Aesthetics in Place:

Commercial Rhetoric and Local Identity in the British Atlantic, 1720-1820

By

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INTRODUCTION

Describing his return to Maryland following an extended journey to New England in his *Itinerarium* (1744), the Scottish-born Dr. Alexander Hamilton offers this observation on colonial life:

> I found but little difference in the manners and characters of the people in the different provinces I passed thro', but as to constitutions and complexions, airs and government, I found some variety. Their forms of government in the northern provinces I look upon to be much better and happier than ours, which is a poor, sickly, convulsed state […]. As to politeness and humanity, they are much alike except in the great towns where the inhabitants are more civilized. (199)

Prepared to encounter vast differences among the places he visits on his northern tour, Hamilton registers surprise at discovering that shared "politeness and humanity" make the inhabitants of all middle and northern British colonies "much alike." Like many of his fellow colonists who chronicled their travels—from Sarah Kemble Knight to William Byrd and, later, William Bartram—Hamilton recognizes the powerful influence of external forces like environment and government in shaping human identity. Nonetheless, here he asserts the primacy of manners over the variability of those other factors. Because "manners" are not subject to the pernicious influence of climate and the vagaries of local differences in Hamilton's account, they represent a potent cultural category that demarcates the boundaries of "civilized" life; manners provide the definitive standard against which to measure what Roxann Wheeler has called the "fluid articulation of human variety" (7). The fact that politeness authorizes larger patterns of similarity by preserving small but meaningful

differences, like those Hamilton identifies in his travels, merely adds to its unquestioned power here as a universal sign of civilization.

In forging a causal link between urbanity and politeness in the suggestion that "great towns" produce subjects who are "more civilized" than other colonists, however, Hamilton's concluding remarks recapitulate the cultural logic modern critical narratives often identify with provinciality. Writers like Hamilton, we are told, constructed British American identity as a provincial phenomenon when they set about emulating the cultural practices of a distant metropolis. As David Shields has documented, colonial writers' countless acts of borrowing and various efforts to make the language and written style of elite English culture their own "defined the discursive dimensions of American provinciality" around locally determined sites such as the urban "outposts of sociability" Hamilton approvingly describes in the *Itinerarium* (*Civil Tongues* xxix, 32). In the words of the historian Michal Rozbicki, the ultimate "transatlantic aspiration" of English colonists in North America was to participate in the "legitimizing process" that attended their appropriation of polite English society's more recognizable traits: "the guiding star in their pursuits," that is, "was the […] cultural model of European gentility" (28). Yet, as Rozbicki also notes, colonists who "had attained […] recognition through appropriating European styles and values […] could not afford to distance themselves from the need for metropolitan approval" (77). It is this double bind of the colonial that scholars often identify with the conflicted coexistence of metropolitan and provincial outlooks in early American writing. And it is this understanding of British American culture's apparent belatedness that makes it possible for us to read Hamilton's preference for the urbanity of "great towns" as just one more attempt to reconstitute on North American soil the standards of metropolitan English culture. His invocation of a particular sense of urbanity and civility, in other words, remains a persistent reminder of the

vast distance separating Hamilton and his fellow colonists from the metropolis whose customs they regard as the one true index of "civilized" life.

Much as it does today, the concept of provinciality in the eighteenth century involved the willingness of writers and their readers to regard such distance as broadly symbolic of cultural and moral authority more generally. The idea that a nation or empire could be divided into metropolitan centers of sophisticated urbanity and vast provincial reaches both described how many eighteenth century elites viewed their world and prescribed that view as the only appropriate one. Writing only a few years after Hamilton's account of his travels in North America, the Frenchman Charles Pinot Duclos proclaimed matter-of-factly, "those who live a hundred miles from the capital, are a century away from it in their modes of thinking and acting" (qtd. in Pratt 35). Duclos's statement manages to conflate spatial and temporal distance and, having done so, to equate both with a position of cultural inferiority within the ostensibly natural hierarchies of prestige and power. To be provincial was to be always behind the times, to suffer from an almost unforgivable belatedness of fashion, of intellect, perhaps even of manners and morals. Provinciality thus provided an essential term in the cultural vocabulary of western European nations at a time when political and economic power was becoming increasingly concentrated in urban settings and, as the eighteenth century progressed, the emerging centralized bureaucracies of modern government. The concept of provinciality helped to naturalize these changes, acting as the metropolis's omnipresent Other and reminding the imagined national subject that the only alternative to his life of urban sophistication—however unsatisfactory it might occasionally seem—was a far less desirable life of unbearable cultural isolation. Locked in an uncomfortably close embrace, the provincial and the metropolitan were (and still are)

mutually necessary and mutually reinforcing categories of experience, equally essential to both the formation of individual subjects and the collective myths of modern nationhood.

This sense of provinciality as a force secretly inhabiting narratives of cultural formation has cast a long shadow over the study of American literature and culture since its disciplinary formalization in the middle decades of the twentieth century. In an essay published in 1940, Joseph E. Baker foregrounded the question of provinciality's role in American literary study in this way:

> Should we look upon America as a mere province of Europe, culturally, and our South and West as mere provinces of our North Atlantic states? […] It is true that Americans should share as much as anyone in European culture; but we should not look upon ourselves as a cultural dependency. Some of the best twentieth-century literature in the English language has been written in America by men born in America […] Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson were not provincials but heirs of the very latest European culture […]. They were thoroughly American; they could not have been produced by any other country. But they were world-figures. (488)

In dismissing the idea that provinciality might be productively applied as a category of cultural analysis to a nation capable of producing "world-figures" like Franklin or Jefferson, Baker echoes the exceptionalist rhetoric that shaped major strands of American Studies in its early decades. To be provincial, in Baker's words, is to be "dependent on a distant authority" and to leave valuable "cultural authority in the hands of a remote center" (489-90)—an unthinkable scenario for a discipline that would, in the early years of the Cold War era, frequently take on the role of articulating a liberal vision of American political and cultural power on the world stage. Consequently, much of the formative scholarship of the 1950s and 1960s implicitly resisted the imagined dangers of provinciality. Growing out of uniquely American environments, experiences, political systems, and forms of consciousness, scholars argued, American literature could not, by definition, be provincial.

If the edifice of American Studies was originally built around the implicit rejection of provinciality, in recent decades scholarship on early American literary culture has often appeared to have reversed course. In recent decades, scholars have largely abandoned what Philip Gura once called the "protonationalist paradigm for reading colonial literatures in North America" (305). Having set aside "the patronizing belief that colonial Anglo-American writing is a prologue, progenitor, or mere precursor of the canonized texts of the nineteenth century, not worthy of study in its own right" (Schweitzer 579), scholars are now far more likely to argue for ways of reading early American literature that expose its transnational and global pedigree—to insist, in other words, that colonial British American and early U.S. literary culture can be fully understood only in broader transatlantic cultural contexts. Rather than assume that America's position on the margins of Great Britain's expanding empire limited the value of colonial and early national writing or, conversely, that political independence heralded the miraculous birth a distinctly American literature, *sui generis*, recent scholarship has instead used the colonies' ostensibly marginal position—their provincial isolation—to rethink Anglo-American writing in terms of colonial subjectivities and identities, ideologies of empire and race, and forms of cultural hybridity.

Ironically, the critical recuperation of colonial British American culture represented in this shift has resurrected the notion of provinciality as a meaningful category through which to understand the early European cultures of North America. Absent its pejorative link to cultural belatedness, provinciality now figures prominently as a defining feature of colonial life. Michael Warner has suggested that British Americans' provincial status, relative to the metropolitan "seat of imperial culture," forced colonial subjects to confront the division between an indefinitely urbane sense of audience" and the "local imagination of territorial possession and […] creole community" (65-67). Similarly, David S. Shields has

argued that British American provinciality produced an equation of transatlantic empire that balanced the flow of material goods from the colonies against the intangible promises of "civility and arts" the metropolis offered colonial subjects. Such an equation meant that colonial culture always understood itself in terms of its departure from or adherence to metropolitan "standards in religion, morality, and politeness" (*CT* 305). Other scholars have transplanted this same paradigm of metropolitan-provincial relations from the strictly transatlantic context where it originated and applied it to the internal cultural dynamics of the United States in the decades following political independence. Edward Watts, for instance, suggests that the emergence of nineteenth-century regional identities in the United States resulted from the internal "colonization" of the nation's interior spaces as the Northeast gradually claimed for itself the role of metropolitan center—an "erstwhile colonial parent," in Watts's terms—to the provincial peripheries of the Midwest and South (xvii). In this way, a recuperated critical vocabulary of provinciality has been used to articulate new ways of reading the multiple cultural nationalisms of British America and the early United States.

The problem with this prevailing model of provinciality, however, is its tendency to calculate cultural difference by assuming a basic correlation between culture and geographic space. As most scholars have characterized it, provincial self-awareness involves the recognition that the site where cultural emulation takes place exists at a significant physical remove from the sites where dominant cultural practices originate. Provinciality, in this view, is a natural—albeit generally unintended—consequence of where in the world one finds oneself, more often the product of happenstance than a deliberately crafted cultural practice with its own modes of thought and its own particular rhetoric, to say nothing of its own strategies for reproducing itself textually. Whether implicitly or explicitly, theories of

provinciality make claims for the presumed cultural authority granted to particular individuals, classes, and social institutions. Yet they invariably trace those claims back to external forces of geography and time, denying them the same forms of legitimacy they attribute to the metropolitan cultural formulations provincial subjects supposedly aspire to. Alexander Hamilton's pronouncements concerning the manners of his fellow colonists illustrate the point. When we read Hamilton's comments, we recognize in them an attempt to assume the position of a particular kind of individual—the urbane, civilized man of polite letters who is culturally sanctioned to pass the judgments he does throughout the *Itinerarium*. But there is another sense in which Hamilton's status as a provincial subject and the presumed authority of the rhetorical resources at his disposal—the language of disinterested comparison on display in his thoughts on "politeness and humanity," say—hinge on the idea of his position in the world. Hamilton's account of the people he meets and the places he visits is, of course, a reflection on the peculiar cultural matrix of colonial life in British America. Insofar as these encounters speak generally to cultural conditions in the colonies, they retain a certain air of abstraction by seeming to stand in for the broad social and cultural formations that shaped life in the English-speaking world. At the same time, Hamilton's text is a record of a particular spatial and cultural field, and the actual people and places whose "locatedness and connectedness" (Toulouse 9), to borrow one scholar's apt phrase, makes the sites they inhabit valuable for their specificity rather than their potential for abstraction. Despite the promises of scholarship intended to furnish more nuanced explanations of the relations between colonial peripheries and imperial centers, metropolitan and provincial settings, it is this dimension of "locatedness" that all too frequently remains buried in discussions of identity and culture in the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century British Atlantic.

Paul Giles's comparative readings of British and American poetry in the early eighteenth century provides an instructive example of the unintended consequences current approaches to transatlantic literary and cultural relations can have when it comes to the rhetoric of locality. In *Transatlantic Insurrections* (2001), Giles argues that pre-Revolutionary American poetry manifests the submerged effects of the colonial writer's attempts to "affiliate himself with and disaffiliate himself from English society simultaneously," a somewhat tricky proposition that requires us to see colonial writing as a surface of "reflecting mirrors" that absorb, cast back, and scatter unpredictably the light of British culture (39, 1). For Giles, the "sophisticated sensibility" of Alexander Pope's witty and ironic rendition of English culture, for instance, finds its way into the work of the New England cleric and poet Mather Byles through a familiar process of transatlantic cultural reproduction. Byles's stylistic imitation of an English luminary like Pope merely represents "an effort to reposition the American cultural landscape within a larger sphere of transatlantic influence" (39). Yet even as he attends to the question of how "American writers were […] forced to negotiate a rhetorical position for themselves within complex and unequal networks of transatlantic privilege," Giles's account of the "ways in which the definitions of […] cultures become twisted and grotesquely perverted through various forms of entanglement with opposing centers of gravity" does little to explain what such cultural repositioning might actually mean for the production of British American poetry (9-10). In fact, in an effort to distance his study of transatlantic culture from the pernicious traces of what he terms the "retrospective fabrication of national tradition," Giles ends up eschewing the local dimensions of early American writing entirely. "[T]o restore a British dimension to American literature," he writes, "is to […] reveal its intertwinement with the discourses of heresy, blasphemy, and insurrection, rather than understanding that writing primarily as an

expression of local cultures" (7, 11). Confronted with what appears to be a fundamental incompatibility between the transatlantic "intertwinement" of British and American literary traditions and the highly specific "expression of local cultures," Giles dismisses the possibility that categories of transatlantic and local identity might, in fact, be intimately related. In so doing, he tacitly promotes the persistent critical assumption that to take seriously colonists' efforts to speak of their "locatedness" is to resurrect the specter of a profoundly exceptionalist mode of thinking.

It is this tired assumption regarding the rhetorical "locatedness" of British American writing vis-à-vis the construction of provinciality and transatlantic modes of cultural identity that I wish to redress in my reading of transatlantic literary culture over the course of the long eighteenth century. In particular, I argue that it is the expression of "local cultures" as they came to be constituted in British American writing—and poetry in particular—that, to a large extent, made it possible for early American writers to interrogate, parodically or otherwise, their own position of cultural "intertwinement" in the Atlantic world. Contrary to Giles's characterization of cultural reflection as something that either opposes or exceeds the "expression of local cultures," I see the evolving literary response from British America and the early United States as an understated critique of an ideal metropolitan cultural refinement that rendered British American subjects invisible. This critique employed a new commercial vocabulary synonymous with the position of metropolitan privilege even as it simultaneously gestured self-consciously to its own status as an intensely local mode of expression. Far from being an insignificant vestige of exceptionalist tendencies, per Giles's suggestion, the recovery of this strain of locally-inflected writing is in fact crucial to understanding how British American subjects responded to their perceived exclusion by vigorously claiming as their own the very terms in which their exclusion was typically communicated.

The concepts of place and locality thus matter immensely in determining the rhetorical authority, or lack thereof, associated with the subject positions scholars continue to identify as either provincial or metropolitan—meaning that the "curse of provincialism," as Rozbicki terms it, is as much the result of discrete local conditions as it is a product of broader transatlantic movements. This is not to say that provinciality is merely another word for the conflict between specific local conditions and those cultural practices that present themselves as universally good, true, or valid. But I am suggesting that provinciality, as it emerges from certain British American texts in the first half of the eighteenth century, is a way of thinking and writing that challenges the terms in which culture, as it was constituted in the English metropolis, assumed the unassailable privilege of absolute authority. The culture of provinciality in British America, in other words, plays on shifting conceptions of space and place to present life in the New World as different from, yet fundamentally compatible with, European notions of what it means to be sophisticated and civilized.

For Joseph Baker, the problem of provinciality had an obvious solution: an array of "genuine regional culture[s]" that stood as "the strongest enemy of provinciality." Fighting against the "ignorant or aggressive assumption that merely local attitudes have universal value," the cultures of American regionalism, in Baker's view, succeed in warding off the threat of "cosmopolitan imperialism" (490). In the chapters that follow, I turn this line of thinking on its head as I examine several moments in early American literary history when the cosmopolitan aspirations of both metropolitan and provincial writers depended on the just such claims of locality's "universal value." Throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, writers on both sides of the Atlantic invested unique and highly individuated localities with the power to voice national and imperial myths of self-understanding—to make claims, in effect, for the representative status of particular forms of

knowledge and history associated with discrete locations on the globe. The urgency with which colonial and otherwise marginal writers brought local and global together, and argued for the global reach of local customs and cultural practices, suggests they seized on this relationship as a means of legitimating their own contributions to the ostensibly universal category of "literature" as it was becoming formalized during exactly this period. The new discourse of locality that resulted soon emerged as a central feature of the transatlantic debates that shaped the literary traditions we now recognize as distinctly American and British. Circulating throughout the English-speaking world, these competing forms of local imagination authorized new modes of community by linking the memories and experiences of specific geographies with larger narratives of commercial empire. Over the course of a century, locality was transformed from being a marker of difference into a sign of the similarities that united people and places in the Atlantic world, a concept whose elastic aesthetic vocabulary made it possible for writers living outside the inner boundaries of the metropolis to lay a powerful claim to the rights and privileges of a shared English culture.

In making the case that modern perceptions of local distinctiveness authorized certain modes of transatlantic affiliation, I contest the prevailing view among many scholars that incompatibilities between provincial and metropolitan cultural formations produced a distinctly American brand of writing. Literary scholarship has long cast the peculiar dialects, environments, and habits found in American locales as the foundations of American literature, a body of work whose status as a separate category of writing depends on distinguishing the local origins of its imaginative products from the more elevated claims made on behalf of works produced in the metropolis. Such literary histories account for myths of American exception, to be sure, but they do so only by assuming that locality provided a stable and self-evident vocabulary for imagining cultural identity and its

reproduction. My reading of early American literature and its British Atlantic contexts seeks to correct this assumption by historicizing locality as an idiom whose usefulness resulted from its unstable imbrication with inchoate aesthetic discourses and the commercial rhetorical of circulation, exchange, and mobility. Colonial and national writers could thus enlist local imagination for double duty, using its terms both to signal their crucial involvement in a transatlantic community of culturally like individuals and to redefine that community's cultural ideals to match more closely particular local conditions.

I begin, in Chapter One, with the claim that the eighteenth-century poetry of empire invented the modern notion of locality in dialogue with early Enlightenment efforts to theorize commerce and taste as twin systems of human difference. Examining the work of the Maryland poet Richard Lewis in conjunction with James Thomson's *The Seasons* (1730-1746), I argue that colonial writers in the first half of the century fuse taste and commerce to produce a distinctive mercantile aesthetic. As a model of spatial representation that employs tropes of circulation and accumulation to privilege the position of the poetic observer, this mercantile aesthetic offers both Thomson and Lewis a means of conceiving the nation as a space defined by the differences between imagined centers and peripheries. While Thomson employs such distinctions to make an idealized English countryside represent the nation, much as Raymond Williams and John Barrell have suggested, Lewis traces their operation to colonial settings. The resulting concept of place borrows from, yet also creatively inverts, the period's prevailing models of landscape representation, allowing Lewis to argue for the recognition of the American colonies as distinct sites of local imagination whose value for the English nation as a whole depends on their difference from it.

Turning to James Grainger's *The Sugar-Cane* (1764), Chapter Two focuses on the connection between aesthetics and empire to show how locality becomes a crucial

prerequisite for the cosmopolitan identities on which the self-authorizing myths of mid-eighteenth century British identity depend. Responding to the prevalent metropolitan view that cultural refinement diminished with distance from the imperial center, Grainger constructs a poetics of natural history designed to fuse the ostensible universality of aesthetic theory, in the form of taste, with the specificity of the spatial and cultural geographies he traces in his dense descriptions of the West Indian environment. In particular, Grainger's engagement with metropolitan discourses of poetic propriety and cultural refinement—like those codified in Lord Kames's *The Elements of Criticism* (1762)—allows him to reconfigure his text's georgic form to reflect on the conditions of cultural reproduction in an ever-expanding Atlantic world. In what amounts to a radical turn for an English poet at mid-century, Grainger presents the language of particularity, in which local knowledge and history increasingly circulate, as vital extensions of both political empire and metropolitan taste. Rather than mark individuals as merely different from one another, that is, local imagination transforms difference into markers of similarity: in effect, we're all the same because we're all different.

The equivalence between local and cosmopolitan community imagined by Grainger was not without its obvious contradictions and traumas, however. Chapter Three explores how early Black Atlantic writing exposes a range of threats to individual and collective identity presented by emerging concepts of locality, yet also imaginatively reconstructs agency in response to such pressures. In reading Olaudah Equiano's engagement with contemporary theories of locality in *The Interesting Narrative* (1789), I examine how commerce and aesthetics in antislavery writing adopts and transforms the rhetoric of local identification to speak of personhood outside the limitations of property and labor imposed by slavery. While many scholars focus on Equiano's intertwined narratives of liberal capitalism and

spiritual redemption, I argue that the presence of these familiar discourses must be read as disruptions to the established binaries of metropolitan and provincial culture. In my reading, Equiano negotiates the difference between places, and the cultural positions for which they stand, by critiquing eighteenth-century cosmopolitanism, balancing a sense of longing for what has been lost against the demands of inhabiting a world defined by restless, and often coerced, circulation. The local's ability to function in this way, I maintain, has broad implications for conceiving diaspora in the Anglophone world and for understanding how marginalized writers describe community in contradistinction to the commercial imagination that defines the British Atlantic in this period.

Finally, in Chapter Four I look to the early nineteenth century to explain how the competition between multiple forms of local imagination structures representations of the new United States and informs its view of cultural authority. Examining Washington Irving's *Sketch Book* (1819) as a text heavily invested in the invention of a national American literature, yet also closely associated with a nostalgic mode sometimes read as provincial, I argue that many of the features that characterize eighteenth-century meditations on trade and local identity persist, in the face of changing political conditions, in Irving's writing. Irving's intense Anglophilia prompted sharp criticism from many American literary nationalists, as well as from some English commentators, but his sense of the aesthetic possibilities of transatlantic dislocation and movement lend new weight to the idea of a provinciality built around the belief that locality travels. Drawing extensively on bookishly cosmopolitan metaphors, in which the global lives of texts stand in for the possibility of transatlantic cultural affiliation and communication, Irving treats *The Sketch Book* as an extended investigation of the ways in which established patterns for describing the relation between local and global categories remained relevant decades after his country's political

separation from Great Britain. As a means of evaluating the status of national culture in the United States, Irving's representation of discrete local communities thus recuperates provinciality—an apparently isolationist turn away from direct engagement with the wider world—as a concept crucial to preserving national integrity. Investing provinciality's insular stance and inward-looking tendencies with supposedly universal traits of aesthetic beauty, Irving articulates a new vision of for a cosmopolitan Anglo-American literature.

CHAPTER ONE

Reconstituting Place in British America: James Thomson, Richard Lewis, and the Birth of Mercantile Aesthetics

In the opening lines of "Food for Criticks" (1732), the colonial Maryland schoolmaster and sometimes poet Richard Lewis favorably compares southeastern Pennsylvania's Schuylkill River to its Old World counterparts:

> Of ancient streams presume no more to tell,
> The fam'd castalian or pierian well;
> SKUYLKIL superior, must those springs confess,
> As *Pensilvania* yields to *Rome* or *Greece*. (1-4; emphasis original)

Like much of the imaginative verse written on both sides of the Atlantic during the period, the poem takes as its primary frame of reference the classical world of ancient Rome and Greece made comfortably familiar by the English verse traditions of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. These lines certainly make no effort to disguise their allegiance to the neoclassical vocabulary that informs them. Despite the conventional opening, however, Lewis's invocation of the river and its colonial setting also makes an audacious claim—namely, that a natural feature of the New World is "superior" to classical sources of poetic inspiration. Indeed, so unusual does the poet imagine this assertion to be that he immediately recasts it in terms that may seem more palatable to readers: the second couplet describes the river's claimed superiority as a function of the colonial setting's evident cultural *inferiority* to the ancient world, defusing possible objections with the conciliatory affirmation that Pennsylvania does, in fact, "yield" to the cultural power of these classical antecedents.

Yet this rather abrupt reversal raises more questions than it answers. Is Lewis merely trying to satisfy two separate groups of readers by using language calculated to please colonial Pennsylvanians while also meeting the expectations of a broader—possibly transatlantic—audience, for whom claims of colonial superiority would be unpersuasive? Or does this brief moment of apparent contradiction instead suggest a deeper tension between the exigencies of poetic practice in colonial settings and the formal strictures of verse style in the early eighteenth century?

In its handling of such questions, "Food for Criticks" offers an instructive example of how even the most casual of local references functioned for colonial English writers as a highly coded idiom for exploring the complexities of transatlantic cultural relations in the early eighteenth century. Scholars of early American literature have long imagined that an acute awareness of their local environment, and the features that marked it as different from European environments, made colonial writers intensely self-conscious about their own status in the world of polite letters.[1] As Michael Warner notes, eighteenth-century British-American writers sought to position their work within a "new aesthetic" regime under which poetry "came to be seen as a marker of politeness" and "a means of refinement" ("Poetry" 1011). "Food for Criticks" is, in Warner's view, a poem marked by the deep "ambivalence […] of the colonial" that resulted from the pressures of such a regime once it had been translated to British North America: "when facing West, he [Lewis] represents the progress of civility; when facing East, he finds himself a provincial in a half-savage world, far from the metropolis" ("Poetry" 1011-1012). Exposed as different from his contemporaries in England

[1] In a chapter on "writers of the [colonial] South" in the third edition of *Literary History of the United States* (1963), Louis B. Wright expresses the common view that many of Lewis's colonial contemporaries produced work that was merely "descriptive and factual, concerned in some fashion with the land itself"—in other words, fashioned according to local interests. Wright contrasts this localized focus on the "social and political" with what he viewed as the characteristic feature of New England colonial writing, namely its emphasis on the more abstract realms of "metaphysics" (40).

by virtue of his position in the world, Lewis, like all the colonial subjects for whom he is said to be representative, conceives of his literary identity at the unstable nexus of metropolitan expectation and provincial reality.

Despite the obvious appeal of such a reading, however, a poem like "Food for Criticks" complicates efforts to slot it neatly into this model of colonial "ambivalence." For one thing, "Food for Criticks" proves to be a highly unstable literary artifact—though not in quite the sense Warner has in mind when alluding to the Janus-like stance of the half-provincial, half-metropolitan speaker it calls into being. Rather, the history of the poem's publication exposes an unusual relationship between colonial and metropolitan expectations of literary aesthetics vis-à-vis the spaces, both real and imagined, of textual production and consumption. Appearing in two different British American newspapers during the summer of 1732, "Food for Criticks" exists today in two extant versions.[2] Read against one another, they present a series of small but significant variations in the names of the places and geographic features referenced. In one version, for instance, the poem's setting is the bank of southeastern Pennsylvania's Schuylkill River; the other version relocates the entire poem to New England, referencing places like Cambridge and Watertown. While such changes might seem inconsequential at first glance, the shifting geographic framing of the poem's two versions has important consequences for how we think about the connection between the literary representation of locality and the reproduction of cultural meaning in metropolitan and provincial settings. In effect, both versions of the poem localize their subject matter. By failing to acknowledge these modifications, however, they suggest an understanding of poetic practices during the period that depends on a shared regard for

[2] See J. A. Leo Lemay, *Men of Letters in Colonial Maryland* (1972). Lemay speculates that a third version of the poem—likely the original—was published in the *Maryland Gazette* "some time before the spring of 1731," though it is no longer extant (150).

poetry as a mobile, transportable form with an expansive capacity for expressing sentiments suited to precisely this sort of local repackaging. The resulting conception of literary aesthetics as something both fixed and remarkably flexible shows provinciality to be a more subtle and varied effect than it is often taken to be. Not simply the faint mirror image of a distant metropolis, aspiring to an elevated cultural status and a level of metropolitan approbation it will never attain, the provinciality of a poem like "Food for Criticks" is modulated by—and, indeed, constructed almost wholly from—this process of continual local reinvention.

Although the rewriting of "Food for Criticks" for particular local audiences is a minor poetic episode when considered in isolation, I believe it represents a new phenomenon in the transatlantic literary relations of the early eighteenth century: the growing power of a nascent mercantile aesthetic to channel and focus debates about cultural authority, particularly those question of authority arising from the fraught colonial and imperial relationships that developed alongside emerging patterns of trade in the British Atlantic. Following the period's own sense of commerce as an overdetermined cultural category whose rich ambiguity allowed it to function as an inexhaustible resource for social imagination, in this chapter I examine how historically contingent concepts of place and locality informed the construction of the metropolitan and the provincial as crucial categories for explaining collective identities, legitimating diverse cultural practices, and conferring status and power on particular literary forms—and their practitioners. As "Food for Criticks" hints, the act of representing locality as an infinitely mobile and reproducible poetic phenomenon helps perform the work of translating the unique features of particular places into a more abstract cultural idiom for describing how discrete sites participate in constructing and reinforcing certain literary modes of cultural authority. Tracing the early

eighteenth-century notion of place through the twinned concepts of aesthetics and commerce, I contend that locality itself came to be seen as a means of carving out the specific positions of authority from which writers could present themselves to the world and imaginatively reconfigure that world in the process. Closely associated with the new commercial vocabularies of exchange, circulation, equivalence, and the mobility of both goods and people, mercantile aesthetics joins these to the forms of judgment and subjectivity that were evolving contemporaneously in the context of taste and the modes of thought Joseph Addison influentially termed the "Pleasures of the Imagination." By providing a hierarchical model for organizing the world into discrete, authoritative centers of pleasure and knowledge, on one hand, and distant, marginal peripheries, on the other, this mercantilist aesthetic made it possible for colonial and metropolitan writers alike to develop a shared vocabulary for speaking of national and imperial modes of self-understanding.

The mutual interdependence of these discourses is clearly visible throughout Lewis's small body of work; his verse of the late 1720s and early 1730s, including "Food for Criticks," contemplates the impact of commercial exchange on colonial culture by attending to the hidden forms of beauty and pleasure that inhabit commercially constituted local spaces. What makes Lewis's approach stand out among other British American writers of the same generation, though, is his insistent resignification of an explicitly mercantilist vocabulary. Lewis does not so much create a new way of speaking about locality in the language of commerce as rebadge an existing brand of commercially-oriented imperial thought that found its most popular expression in the Whig-inspired verse of the Scottish-born poet James Thomson. In works like *The Seasons* (1730-1746), where early poetic manifestations of landscape aesthetics inform a new model of diasporic nationalism, Thomson elaborates a theory of locality that draws on commercial rhetoric to imagine a

cohesive, powerful, and civilized English national culture. Writing as a self-consciously provincial poet, however, Lewis adopts portions of this same vision of locality so as to show how Thomson's terms for constructing an ideal English subject, a national home, and a collective imperial destiny do not, in fact, mean what Thomson and his metropolitan readers think they do. In other words, even as he presents them in the inherited mercantilist language of the metropolis, Lewis situates the concepts of place and local identity within specifically colonial settings in order to recuperate the positions of subjectivity ordinarily denied to colonial writers. The result is nothing less than a fundamental reconfiguration of the terms in which provincial culture asserts equal authority with a distant metropolis.

The Commercial Rhetoric of Place

When Anne Bradstreet, writing from New England in the middle of the seventeenth century, asserted that global trade offered proof of a divine plan for human society, she supported her claim by pointing to the natural variations that existed among regions of the world. "God hath by his providence so ordered," Bradstreet wrote, "that no one Country hath all Commoditys within it self, but what it wants, another shall supply, so that there may be a mutuall Commerce through the world" (73). At once an expression of faith in the legibility of divine will and a justification for emerging systems of global capital, Bradstreet's meditation on the purpose of trade both illustrates the remarkable rhetorical and logical power exercised by the figure of commerce and reflects what Michelle Burnham describes as the "interwoven religious and commercial sensibilities" of the "developing world economy" (2, 4). Beneath its authorization of a Christian commercial empire, the passage also mobilizes the language of lack, and the corresponding rhetoric of desire, in order to comment on the conceptual preconditions for constructing a community of Christian souls "beholden to one

another" through commodity exchange (73). Bradstreet's notion of "mutuall Commerce" implicitly partitions the world into manifold parts, each conceived as a discrete "self" based on its "wants" instead of its existing possessions and features. Alongside the intertwined Protestant language of spiritual salvation and the proto-capitalist vocabulary of liberal selfhood, this differential logic identifies every point on the globe commercially and contextually. Only through the contact initiated in the hopes of overcoming this original and divinely ordained constitutive lack, Bradstreet implies, can any "one Country" identify its proper place within a global system of exchange and the universal spiritual economy to which it corresponds.

At once highly conventional and strikingly modern, Bradstreet's rendition of commerce foreshadows the emergence of one of the eighteenth century's most powerful cultural refrains—namely, the seemingly unbreakable ties binding trade to myriad forms of social, intellectual, and even spiritual refinement. As the cultural historian John Brewer notes, throughout much of the eighteenth century commerce was "considered […] a civilizing process which encouraged politeness and refinement" (642). At the same time, as a force that "socialized human behavior by refining the passions," trade gave form to "the ideal of the commercial unification of the civilized world" (Gould, *Traffic* 5, 17). Both ideas are present in Bradstreet's meditation, authorized by the intersecting languages of Christian commonwealth and trade. Yet Bradstreet's "mutuall Commerce" does not participate fully in the transformative and corrective powers that constituted such a major part of the eighteenth-century commercial ideal. Despite predicating trade's cultural value on its ability to form interregional communities, the notion of "mutuall Commerce" ultimately reinforces an older model of the world. Bradstreet presents the separation of places as an unquestioned truth, a preordained feature of Creation. In so doing, she affirms early modern

epistemologies that read the world in terms of the "environmental effects" associated with the geography of particular places, an outlook that understood identity, through theories of monogenesis, to be an outgrowth of "Variations in temperature and lifestyle, compounded by long amounts of time in the places where" people "settled" (Parrish 85; Wheeler 15). Such theories of "human variety" assumed a formative association among climate, place, and person that functioned, in the words Roxann Wheeler, as the "linchpin to understanding most eighteenth-century pronouncements" about "human differences" (Wheeler 21). In its most basic form, it could be said, the resulting rubric of identity insisted that place made person.

But what made places recognizable to begin with? What specific features marked particular places as unique, different from one another and all other places in the world, and therefore endowed with special meaning? If the concept of place formed a crucial component of modern identity, that is, how could one know that one's place was special, civilized, separate from the barbarous sites of "degeneration" that ringed the globe? The answer to these questions lies within the rhetorical strategies that portrayed the figure of commerce as culture's representative agent—indeed, in many ways, the very medium of culture. To the extent that the rhetoric of commerce conformed to the environmental theories of identity described by scholars like Roxann Wheeler and Susan Scott Parrish, this proposition is a familiar one. Within these accounts of climate, epistemology, and identity, however, what constituted place and how, exactly, place could be used to recognize and promote certain forms of difference remains an open question. In fact, Bradstreet's rhetoric of "mutuall Commerce" hints at a number of ways in which the figure of commerce provided the conceptual framework necessary for linking these forms of difference to particular places. More to the point, the vocabulary of commerce, as it continued to develop

in the early eighteenth century, gave rise to a system of expression—a pattern of literary figuration and allusion—that made the concept of place available to British Atlantic writers. I am suggesting, in other words, that representations of commerce were directly responsible for the conceptualization of place in the early eighteenth century. Ultimately, the rhetoric of commerce produced both the terminology and the conceptual grounds through and on which it first became possible to imagine the idea of place in a fully modern sense.

Joseph Addison's famous description of metropolitan London as "a kind of *Emporium* for the whole Earth," in *Spectator* 69, offers an explicit demonstration of the characteristic function and form of this commercial rhetoric. Writing of commerce as the "Business of Mankind," Addison enthusiastically describes its influence on human actions: trade leads men to "negotiate Affairs, conclude Treaties, and maintain a good Correspondence between those Societies […] that are divided from one another by Seas and Oceans, or live on the different Extremities of a Continent" (1:293). Commerce, according to Addison, functions as "a great Council" for adjudicating differences among the world's peoples. These differences, in turn, are made recognizable through acts of exchange:

> Nature seems to have taken a particular Care to disseminate her Blessings among the different Regions of the World, with an Eye to this mutual Intercourse and Traffick among Mankind, that the Natives of the several Parts of the Globe might have a kind of Dependence upon one another, and be united together by their common Interest. Almost every *Degree* produces something peculiar to it. The Food often grows in one Country, and the Sauce in another. The Fruits of *Portugal* are corrected by the Products of *Barbadoes*: The Infusion of a *China* Plant sweetned with the Pith of an *Indian* Cane: The *Phillipick* Islands give a Flavour to our *European* Bowls. (1:294-5; emphasis original)

Drawing on the original meaning of commerce as social intercourse by stressing its origins in humanity's state of "mutual" "Dependence," Addison also makes clear the material basis of

the sociable contact he extols.[3] A kind of social currency whose value is determined not by the commodities that change hands, but rather by the amount of "common Interest" it purchases, Addison's idealized trade gestures expansively toward the period's ideology of benevolent commerce.[4]

Yet the passage reveals two additional features of commercial rhetoric. First, it strongly suggests that commerce relies for its very existence on differences between places, without which there would be no motivation to exchange the commodities that help define this difference. Second, these differences are measured specifically in terms of the calculus of lack and necessity, excess and surplus. Taken together, these two characteristics suggest a circular formation of place and commerce similar to the one J. G. A. Pocock identifies in his definition of early modern commerce as "a mode of power-relationships between finite and local commonwealths, both a cause and an effect of their particularity" (444). Addison moves at least one step beyond this mutually constitutive relation of place and commerce, however, by indicating a place can be recognized only through the specific commodities "peculiar to it." In dwelling on this point, Addison insists that we understand the idea of place within the broader conceptual framework provided by commerce, for without trade the commodities that define discrete locations in the world cease to possess the forms of social and cultural value the Spectator celebrates in his survey of the metropolis. At the same time, he renders trade's resultant "common Interest" the property of humans rather than

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[3] According to the *OED*, the earliest meaning of "commerce" in English is not far from the one Addison initially invokes: "intercourse in the affairs of life; dealings." The word began to accrue the more specific associations with trade and the exchange of commodities later in the sixteenth century. At the time Addison was writing, both meanings applied.

[4] Lawrence Klein's reading of "plebian" politeness at the beginning of the eighteenth century highlights the pervasive link between commerce and culture that structured this ideology, tracing the relation of "commercial personality" to shifts in the social valuation of economic activity ("Politeness for Plebes: Consumption and Social Identity in Early Eighteenth-Century England," 364).

divine providence, suggestively linking commerce to the realm of what today we might identify, following Locke and subsequent Enlightenment thinkers, as a form of liberal individualism.[5] This relation between place and commodity supplements the idea that commerce is a differential system by rendering it a transformative system as well, one in which the representative commodities of different places act upon one another in ways that alter their fundamental properties.[6] Only if we understand commerce to be both kinds of system at once can we make sense of Addison's claim, for instance, that Portuguese fruits must be "corrected" by sugar from Barbados.

Addison's principal conceit is deceptively simple. A figure for Enlightenment culture itself, the complete dish he describes only becomes possible when the "Food" from "one Country" has been complemented with the "Sauce" from "another." As opposed to Bradstreet's seventeenth-century Christian commonwealth, the internal metaphoric logic governing this version of commerce relies on a holistic union of cultural and commercial imperatives. Initially ranging across the globe by introducing the proxies for distinct geographic regions, in the form of fruits, sugar, tea, and spices, the brief catalogue of commodities concludes by returning to "our *European* bowls," identifying Europe as the location of common ownership and the privileged site of delectation—a location that is to the refined senses what Bruno Latour's "center of calculation" is to the scientific and

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[5] Locke's *Essay Concerning the True Original, Extent, and End of Civil Government*, published as the second part of *Two Treatises of Government* in 1690, makes the case that individual identity derives from property. With its ability to contribute directly to the individual's sense of self-possession by figuring his participation in exchange as a form of property-producing labor, commerce thus gives rise to the individual as independent agent.

[6] In *Oracles of Empire* (1990), Shields describes how commercial poetry "provided a new discursive dress for the ancient project of conceiving metamorphoses," presenting British colonies as "transmutable regions of exchange value" (17).

mathematical mind.[7] The commodity pairings thus reinforce the commercial trope that allows places to stand for things and things to stand for places. Addison's linguistic yoking of place and commodity imposes a particular commercial fiction, where the meeting of commodities from different parts of the world is itself a figure for other kinds of social and cultural contact and exchange. This, then, is commercial rhetoric in its simplest form. The fact that today we can so easily follow the logical premises permitting Addison to present global commerce in this way testifies to the success this rhetoric encountered, during and after the eighteenth century, in its efforts to present itself as natural to the world.

That the commercial rhetoric of place was an intensely powerful ideological tool in the hands of Addison and his contemporaries appears most obvious in contemporary works that deploy it to naturalize national and imperial designs through the figure of commerce itself. Daniel Defoe's *A Tour thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1724-1726), for instance, employs similar rhetorical techniques to authorize a particular vision of national life, and to consolidate the disparate social and economic conditions that inhered within the newly formed entity of Great Britain.[8] Defoe's attempts to trace a common thread of Britishness connecting the nation's various regions, each constituted in relation to its role in promoting the "circulation of trade," lead him to note "the general dependence of the whole country" on the commercial prosperity of its capital—a theory of national cohesion that, somewhat

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[7] See *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (1999) for Latour's rather more literal definition of a "center of calculation" as "Any site where inscriptions are combined and make possible a type of calculation […]. This expression locates in specific sites an ability to calculate that is too often placed in the mind" (304). In broadening the term to apply more generally to Addison's centripetal notion of European commerce, I am following David Philip Miller's lead; see "Joseph Banks, Empire, and 'Centers of Calculation' in Late Hanoverian London" (1996).

[8] Although published nearly two decades after the 1707 Act of Union officially joining England and Scotland under a single parliamentary government, the *Tour* nevertheless promotes the advantages of union. In their introduction to the *Tour*, P. N. Furbank and W. R. Owens characterize it as "a work written in a vein of patriotic optimism […] to encourage" the inhabitants of the new nation (viii).

paradoxically, relies primarily on recognizing the regional variations that commerce itself inaugurates (5).

Like Addison, Defoe also observes the transformative effects of commerce, but his understanding of the nuances that inflect this power differs from his contemporary's in other ways. In the Preface to the *Tour*, Defoe argues that in all commercial nations it is "the fate of things" for "great towns [to] decay, and small towns [to] rise," for "great rivers and harbours [to] dry up, and grow useless;" likewise, "new ports are open'd, brooks are made rivers, small rivers, navigable ports and harbours are made where none were before, and the like" (3). Ever the commercial optimist, Defoe links trade's power to transform the world with both the commercial construction of places and the patterns of natural geological change. Whatever the cause of such changes, he locates within the places he imagines to be endangered by this inescapable cycle of growth and decay "a kind of nostrum […] inseparable to the place, which fixes" trade there "by the nature of the thing" (17). In Defoe's view, trade remedies the ravages it unleashes by offering us a concept of place; simultaneously, the places thus constituted immunize themselves against trade's sometimes pernicious and always unstable influence by falling back on what makes them unique: the differences which inaugurate meaningful commercial exchange. This circular understanding of trade, indicative of what Terry Mulcaire identifies as the "astonishing power" of commerce "to make something out of nothing" (1039), presents itself as the authentic signature of the commercial rhetoric of place.

The Mercantile Prospect and the Mercantile Aesthetic

In calling attention to the mutually constitutive relation of trade and place, the commercial rhetoric that endowed them with particular cultural significance helped fashion

and promote the peculiar mercantile aesthetic modern scholars have come to associate with the Whig ideology of nation and empire.[9] David Shields has provided an overview of many of the features of this late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century "literary topology of mercantilism," listing the particular tropes which circulated in the period's poetic examinations of nation and empire and explaining how those images contributed to the ideological formations we now recognize in the literature of commercial empire.[10] These features constituted a complex code for representing debates about luxury, virtue, labor, and trade policy in the shared language of pleasure and desire. The conventions governing the literary figuration of commercial exchange thus participated directly in the production of what is best termed mercantile aesthetics. Once again, Defoe's *Tour* provides an instructive example; here, Defoe describes a view of the Thames as it runs through London:

> I shall sing you no songs here of the river in the first person of a water nymph, a goddess, (and I know not what) according to the humor of the ancient poets. I shall talk nothing of the marriage of old Isis, the male river, with the beautiful Thame, the female river, a whimsy as simple as the subject is empty, but I shall speak of the river […] as it really is made glorious by the splendor of its shores, gilded with noble palaces […] and publick buildings; with the greatest bridge, and the greatest city in the world, made famous by the opulence of its merchants, the increase and extensiveness of its commerce; by its invincible navies, and by the innumerable fleet of ships sailing upon it, to and from all parts of the world. (71)

By the time he reaches the end of this passage, Defoe is no longer speaking directly of the Thames, as he initially promises, but instead rhapsodizing on the displays of material wealth on its banks. In the synecdochical substitution this shift enacts, "noble palaces" and "publick

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[9] For discussions of the Whig ideology of nation and empire, in a number of forms, see John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (1997) and *The Sinews of Power: War, Money, and the English State, 1688-1783* (1989); Eliga Gould, *The Persistence of Empire: British Political Culture in the Age of the American Revolution* (2000); Suvir Kaul, *Poems of Nation, Anthems of Empire: English Verse in the Long Eighteenth Century* (2000); and Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture, and Imperialism in England, 1715-1785*.

[10] See Shields, *Oracles of Empire*, especially pp.13-20.

buildings" come to stand in for the nation's virtues, and the commercial vocabulary of boundless "opulence" and "increase" achieves new status as the signature of representational authority—the mark of the world "as it really is." Whereas the "ancient poets," Defoe tells us, conferred this authority by constructing "empty" mythologies of origin around representative sites, in the new nation commerce now provides the terms that define the very idea of reality. Implicitly governed by the Whig logic of progress that equated commercial success with rising civilization, the images of "increase and extensiveness" and "innumerable fleets" meeting on the Thames underwrite the value of the national present. The final phrase assigns Great Britain its central commercial and cultural role, while simultaneously granting itself the authority to do so, for it represents the nation as the site where "all parts of the world" converge. Constructing an imaginative axis around which commercial and cultural categories revolve, the passage thus discloses its own role in promoting a quintessentially mercantile vision of the nation. What Defoe allows us to glimpse, then, is nothing less than the metropolitan imperial center as the site where the yoking of wealth and power is made to seem both natural and inevitable.

The mercantile prospect as it is constituted here makes a double claim on the individual who, like Defoe's narrator, employs its terms to envision the material and imaginative elements of a vibrant commercial world organized around a central focal point of observation. As a preliminary condition, this mercantile prospect imagines the individual can see beneath the surfaces of things and view the world, in Defoe's words, "as it really is." This penetrating vision is capable of reading the social and cultural value of objects circulating in the world, yet it also recognizes how these cultural values remain bound to their original materiality. Thus, in true bifocal form, Defoe sees the "innumerable fleet of ships" as both actual and symbolic objects; in this regard his mercantile prospect has an

obvious analogue in the Addisonian discourse of taste. Introducing the "Pleasures of the Imagination" in *Spectator* 411, Addison defines the "Man of Polite Imagination" as the individual who penetrates the surfaces of everyday life to find "a secret Refreshment" when contemplating "the Prospect of Fields and Meadows." This individual's perspicacity "gives him, indeed, a kind of Property in every thing he sees […]. So that he looks upon the World, as it were, in another Light, and discovers in it a Multitude of Charms, that conceal themselves from the generality of Mankind" (3:538). Mirroring the interiority of the modern subject, the discovery of "secret" and "conceal[ed]" recesses returns us to the imaginative realm of commercial empire. Without reducing itself to precisely the same terms, the observer's ownership of figurative "Property" in the world approximates Addison's prior assessment of British commerce: "Trade, without enlarging the *British* Territories, has given us a kind of additional Empire […] as Valuable as the Lands themselves" (1:296; emphasis original). The aesthetic substitution of symbolic for actual property links this imagined individual's own position as a subject to the sites of material and cultural accumulation he observes and inhabits. Surveying the world and its hidden pleasures from this site of accumulation, that is, this individual becomes almost synonymous with the mercantile centers that frequently define the very idea of the nation in Defoe's and Addison's work.

The mercantile aesthetic traces its representational authority to precisely this double claim. The English subject so imagined is at once the Addisonian man of taste and the kind of liberal individual—modeled in Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, for instance—whose subjectivity depends on his ability to recognize the constitutive relation between his accumulative prowess and his selfhood.[11] This same logic structures representations of the British nation and its empire throughout the early eighteenth century. James Bunn, writing of the

[11] See Nancy Armstrong, *How Novels Think* (2006), especially 5, 33, 36-37.

"unintentional aesthetic of accumulating exotic goods," has argued that the "aesthetic of bric-a-brac" and "eclecticism" at the height of Britain's mercantilist phase necessitated a "detached perspective" from which the elite observer might "arbitrate" among the assembled commodities. At the same time, the detachment involved in producing the mercantile aesthetic relied on a keen sense of the "process of naturalization" through which exotic imports were resituated against the conceptual "ground" of their new contexts (304, 312, 306, 309). In both cases, the individual is understood in terms of his position in space, and of that position's relation to the precise "ground" of cultural authority against which others might judge the value of commodities and the locations—to say nothing of the modes of cultural authority—they represent.

This interplay of ground and commodity is clearly on display when Defoe reconstitutes the Thames in commercial terms rather than the more conventional poetic terms one might expect from a writer determined to celebrate the river's "splendor." It is a transformation that provides a commercial basis for evaluating the accumulated images of wealth and power that occupy the *Tour*. Instead of "undermin[ing] the meaningfulness of mutual exchange" by staging the precarious accumulation of commodities and wealth (Bunn 315), however, the early eighteenth-century mercantile aesthetic invoked by Defoe, Addison, and their contemporaries actually defuses threats of instability by consistently evaluating commercial exchange and commercial subjects according to their role in producing what Addison terms "property" in the world. As a surrogate for place itself, this figurative "property" grounds unstable commercial potentiality in the concrete spaces associated by these writers with the nation itself. Just as eighteenth-century landscape conventions in the literary and visual arts imagined geographic space according to "principles of composition" whose "patterns and structures" provided a "characteristic way of looking at" the world

(Barrell, *Landscape* 6-7), this alternative sense of commercially constituted place depicts its own instantiation as the "representative image of the national order" (Guillory 4). Mercantile aesthetics thus provide the means by which early eighteenth-century writers insist that the textual life of the ideal national subject—the individual capable of looking at the world in this way—take place within the discourses of commercial exchange.

In the Whig poetry of the early eighteenth century, the formation of ideal subjects traces a similar pattern, bounded by the ideological and spatial dimensions of landscape representation and guided by the assumptions of mercantile aesthetics. Even when dissociated from overt discussions of commercial activity, the period's topographical poetry often implicitly adopts the form and rhetoric common to texts that articulate this version of mercantile aesthetics. Relying on commercial rhetoric to transform particular topographies into unique places, that is, the poetic landscapes imagined by the period's writers internalize as sense of place that is ultimately authorized by the imagined effects of commerce. Accordingly, subjects imagined to be capable of viewing landscapes in the manner of Addison's ideal man of taste derive their authority not just from the organizing principle of detachment—the view from above—but also, crucially, from the specific logic of mercantile accumulation that acts as the prerequisite for blending the diverse components of a landscape into a single, coherent view of the place.

James Thomson's *The Seasons*, perhaps the eighteenth century's most widely read landscape poem, exemplifies the tendency of the period's imagined landscapes to follow this pattern. In a passage that appears early in the poem, Thomson's speaker invokes the authority of a new British agricultural empire in much the same terms Defoe employs to render his prospect of London as the world's mercantile center:

> Ye generous BRITONS, cultivate the Plow!
> And o'er your Hills, and long withdrawing Vales,

> Let Autumn spread his Treasures to the Sun,
> Luxuriant, and unbounded! As the Sea,
> Far thro' his azure turbulent Extent,
> Your Empire owns, and from a thousand Shores
> Wafts all the Pomp of Life into your Ports;
> So with superior Boon may your rich Soil,
> Exuberant, Nature's better Blessings pour
> O'er every Land, the naked Nations cloath,
> And be th' exhaustless Granary of the World! (*Sp.* 67-77)[12]

At first glance, Thomson's emphatic celebration of the georgic potentiality of labor and harvest is decidedly not commercial. Nor does it construct the kind of particular rural landscape that *The Seasons* tasks itself with providing, the sort John Barrell associates with the "complete, or completely representative, view of the landscape and of the society of Britain" that *The Seasons* tasks itself with providing (Barrell, *Literature* 76). Nonetheless, the passage relies on the conventions of commercial panegyric, and specifically the commercial rhetoric that promotes land and sea as vehicles of social and cultural exchange. In balancing Britain's "unbounded" domestic "Treasures" against the foreign "Pomp of Life" originating on "a thousand Shores," Thomson draws a series of parallels between purportedly oppositional categories: land and sea, agriculture and commerce, domesticity and foreignness. These equivalences delineate the logic through which the speaker collapses the representative geography of the English countryside with that of distant lands, while also performing a similar, though less obvious, rhetorical approximation of the "generous Britons" to the "naked Nations" of the penultimate line. The analogical structure helps draws out the central ideological construct of the passage: the idea that benevolent commerce makes possible

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[12] Abbreviations follow the conventions established by James Sambrook's 1981 edition of *The Seasons*. Except where noted, line numbers refer to the 1730 edition of the poem. Sambrook notes that the 1746 edition is the "latest text which certainly has Thomson's authority," and given that Thomson "was an inveterate tinkerer," the established wisdom has been that the 1746 edition best reflects Thomson's final authorial vision. Nevertheless, for the purposes of the comparative approach I adopt in this chapter it makes more sense to use the published version of *The Seasons* that is closest to what Richard Lewis and his British American contemporaries would have read. See Sambrook, "Introduction," especially pp. xxxiv-lxxxiii, for further details surrounding the poem's publication and revision.

England's national integrity even as it legitimates global empire through the dubious authority of the sentimental imperative to supply the world with culture's material trappings in the form of food and clothing. That imperative, however, imagines a subject susceptible to its moral pull. For all the "cultural and moral arrogance embedded in nature's mandate," to borrow Suvir Kaul's reading of the line (149), this subject's existence remains predicated on Great Britain's absolute, unquestioned cultural and spatial centrality to the world the poem describes.

The claim I'm making of this passage is simply that it records its particular vision of empire in the language provided by the literary figuration of commerce. While these lines hearken back to classical georgic forms, the ideal of social and commercial circulation provides their logical and rhetorical structure. The "unbounded" agricultural "Treasures" produced on England's "Hills, and long withdrawing Vales" receive their value, ultimately, through the potential exchanges imagined within the parameters of the poem's commercial rhetoric. However much we might now object to its terms on moral grounds, the internal logic of the passage grants Britain's empire cultural value by insisting that a fair and equitable exchange lies at the heart of the symbolic transactions between "generous Britons" and "naked Nations." In its general outline, after all, the passage closely replicates the conventional commercial tableau, familiar from *Spectator* 69 but widely adapted throughout the period: "The *Mahometans* are cloathed in our *British* Manufacture, and the Inhabitants of the Frozen Zone warmed with the Fleeces of our Sheep" (Addison 1:296). The discourse of empire, then, becomes the discourse of a morally charged exchange, and the rhetoric of possession that affirms the reader's own common property in the nation thus represented ("*your* Hills," "*Your* Empire *owns*," "*your* Ports") points suggestively back to the forms of figurative property claimed more broadly by the Addisonian discourse of taste. What

connects the various points within this constellation of rhetorical and aesthetic formations is the commercial subject, hailed in the initial call to "Ye generous Britons" and indirectly a participant in an imperial economy imagined to be the *ne plus ultra* of national destiny. Defined by—indeed, born out of—the representation of commerce itself, this poetic subject embodies the principles of spatial organization encoded by mercantile aesthetics.

The "Horror" of Home in a Diasporic Nation

A particular kind of modern individual, one defined largely by his capacity for deriving pleasure from scenes of commercial exchange, the commercial subject constituted within the discursive matrix of mercantile aesthetics and commercial rhetoric grants the Whig narrative of cultural progress much of its descriptive and normative power. Still more crucial than this commercial subject's role in legitimating Whig thematics, however, is the fact that his presence provides new possibilities for imperial imagination—opportunities, in fact, to project onto other commercially imagined places the same mercantile logic that makes the subject's own position authoritative. If we recognize this commercial subject as representative of a new literary ideal of British identity, then we can also identify his global field of vision as the conceptual ground on which eighteenth-century writers worked out various "anxieties and hesitations" about imperial transience and commercial mutability.[13] Literary explorations of nation and empire become, in this context, guides for explaining how the kind of commercial subjectivity and positionality I have been describing naturalized forms of cultural authority within written descriptions of place.

[13] See Kaul for a more complete discussion of the "anxieties and hesitations of nationalist aspiration" and their accompanying "twists and turns of form and argument" in Thomson's poetry (181).

In Thomson's case, the precise function of the commercial subject's involvement in the production of places and the evaluation of mercantile prospects does not become clear until partway through *Summer*, the second book of *The Seasons*. In an extended digression often referred to as the "tropical excursion," the poem's speaker revives trade's comparative and differential register when he turns his gaze toward the "exalted Stores of every brighter Clime" (*Su.* 425), converting his previous investment in domestic landscapes into a broader global prospect. In most accounts the tropical excursion, as the poem's most detailed engagement with spaces beyond Britain's geographic borders, the tropical excursion, affords Thomson the "occasion […] to reflect on the variety of geological, climatic, and natural phenomena to be found across the globe" as "a prelude to suggesting that the international circulation of commodities has divine sanction" (Kaul 152). In Suvir Kaul's view, the "surfacing of the imperial unconscious" within the section's descriptions of the lush, seductive "wonders of the torrid zone" allows Thomson to "fuse" "poetic and imperial desire" in order to emphasize "Britain's specialness" and "encourage a mercantilist and imperial conception of its national destiny" (Kaul 154, 152). This is certainly true. But the tropical excursion also poses an important problem for imagining British identity, primarily by hinting that Great Britain's claims to cultural superiority depend on recognizing the constitutive lack that drives desire for the material riches *Summer* puts on display.

The tropical excursion thus presents a difficult choice. Either we acknowledge the troubling paradox in which Great Britain's cultural authority depends on what it does not possess (a position that undermines the poem's confidence in a shared national moral and ideological property), or we ignore the differential commercial system entirely, prompting the collapse of the cultural hierarchies that authorize claims to English identity in the first place. In either case, the tropical excursion exposes a threat to mercantile aesthetics. In

troubling the assumptions that structure mercantile aesthetics, however, the tropical excursion intervenes in the more general problem of position in ways that clarify what is at stake in the early eighteenth century's discourse of provinciality. By showing how forms of imperial desire are grounded, located, or otherwise situated, Thomson makes the individual subject's position, like Great Britain's position in the world, the object of scrutiny within the framework provided by mercantile aesthetics. Employing much the same submerged logic involved in the recognition of place through commerce, the tropical excursion defines the nation through its ability to construct the centrality of its own place in the world—the position it identifies, crucially, as "home."

The tropical excursion approaches the twinned questions of authority and position that crystallize in its representation of "home" by grafting a narrative of decline and degeneration, already familiar from the climatic theories of identity whose language it frequently borrows, onto a competing account of the limitless potentiality mobilized by imperial and commercial desires.[14] The section performs two specific tasks, first representing the "*torrid Zone*" (*Su.* 632) as a scene of vast "Beauty" and material "Wealth" awaiting consumption (*Su.* 646), and then transforming it into a scene of violence, disease, and decay where "raging Elements," "inclement Skies," "Terrors," and "Recesses foul, / In Vapours rank and blue Corruption wrapt" predominate (*Su.* 961, 1052, 1031-1032). The conflictual structure resulting from the section's division into these two distinct movements, their contrapuntal arrangement following the speaker's shifting conceptualization of the global prospect, unmasks the limitations of mercantile aesthetics when it comes to remaking the world in Great Britain's image. Ultimately threatening the commercial system on which

[14] This might productively be thought of as another example of the ideological "knotting" John Barrell associates with the long poem form in the eighteenth century; see *Poetry, Language, and Politics* (1988), especially p. 100.

Thomson bases his vision of empire, the speaker's abrupt shift from sampling the "ambrosial Stores" of "unnumber'd Fruits" to cowering before the "malignant," "tempestuous" face of "vengeful Nature" in the tropics shows the commercial subject under threat. Hints of the speaker's inability to contain the unruly, disordered spaces of the tropical world within the aesthetic structures employed elsewhere in *The Seasons* only accentuate the danger. The global prospect resists the authority of the commercial subject to impose visual order: "Plains immense / Lie stretch'd below, interminable Meads, / And vast Savannahs, where the wandering Eye, / Unfixt, is in a verdant Ocean lost" (*Su.* 690-693). In a poem where the power to "command" spaces represented in visual terms is crucial, such resistance is a stark reminder of the limitations of the mercantile aesthetic—and of the unstable authority of those who define their power according to its precepts.

Read as a mode of commercial failure, the tropical excursion's apparent inability to make the global prospect a mere extension of domestic landscapes casts further light on the speaker's abrupt retreat to the safety of a position he identifies as "home." As the culmination of a sequence that begins by voicing the ideal of benevolent commercial empire ("generous Commerce binds / The Round of Nations in a Golden Chain" [*Su.* 138-139]), the concluding invocation of "home" as a site of refuge shows the speaker's confidence in his own authority has been shaken by his contact with the contagious excesses of the global prospect. But while both the unruly profusion of the tropical excursion's first half, and its characterization of tropical regions as "a World of Slaves" "tyrannize[d]" by the climate's "blind Rage" (*Su.* 860, 885, 889) in its second half, suggest the collapse of commercial authority, Thomson's introduction of "home" does, in fact, follow the pattern of commercial rhetoric established elsewhere in the poem. For "home" retains a spatial component, revealed in the gesture toward its status as both literal and figurative location,

that ultimately reinscribes the tropical excursion within the differential system of commercial rhetoric. The unexpected yet fortuitous return to a "home" that coincides with the geographic terrain of the nation itself permits the poem to define that nation against everything it is not. It is no coincidence, after all, that the return "home" is necessitated, according to the speaker, by a domestic thunderstorm whose destructive force parallels the decaying conditions (the "Drought and Famine" that "starve the blasted Year" [*Su.* 1094]) he first observes in gazing on the global prospect.

By pointing out the commonalities linking the "torrid Zone" to the domestic landscapes that define Great Britain, the return "home" rhetorically contains, and thus neuters, the "terrors" of foreign climates and geographies. More importantly, though, this rhetorical containment also orchestrates the recuperation of the differential logic of place the tropical excursion puts under such intense stress. Indeed, the figurative authority linked with "home" owes much of its power to the fact that the muse's return places new emphasis on the *difference* between "home" and "abroad." The flight back "home" reminds us that the section's observation of the global prospect has taken place from the privileged vantage point afforded by English soil, and that the immersion in the rich landscapes of the tropics has been an elaborate simulation. This recognition of "home" establishes it as the site of poetic accumulation, the location from which all poetic excursions depart and to which they inevitably must return. Thus constituted geographically and commercially, the invocation of a national home mobilizes precisely the kind of expansive imperial possessiveness previously denied by commercial desire's failure to organize the global terrain before it.

Thrown into relief by the tropical excursion's precipitous return "home," this grounding of nationalist ideology in the spaces of domestic landscapes grants the mercantilist national imagination a physical dimension that is missing from the poem's other

commercially imagined landscapes. That the geospatial contextualization of the nation, like the positioning of the commercial subject himself, is a retrospective act within the poem's structure, fully realized only once the speaker has pulled back from the global prospect that makes such national and spatial differentiation recognizable, is a crucial facet of Thomson's approach. By withholding the position of observation until the last possible moment—by choosing not to identify the vantage from which the commercial subject surveys the global prospect—the poem immerses the commercial subject within the tropical world itself. The commercial subject's momentary immersion in the undifferentiated spaces "abroad" is both the precondition of the final negative definition of "home" and the instantiation of the diasporic form of nationalism *The Seasons* eventually goes on to codify. Near the end of *Summer*, the speaker calls on the "firm," "graceful," "generous Youth" of Britain to perform the work of expanding Britain's global dominion by "Scattering the Nations where they go" (*Su.* 1467, 1469). Not only does the idea of "home" provide these subjects the necessary position from which to imagine their own subjectivity, it also provides the poem with an ideological, mercantile, and aesthetic center that makes it possible to imagine the conditions of diasporic dispersal in the first place.

The "scattering" of "Sincere, plain-hearted, hospitable, [and] kind" British subjects authorizes new forms of exchange—cultural, rather than strictly commercial—that replace the failed commercial rhetoric of the tropical excursion's first part. Revisiting the commercial-imperial imperative of *Spring*, England exports its flourishing liberty and arts, through the persons of its "generous Youth," in exchange for the desired products the tropical excursion enumerates. Thomson's diasporic nationalism thus emphasizes the rootedness of a global prospect in the English countryside, ensuring that the British subject is the one who stays "home" even when traveling abroad. In this sense, the diasporic

impulse offers what appears to be an infinitely mobile model for reproducing social as well as geospatial relations. Thomson thus liberates English identity from the English landscape, even as he guarantees that this identity always remains centrally fixed by its source in the concept of "home."

Thomson's attachment to the mercantile logic of a fixed, rooted center in the form of a generalized, non-specific "home" to which common imaginative property all Britons can lay claim frees him from the limitations of a more narrowly defined commercial rhetoric of place. But it also transforms the matter of positionality, so important to any mercantile representation of the world, into a poetic problem. The central strategy for legitimating national and imperial claims in the tropical excursion relies on the speaker's ability to make the differences between "home" and "abroad" perform the cultural work necessary to transform Britain's commercial desires into apparently natural geospatial distance. This is the distance that differentiates the British subject's position, "home," from every other site, and the differences its produces justify the benevolent—and inevitable—spread of Britain's global influence through diasporic "scattering." Yet the cultural claim on which Thomson's new vision of empire is predicated also authorizes itself by suggestively linking poetic practice directly to Britain's presence in the wider world, a relationship that subtly reimagines commerce as a violent impulse and instead offers poetic imagination as the true repository of national virtue. Thomson's brief address to his wandering muse, partway through the tropical excursion, rejects the language of benevolent commerce in an attempt to insulate the poem from the acts of violence involved in the expansion of empire:

> Thou art no Ruffian, who beneath the Mask
> Of social Commerce com'st to rob their Wealth;
> No *holy Fury* Thou, blaspheming Heaven,
> With consecrated Steel to stab their Peace,
> And thro' the Land, yet red from Civil Wounds,
> To spread the purple Tyranny of *Rome*.

> Thou, like the harmless Bee, may'st freely range,
> From Mead to Mead bright with exalted Flowers.
> (*Su*.753-60; emphasis original)

A frank admission that the "social Commerce" around which Thomson has previously structured Britain's domestic order is just another form of tyranny that oppress the "torrid Zone," the passage insists its readers confront the true nature of commercial figures that masquerade as beneficent social and political agents. Holding out the hope that the muse, "like the harmless Bee," will yield the same results for poetry as commercial activity yields for the English nation by collecting images and returning them to the poet at "home," Thomson's speaker transforms poetry itself into the representative agent of the metropolis. This turn treats the text of *The Seasons* as a direct cultural analogue to the bustling ports and busy streets the period's commercial rhetoric celebrates. Circumventing anti-imperial and anti-commercial critiques, the poetic intervention we observe at this moment relies on the seemingly innocuous process of imaginative collection and accumulation through which poetry carries out the work of empire.

The necessity of the tropical excursion to the larger nationalist and imperialist project of *The Seasons* thus turns on the speaker's ability to position himself as a central arbiter of poetic authority, a figure who weaves the chaotic diasporic movements of English subjects into a compelling national narrative. Having shown that the tropical expanse's abundance exceeds the power of commercial discourse to contain it by transforming its features into commodities for English consumption, Thomson shifts the terms in which he offers a moral justification for empire. By emphasizing the acts of figurative accumulation, with the muse searching out rich sources of poetic imagery "like the harmless Bee," the poem suggests the value of actual commodities lies not in their ability to enrich the nation economically but rather in their contribution to the imaginative life of the nation as communicated in

imaginative literature. The poet occupies the ethical and imaginative center of the globe thus represented, assuming a role analogous to the Addisonian commercial observer whose judgment provides authoritative, normative evaluations of the cultural and moral registers of commerce. Here, as he does throughout the tropical excursion section, Thomson adopts commercial rhetoric to imagine Great Britain's imperial power in the service of poetry. Poetry becomes the privileged form for articulating the subject position identified with "home"; the authority of its diasporic subjects derives from the absolute, unquestioned centrality of this position.

Locality and the Question of Culture

Up to this point I have argued that *The Seasons* models the process through which mercantile aesthetics produced a form of identity predicated on the existence of a discrete national home, rendered literally as the site of commercial accumulation and the origin of diasporic migrations, and presented figuratively as the privileged source of poetic authority. That such a model of poetic and commercial nationalism thrived during the early and middle eighteenth century is confirmed by even the most cursory inspection of the period's patriotic verse, most of which vigorously defends its claim, as Suvir Kaul remarks, to be "the sublime form of imaginative or literary utterance," a mode of written expression that "speaks to and of nations and the even larger 'collectivities' that result from international conflict" (16).[15] Shaped, however, by the synthesis of the mercantile organization of space and the Addisonian principles of aesthetic property, Thomson's version of the English nation and the subjects who inhabit it remains blind, in a very real sense, to the full range of possibilities

[15] See also Dustin Griffin, whose examination of eighteenth-century patriotic poetry in *Patriotism and Poetry in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (2002) suggests writers of verse following Thomson continue to "insist that they perform a public role" when they "aspire to shape public opinion" or "forge […] a national myth" (294).

for representing the complexity of national communities. While Thomson's poetic construction of "home" finds a source of ideological cohesion in its rhetorical linkage to the figurative centrality of the commercial metropolis, the resulting conception of diaspora makes it difficult to see how poetry written outside this privileged metropolitan terrain could conceive of English subjects in the new spaces opened up by British colonization in the Americas. For all its attention to authorizing a long list of imperial designs by shoring up the cultural legitimacy of the commercial subject's spatial position, that is, *The Seasons* effectively writes the diasporic subject—so crucial to implementing those designs—out of existence almost as soon as he departs British soil. In the world of *The Seasons*, true English subjects are nowhere to be found outside the limited geographic spaces of Great Britain's rural and urban landscapes.[16]

If Thomson's model of commercial subject and imperial nation depends on the ability to grant itself the full weight of the nation's cultural legitimacy by adopting certain conventions of commercial rhetoric, it also poses a series of problems for approaching British American poetry. To begin with, how did colonial poets write from the diasporic position assigned them by Thomson's division of the world into a diffuse global prospect, on one hand, and a central metropolitan "home," on the other? How did poets in British America respond to the erasure of their own poetic authority implied in such a division? And, perhaps even more importantly, how did their response shape what we now term provincial identity? The distinction I want to make between merely responding to

[16] There is an important caveat involved in this claim. Thomson does make reference to people abroad, as in the "Arctic excursion" and descriptions of Peter the Great in the *Winter* section. But these passing descriptions represent them neither as *subjects* nor as English within this extra-national space. Absent any detailed rendering of their capacity to claim the commercial subject's position of accumulation and observation, and to evaluate the common aesthetic "property" to which they gain access through this position, they remain *objects* within the landscape or global prospect. In this sense, these English persons caught within the empire's diasporic spaces are relegated to a position not unlike that of the rural poor as described by John Barrell in *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting, 1730-1840* (1980). See also Sambrook, "Thomson Abroad" (1990).

metropolitan cultural models and redefining the terms in which those models are conceived and deployed is a fairly subtle one, but it has important consequences for the way eighteenth-century British American writers understood provinciality and the way emerging conceptions of local identity contributed to this understanding.

To see that this is the case, one need only turn to the brief dedicatory poem Richard Lewis prefixed to his 1728 English translation of Edward Holdsworth's *Muscipula* (1709). There, Lewis comments on the act of translation as a means of foregrounding the problematic relation of spatial position to cultural authority, apologetically linking his rendition of Holdsworth's original Latin to the culturally debased status of colonial space. At once the symptom and the cause of cultural difference, poetic translation, as Lewis represents it, locates the division between metropolitan cultural authority and colonial backwardness in the place where translation occurs:

> Nor *Here*, expect such "*soft enchanting Strains*,"
> As once You heard on fair Italian Plains;
> . . . . . .
> *There*, Painture breathes, *There* Statuary lives,
> And Music most delightful Rapture gives;
> *There*, pompous Piles of *Building* pierce the Skies,
> And endless Scenes of *Pleasure* court the Eyes.
> While *Here*, rough Woods embrown the Hills and Plains,
> Mean are the *Buildings*, artless are the *Swains*:
> "*To raise the Genius*," WE no Time can spare,
> A *bare Subsistence* claims our utmost Care. (24-25, 31-38; emphasis original)

This is the quintessential moment of provincial self-recognition. Joined by the emphatic pronominals "we" and "our," reminding speaker and reader alike of the culturally debased location they share, Lewis's discussion of translation reframes the representation of place made familiar by *commercial* rhetoric in the equally familiar terms of *cultural* difference. The stark contrast Lewis draws between the cultural refinements located "there" and the

"rough," "artless" state of the colonial setting, "here," confirms the metropolitan view whose cultural logic the dedication appears to embrace.[17]

It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that Lewis simply updates the idea of provinciality by dramatizing its presence in the forms of cultural translation evoked by linguistic translation, or by inscribing it in the deictic language of self-reflexive space. To the contrary, the transformative commercial project celebrated in the poem's second half challenges the modes of cultural difference its first half takes for granted.[18] In the context of Lewis's hopes for an "advance" in the "*Markets* for our Staple" and the resulting "reign" of "*Peace* harmonious," "honest Zeal," and "Arts Polite" (49, 69, 73, 76; emphasis original), it becomes apparent that the unstable referentiality of "here" and "there" employs the commercial vocabulary of place to very different ends than Thomson's resolution of "home" within the determinate, if somewhat abstract, spaces of recognizable English landscapes. In its simplest form, Thomson's vision of the world promotes a form of provinciality that recognizes provincial status on the basis of the geographic and cultural difference separating one from the spaces constituting the national "home." Lewis, on the other hand, makes the spatial dimension of this equation—and, consequently, the cultural values that inhere within any differential understanding of place—far more indeterminate and uncertain. If place itself can only be defined in the sketchy terms provided by "here" and "there," it is difficult to see how such nebulously interdependent markers can continue to make person.

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[17] In this passage, Lewis is referring explicitly to classical antiquity; the metropolis in question, if we read the lines literally, is ancient Rome. Given that the translated poem is a mock-epic exploration of the Welsh claim to cultural (or at least intellectual) superiority, however, the dedication clearly invokes a comparison with the contemporary metropolis, London—or, perhaps, more broadly, Great Britain as a whole. See Chris Beyers, "Maryland's 'FIRST ESSAY of Latin Poetry in English Dress': Conceiving Cultural Change in Eighteenth-Century Maryland" (2002), for more on the significance of the Welsh connection to colonial Maryland.

[18] Lewis's own deictic structure in the dedication to *The Mouse-Trap* (1728) resolves itself easily into the division between colonial and metropolitan space, but retains the ambiguity of all linguistic references which rely on context to determine their specific referents.

What does this uncertainty surrounding the construction of place in British America do to the concept of provinciality as spatial and cultural distance? The ways in which poetry renders specificity of place is clearly at stake in Lewis's lament for colonial culture's sorry state. In attempting to adopt a recognizably metropolitan stance—a stance which, following current definitions, actually marks him as provincial—Lewis reinscribes colonial Maryland within a global system that recognizes lack as the constitutive term of identity. The effect is the same one we find in most of the period's attempts to discuss places in the vocabulary provided by global commerce, a division of space in terms of the flow of culture and commodities from points of excess to points of deficiency. In adopting these familiar terms, however, Lewis also engages in an act of resignification that centers on the precise meaning this vocabulary holds for imagining place in negative or positive terms. The commercial rhetoric of place, as we have seen, largely understands locality through a kind of negative specificity: specific insofar as it relies on particular commodities to define places, and negative in the sense that what defines places is the absence of a totality of all commodities. (This is one of the main reasons that the mercantile fantasy of accumulation is such a powerful figure in the Whig-influenced writing of the period.) Lewis implicitly redefines this negative specificity, transforming it into a positive attribute through the introduction of a third term, that of locality.

The idea that locality as a positive attribute holds the power to redefine the crucial terms of commercial metropolitanism implies a radical resignification of those terms, for the Thomsonian model of individual and nation persistently generalizes, rather than localizes, the landscapes and places it invokes. The case is clearly different in a poem like Lewis's "Food for Criticks," whose two extant versions present a series of variations that, taken together, indirectly challenge the supremacy of Thomson's metropolitan model and question

the apparent ease with which it universalizes the privileged sites that constitute Britain's national landscape.[19] Both extant versions of the poem "localize" its subject matter, yet the fact that neither acknowledges these modifications implies that poetry in British America, at least during the 1730s, replicated a crucial component of the mercantile logic that I have been arguing structured the poetic production of commercial subjects and their position in the world. The poem's transformation into a circulating commodity whose consumption is governed by local circumstances and practices places it in the realm of symbolic exchange with which I began this chapter. Its circulation is yet another factor that helps define the sites where it is modified and consumed as distinct places in their own right. These modifications also suggest an additional point concerning how we ought to read Lewis's appropriation and redefinition of the terms in which mercantile aesthetics produced commercial subjects and the cultural authority they claimed. In reminding us that the definition of locality was intimately connected to the concept of provinciality by virtue of its ability to designate specific places and endow them with particular forms of value, cultural status, or political authority, the poem's publication history hints at how forms of local affiliation and identity might articulate alternatives to metropolitan models of both individual subjectivity and culture.

The significance of the substitution of place names in "Food for Criticks," with its suggestive invocation of a kind of extratextual local imagination, lies in the intersection of the hinted specter of locality and the series of cultural and commercial inversions that characterize nearly all of Lewis's poetry. While the most striking sign of what we might

[19] The poem was printed in both the *New England Weekly Journal* and the *Pennsylvania Gazette*. In the former, the poem includes direct references to various New England locations, including Cambridge and Watertown; in the latter, they have become references to Philadelphians, Pennsylvania, and the Schuylkill River. J. A. Leo Lemay once speculated that the poem was originally published in a now missing issue of the *Maryland Gazette*, possibly in 1731, before being reprinted elsewhere. See *Men of Letters in Colonial Maryland* (1972) for further discussion of the matter.

identify as local poetic imagination in "Food for Criticks" involves its publication history, the poem itself grapples with questions of locality and the aesthetics of place as it explores the contested nature of poetic representation in the New World. The invocation, in its second half, of an ambiguous, spectral Native American figure crystallizes out the sense of colonial difference from the same metropolitan cultural practices that shape the poem's form and provide its basic aesthetic premise. I will return to this figure and his cultural significance shortly, but for now I wish only to point out that the idea of locality in Lewis's poetry provides an index to the relation of particular and universal value in both the commercial and cultural systems of exchange that govern the eighteenth-century recognition of place. The concept of locality that emerges, by implication, in Lewis's work identifies itself as a universal characteristic of poetry's aesthetic function. By constructing particular places in terms of specifically local features, that is, the concept of the local actually endows them with forms of universal value that allows these sites of local aesthetic experience to circulate more widely, beyond the limited circle of influence they claim directly as their own. In this sense, locality may be thought of as a means of regulating provinciality itself—the poetic intensification, rather than abandonment, of Thomson's metropolitan, diasporic nationalism, retooled so as to situate the very concept of place outside the hierarchical framework of cultural authority Thomson's model presumes. Locality, then, becomes the key to inverting the cultural hierarchies which made it impossible to imagine commercial subjects outside the language of mercantile aesthetics.

Reconstituting Place in British America

A careful inspection of the dedication attached to Lewis's *The Mouse-Trap* (1728) makes evident the fact that the commercial project Lewis outlines in the poem's second half

participates in precisely the kind of cultural inversion "Food for Criticks" presupposes. The dedication reformulates the familiar question, asked by so many writers preoccupied with the consequences and effects of English settlement in North America, of whether civilized society is possible in an environment where people struggle to eke out "A *bare Subsistence*." Lewis reframes this concern, however, by exposing the social, rather than material, modalities of commercial exchange. Thus, when he proposes refining the colony's social and intellectual life by reinstating virtuous commerce, Lewis is careful to highlight the role it will play in reuniting families previously torn apart by the vicissitudes of transatlantic trade. The result, the poem assures us, will be to save "*Husbands*, *Brothers*, *Sons* from *Shipwreck* […] / In Climes remote"; their safe return "with Joy shall be receiv'd" by their "thankful […] *Mothers*, *Sisters*, *Wives*" (56-59; emphasis original). As the precise pairing of husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, and sons and mothers suggests, the reunification of families by commercial means preserves existing social structures, while also hinting (in the reverse order in which these plural subjects are matched) at the complex interconnectedness of collective social networks.

In dramatizing trade's potential to reunite families, though, the poem locates the basic unit of social and national reproduction, the family, in the undifferentiated spaces (from the vantage of the poem's initial metropolitan stance) of colonial settlement.[20] Situating the reintegrated family within the "degenerate" spaces of North America thus constitutes an inversion in its own right. More than a mere vote of confidence in trade's civilizing potential, the cohesion of families in Lewis's vision of Maryland's potential future

[20] The reliance on depictions of family life as representative of particular values associated with the cohesion of national life can be traced through poems like *The Seasons*, where Thomson returns insistently to a various scenes of domestic tranquility as a means of imagining a kind of national family. Especially relevant is the concluding section of *Spring*, where Thomson traces the ideal form of the "elegant sufficiency" of rural domesticity.

also suggests trade's ability to transform space itself, making debased peripheries where basic social units, like the family, disintegrate into centers of social reintegration and stability. Through its attention to trade's contribution to the integrity of families, the poem directs attention to the colonial setting where this process occurs. As the site of observation, the point from which commercial exchange is watched and evaluated, Maryland therefore makes it possible to identify the kind of national property imagined by Addison when he discusses trade's expansion of empire's figurative territory. Such identification between colonial space and metropolitan vision is only reinforced by the poem's promise to superintend trade's restorative power of reclaiming the individual's property via his labor. Under the commercial and cultural regime the poem advocates, that is, the "lab'ring Planter shall" no longer "complain / How *vast* his *Trouble*! but how *small* his *Gain*!" (52; emphasis original) Restored to his rightful property, in Locke's sense of the term, the colonial subject can reverse the process of degeneration "which sunk him down from *Man* to *Beast*" (54; emphasis original). The significance of Lewis's imaginative inversion in the dedication, then, lies in its ability to employ the terms of metropolitan commercial subjectivity to reconstitute—to re-humanize, really—England's diasporic subjects on colonial ground.

Echoing Thomson's formula of "social Commerce," the dedication's faith in the power of commercial rhetoric to solve social problems and overcome the cultural deficiencies attending them becomes a means of exploring the sense of difference that informs provincial identity. While the borrowing of "social Commerce" as an ideal shows how Lewis might be seen to perform his provincial status in the poem, the language of sentimental commerce associated with Calvert's response to the colony's cultural and economic plight critiques a strictly differential recognition of metropolitan and provincial identity. Lewis's adoption of a commercial rhetoric associated, as we have seen, with the

construction of particular forms of metropolitan and nation identity, thus suggests that the attempt to redress colonial deficiencies is predicated on the differential logic of lack. To put the matter slightly differently, the poem initially invokes the inferiority of its colonial place of composition only to then proceed by invoking trade's cultural potentiality. Perfectly logical from the perspective of metropolitan cultural superiority, this response to the initial problem of translation suffers from a perverse illogic when viewed from the colonial position the poem identifies as its own ("here"). The poem's turn to commercial rhetoric is what makes this competing logic visible. After all, if figures of commerce provide the vocabulary for discussing distinct places, the use of commercial rhetoric to recast cultural problems in colonial Maryland does not escape the comparative logic that structures the poem's statements of colonial and metropolitan difference. Mirroring the lack of particular commodities that defines locations on the Earth's surface in the Addisonian commercial rhetoric of place, this self-conscious performance of cultural lack seeks to narrow the perceived gap between metropolitan and colonial settings by employing the recognition of transatlantic cultural difference. Thus, the commercial rhetoric that makes possible the metropolitan category of provinciality becomes, in an ironic twist, the panacea for colonial cultural difference figured as degeneration.

The kinds of inversions that originate in Lewis's representation of the individual commercial subject, his labor and property, and his family are only intensified in "To Mr. Samuel Hastings (Ship-Wright of Philadelphia) on his launching the Maryland-Merchant" (1729/30). A clear example of what one scholar has termed Lewis's "poetics of anti-mercantilism," the poem is at once "a chronological progress piece on the history of shipbuilding" and a "conceptualization of labor" and "aesthetic creation […] which yokes

economic and creative impulses" (Lemay 34; Beyers 32).[21] Far from ratifying the modern distinction between "aesthetic creation" and "useful labor" that Chris Beyers has identified in the poem (32), however, the imbrication of economics and aesthetics relies on the interrelatedness of both categories to upend the hierarchical organization of commercial and cultural relations between colonial Maryland and Great Britain.[22] Lewis's instantiation of commercial reversal, partway through the poem, suggests not only the literal anti-mercantilist program he is proposing but also the way in which such a proposal may be seen to restructure the cultural terrain of the British Atlantic. Writing of ships' ability to "preserve the Race of Man" and ensure "native Liberty," "Freedom," "Knowledge," and "Trade" (75-78), Lewis employs the conceit, already familiar from Alexander Pope's *Windsor-Forest* (1713), of trees willingly yielding themselves to the needs of global trade as he imagines a new economic order emerging from colonial commercial progress. "[W]ith Pleasure" America's trees "shall forsake their Woods," Lewis writes,

> And fly to distant Lands o'er deepest Floods,
> From hence shall bear the Product of these Shores,
> And make the Growth of foreign Climates ours:
> In Ships of them compos'd, *Barbadoes* yields
> To us the Product of her fertile Fields.
> *Iberias* golden Fruit shall zest our Bowls,
> And *Florence* send her Wine to chear our Souls.
> To form our Cloaths shall *Britain* shear her Sheep,
> And *Indian* Curtains screen us when we sleep.

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[21] See Nanette Tamer, "Richard Lewis's Poetics of Anti-Mercantilism" (2001), on the topic of Lewis's anti-mercantilist poetics. Whereas Tamer argues Lewis's poetry contests mercantile economic arrangements, however, I want to stress the cultural significance of such opposition. Lewis employs mercantile aesthetic terms—particularly the way in which mercantile aesthetics constituted individual subjects and the terrain they occupied—not to undo a mercantile system of commercial and cultural relations, but rather to authorize the colonies' ability to participate fully in such a system.

[22] Beyers goes on to suggest that it is Lewis's focus on "useful labor" that "has hindered his own aesthetic creation" (32). Such a reading is only possible if one ignores the manifold ways in which the poem references the rich commercial (and creative) potentiality associated in the eighteenth century with the poetic representation of trade.

> What Nature has to *Maryland* deny'd,
> She might by Ships from all the World Provide. (84-95; emphasis original)

As Beyers notes, Lewis's adoption of Addisonian vocabulary contributes to the fantasy of a colonial commercial resurgence that endorses "the virtue of mercantilism" and figures labor, as well as commerce, "in terms of its end, as a consumable product" (24-25). (The idea that "*Iberias* golden Fruit shall zest our Bowls" is lifted almost directly from Addison's formulation of the pleasures of global commerce.) But the passage's commercial rhetoric also recognizes colonial Maryland as a distinct place, by virtue of its contextual, differential relation to the other locations to which it is connected by trade, in terms that carry the authority associated with the mercantile valorization of sites of accumulation and consumption. Once constituted as a place in its own right—the colonial instantiation of Addison's metropolitan "Emporium," in fact—Maryland attains new commercial as well as cultural status. Indeed, the language of possession and consumption Lewis employs throughout ("we," "our") actually opposes the mercantilist implications of commercial desire revealed in *The Seasons* by transposing colony and metropole at the moment the poem announces that Maryland's expansive shipping interests will eventually allow it to claim all the world's commodities as its own. This remarkable act of commercial usurpation is nothing short of an astonishing reversal of the direction in which power flows across the Atlantic.

The commercial and cultural inversion Lewis enacts when he substitutes colonial Maryland for the metropolitan site of mercantile accumulation suggests the uncertain position of creole identity, habitually self-conscious of its precarious status vis-à-vis an imagined normative Britishness.[23] More than simply an argument intended to overcome the

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[23] See Benedict Anderson's description of creole identity formation in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983).

perceived limitations of creole status, however, "Hastings" claims poetic privilege to construct colonial subjects—speaker and reader alike—as individuals who, like the Addisonian man of taste, see the fine web of imaginative, aesthetic, commercial, and spatial associations hidden beneath the world's otherwise opaque surfaces. Yet this individual's capacity to distinguish among groups of people and not just places, so important in a schema that separates metropolitan and provincial practices on cultural as well as spatial grounds, means that the forms of affiliation and collectivity imagined within the poem's negotiation between colonial subjects ("we") and those previously metropolitan individuals ("they") rely on precisely that sense of difference its various inversions might otherwise be thought to erase. Lewis's project, then, does not rely on ignoring the perception of cultural differences among colony and metropole, or denying the relevance of factors that mark colonial subjects as provincial. Instead, as "Hastings" demonstrates, these differences—and, more importantly, the ability to recognize them—are what permit colonial subjects to seize the authority to represent themselves in positions of imagined commercial and, hence, cultural centrality. The paradoxical logic "Hastings" makes visible thus reveals how it was possible, in the early eighteenth-century colonial world, to recognize difference as the necessary precondition for the ideal of universal civilization associated with commerce.

That commerce provides the conceptual vocabulary required to conceive of cultural difference as an integral component in the formation of British metropolitan identity is confirmed by the aesthetic turn "Hastings" makes in its final section. The poem's concluding masque scene, in which an embodied Chesapeake, "Father of the Floods," predicts the future economic and cultural successes of colonial Maryland, follows the inversion of trade relations between Britain and its colonies by endowing the agents of commercial exchange with formal beauty. As Lewis's speaker gazes, "well-pleas'd," on the nearly completed

Maryland-Merchant and its surroundings—a sight which his "ravish'd Eyes" observe "with vast Delight" (128)—Chesapeake confirms the aesthetic response the vision produces. "[A]ll" observers inevitably must "admire" the ship's "graceful Form" and note:

> How boldly regular she Charms the Sight!
> Her Strength, her Symmetry, affords Delight;
> What just Proportion shines in every Part!
> A lovely Master-piece of curious Art!
> How sweet those horizontal Lines appear!
> From Keel to Wale how faultless and how fair!
> Her grosser Part takes the eliptick Form,
> Proof to the surging Sea and howling Storm;
> Her Sweep how easy, and her lively Sheer!
> Unbalasted her Course she safe shall steer! (151, 153-162)

The "fitness" Chesapeake identifies in the ship's outward appearance suggests the reciprocity of its form and function, importing the vocabulary of formal aesthetic judgment to evaluate the ship's beauty.[24] No longer just the *telos* of a historical narrative of shipbuilding, when viewed by the commercial subject the poem presumes the *Maryland-Merchant* sheds its status as a mere technological innovation; the activity it makes possible, trade, synecdochically replaces the ship as commercial object and invests it with the symbolic authority commensurate with the man of polite imagination. Within this framework the inversion of trade relations and the modes of difference they have come to represent promote formal aesthetics—particularly the idea that aesthetics transcends the differences of individual bodies and sensations through the shared act of critical judgment itself—as an alternative that allows social and cultural cohesion to be measured in terms of the differences it overcomes. By employing a normative, ostensibly universal vocabulary of aesthetic form and

[24] William Hogarth, in his *Analysis of Beauty* (1753), introduces his comments on beauty in the visual arts with a chapter "On Fitness," where he illustrates the concept of the "fitness of the parts to the design" (15). "In shipbuilding," Hogarth continues, "the dimensions of every part are confin'd and regulated by fitness for sailing. When a vessel sails well, the sailors always call her a beauty; the two ideas have such a connexion!" (15). The idea that beauty results from objects whose regularity, symmetry, and proportionality contribute to their function is a commonplace, as Hogarth's later comments suggest, of eighteenth-century aesthetic discourse.

function, that is, Lewis suggests colony and metropole alike share basic cultural values that obviate, to a large degree, the division into metropolis and province in the first place.[25]

Yet despite their suggestive ability to promote forms of shared value by positing the unifying force of a universal commercial and aesthetic system of exchange, the emphatic reminders of colonial difference that punctuate Lewis's poetry also point to a renewed sense of instability surrounding acts of representation in the colonial setting. What can count, Lewis seems to ask, as colonial? If differences are essential, paradoxically, to establishing a shared identity governing British and colonial life, how, precisely, are those differences to be represented in textual form, particularly when the actual forms of writing themselves are associated with the metropolis? And if, as I have been suggesting, the idea of locality promotes the necessary recognition of difference that, in turn, produces a larger pattern of shared cultural affiliations, how exactly does locality stop from sliding into the realm of the *merely* local? How does locality retain its claim to some sort of universal, transcendent value, capable of uniting subject across time and space in the Atlantic world?

The answer to these questions becomes clearer if we return once more to the concept of locality defined as the individual subject's orientation toward particular spaces that have been constituted according to the commercial rhetoric and logic I have been discussing. At one level, all of Lewis's poetry stakes its power to represent colonial subjects

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[25] A similar version of the negotiation among forms of difference, mapped onto the larger transatlantic cultural field of publication and readership appears in what was probably Lewis's most widely read poem during his lifetime, "A Journey from Patapsco to Annapolis." The attention attracted by the poem in London was due, at least in part, to its representation of New World nature and environment, features which insistently highlighted differences, rather than similarities, when compared to the characteristic elements associated with the English landscape. Readers were struck by the poem's portrayal of species like the mockingbird and the hummingbird, both of which were seen to contribute to its status as an accurate and "original" representation of the "beautiful … Country it describes," as one contemporary reader wrote. Circulated, consumed, and apparently greatly appreciated on both sides of the Atlantic, "A Journey" suggests a shared cultural context in the very idea that the poem encapsulates some essentially "original" version of the North American landscape. See Carlson and Lemay for details on the poem's publication and reproduction in England.

on the fundamental claim that colonial Maryland makes subjects just as well as the English landscapes identified with the nation and its subjects in *The Seasons*. This basic premise is given special attention in "Food for Criticks," where it coincides, not accidentally, with Lewis's exploration of the function of poetic representation and mimesis, constrained by conventional poetic forms yet adapted to a New World environment. Complicating the conventional pastoral elements it employs to describe the particular geographical and natural features that draw the speaker's attention, the poem's representation of its riparian setting conceives of local topography as a cultural construct, the aesthetic manipulation of rhetorical and discursive features that produce the individual subject himself. The speaker's notice of the "painted world its peaceful gleam contains" (7) induces his attraction to the pastoral setting of the Schuylkill River. This observation draws him further into the contemplation of the river's "mock silver" surface, where he finds a mirror that reflects every feature of the surrounding environment:

> On flying clouds the simple bullocks gaze,
> Or vainly reach to crop the shad'wy grass:
> From neighb'ring hills the stately horse copies
> Himself a feeding, and himself envies[.]
> Hither pursu'd by op'ning hounds, the hare
> Blesses himself to see a forest near,
> The waving shrubs he takes for real wood,
> And boldly plunges in the yielding flood. (17-24)

The speaker's insistence that the mirrored world self-reflexively engages the actual world (the horse "copies / Himself" and "himself envies," while the hare "Blesses himself") disguises the fact that the "painted world" is shown to be significantly more real than the real world. That these watery reflections replace the objects they mirror suggests the poem's investment in investigating mimetic representation by dramatizing it. The poem, in effect, attempts to represent a naturally occurring act of representation, or at least reflection. This double layer of reflexivity contributes to the poem's self-conscious reconfiguration of the ostensibly

debased colonial space it describes, for here no "noxious […] poison" emanates from the nearby marshes, "Nor screams of night-bird rend the twilight air" (31-32).

Sanitized in the reflective act, the poetically inscribed river functions as a kind of pre-romantic *genius loci*, negotiating the strictures of poetic convention by mapping them onto actual places while also endowing the specific places it represents with a value that allows them to circulate, and be appreciated, beyond the immediate local circle of experience. This act of recognizing cultural value that extends beyond the immediate scene effectively grants full subjectivity to the colonial individual. By situating him in the position of the poetic observer within a landscape that circulates broadly, in both provincial and metropolitan settings, Lewis's poetry constructs an individual who commands the global landscape from within its own terrain, one whose actual physical position has little to do with his authority as poet, cultural arbiter, or Addisonian man of taste. The figurative property he identifies in the world is not simply the landscape constituted as such—the imaginative terrain of global empire, so to speak—but also the ability to perceive the *process* through which such imaginative space comes to accrue cultural value through its claim to aesthetic property. Such aesthetic property acquires value, furthermore, because it is the product of cultural, commercial, and spatial inversions that provincialize Britain and metropolitanize—to use a rather ungainly word—the colonies.[26]

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[26] I am drawing the idea of provincializing Britain and, by extension, the idea of metropolitanizing the colonies, from Alok Yadav, whose *Before the Empire of English: Literature, Provinciality, and Nationalism in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (2004) argues that throughout the eighteenth century there exists a "very real concern with *provinciality* in […] English language culture," particularly the "anxiety" produced by an "uncertainty about being provincial" that "underlies the raucous nationalistic boasting that historians and literary scholars have been more ready to identify as a basic feature of the culture of the period" (3). I have assumed throughout this chapter that British culture is, in some sense, always already metropolitan. Yadav, however, suggests this is a misconception, a fixture of nineteenth-century nationalist literary history designed to paper over the uneven and anxious terrain of British letters in previous centuries.

The unexpected spectral presence of the "swarthy ghost" of "Some Indian Prince" who "can't in death his native groves forget, / But leaves elyzium for his ancient seat" (105, 107-8) is at the center of the recuperation of the colonial setting's cultural value as aesthetic property in "Food for Criticks," for his ghostly appearance crystallizes out the poem's assumptions about the yoking of cultural authority, poetic representation, and place. The irresistible pull that draws the Indian's spirit back to its favored site provides a convenient metaphor for the position of the colonial subject himself. As both the alien Other and the metropolitan voice in which the poem's conventional pastoral elements are uttered, the Indian prince is also the representative of a kind of "native" authority which does not position itself in opposition to the authority of the metropolis but rather supplements it. Like Robert Beverley's famously enigmatic claim to native simplicity in introducing *The History and Present State of Virginia* (1705) with the proclamation, "I am an Indian," the Indian prince's presence incorporates the features of purported savagery as signs of virtue within a metropolitan world view.[27] The Indian's supposed difference from—and indifference to—the metropolitan subject, in other words, actually grants him remarkable latitude to pass judgments that carry the weight of cultural authority as recognized by metropolitan culture. The Indian's opinion matters, that is to say, precisely because his perceived alienation from metropolitan custom endows his own capacity for judgment with a notable independence, in the metropolitan view. The Indian prince's appearance, and the special status he grants the location of Lewis's riparian scene through his posthumous regard for it, thus paves the way for Lewis to elevate the poetic and cultural value of the poem's local setting; "Well is their

[27] In this sense, the Indian prince's appearance might be seen to perform a function similar to that of the Native American in Ebenezer Cooke's *The Sot-Weed Factor* (1708)—a reminder of the possibility that English colonists living in the "degenerate" New World might, in point of fact, retain some claim to be *more* English than those metropolitans, like the poem's narrator, who hold themselves to be superior. See Egan, "The Colonial English Body as Commodity in Ebenezer Cooke's *The Sot-Weed Factor*" (1999).

worth in Indian story known," Lewis remarks immediately after the Indian prince's appearance, before proceeding to enumerate the forms of aesthetic and commercial "worth" visible in the river. By implication, the river thus comes to occupy an important position with regard to the global commerce Lewis discusses in his other poems, and Lewis's description of its "worth" places colonial Maryland, at least metaphorically, in contact with other parts of the world involved in preserving and expanding England's commercial empire.[28]

Played off against this form of aesthetic and commercial valuation, the river's "worth" also situates itself within a broader narrative of global cultural decline that manifests itself in spatial terms. Initially appearing to revisit the self-abnegating logic of provinciality we find in the comments on translation that preface *The Mouse-Trap*, the poem suggests that the river's location is in part to blame for its limited fame in verse:

> … hadst thou in Grecia flow'd
> The bounteous blessings of some watry god
> Thou'dst been; or had some Ovid sung thy rise
> Distill'd perhaps from slighted virgins eyes. (109-12)

It is the absence of any such poetic enshrinement which here marks the setting as debased, yet Lewis's argument concerning the river's value as an object of aesthetic pleasure and cultural value hinges on the fact that it is *not* the subject of an Ovidian mythology of origins. Instead of attaining its significance through the authority of some member of the classical literary pantheon, the river is shown to be valuable precisely because the prince is unable to "forget" its strange attraction. This privileging of the "native" right to represent one's own immediate surroundings merges with the poem's earlier call for "ev'ry other fount but this be

[28] The "hairy musk-rat" inhabiting the river's bank, for instance, is said to possess a "perfume [that] defies / The balmy odours of arabian spice" (122). Comical though the reference is, it metaphorically ascribes to the musk-rat a high commercial value.

dumb," and its intimation that all poets, "Which way soe'er your airy genius leads, / Receive your model from these vocal shades" (78-80). Suggesting the Schuylkill is the sole source of poetic inspiration in the world, this globalization of the local, so to speak, performs a more extensive cultural inversion than the commercial inversions we encounter elsewhere in Lewis's work. Far from preventing access to universal authority, this final inversion suggests, the representation of locality is the ultimate guarantor and source of such authority.

"Food for Criticks," specifically, and Lewis's poetry more generally, ultimately insists that colonial landscapes are every bit as capable as English landscapes when it comes to forming individual subjects. This puts a new spin on the old conceptual linkage of place and person, for Lewis adopts the commercially oriented vocabulary of mercantile, metropolitan authority—and the poetic authority on which it relies—in order to resignify the language of aesthetic property claimed by the commercially constituted subject via poetry. Whether colonial, provincial, metropolitan, or some combination of all three, the individual subject as he is constituted in Lewis's poetry thus derives his authority to make cultural pronouncements, pass aesthetic judgment, and organize the world according to the principles of mercantile aesthetics from his recognition of the local differences that are themselves constitutive of broader patterns of affinity and affiliation. Lewis's contribution to the conceptual history of provinciality is his promotion of the local as the sign of a common Britishness.

CHAPTER TWO

James Grainger's "Indian" Language: Transatlantic Cultural Relations and the Aesthetics of Empire

If contemporary accounts are to be believed, James Grainger's *The Sugar-Cane* (1764) entered the polite world of London society to the sound of laughter rather than applause. In his *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791), published nearly thirty years after the event, James Boswell recalled the "little laughable incident" that occurred when a manuscript draft of Grainger's poem was presented to a gathering at the residence of the acclaimed painter Sir Joshua Reynolds:

> [T]his poem […] made all the assembled wits burst into a laugh, when, after much blank-verse pomp, the poet began a new paragraph thus: "Now, Muse, let's sing of *rats*." And what increased the ridicule was, that one of the company, who slyly overlooked the reader, perceived that the word had been originally *mice*, and had been altered to *rats* as more dignified. (614)[1]

Silently eliding the poem's primary subject—a meditation on the cultural value of the West Indian sugar economy—with the metropolitan vocabulary of critical judgment, Boswell's brief anecdote seems to epitomize the strictly hierarchical arrangement of cultural authority in the eighteenth-century British Atlantic. Most modern readers take for granted that the

[1] The story exists in several other versions besides Boswell's, but while they vary in a number of particulars they all concur on the important fact that Grainger's poem deserved the ridicule it received. For a brief discussion of two other versions that circulated—including one in which Johnson, not Grainger, was the unfortunate reader—see Shaun Irlam, "'Wish You Were Here': Exporting England in James Grainger's *The Sugar-Cane*" (2001). It is worth noting that in Boswell's account Johnson, true to form, cannot resist adding a gibe of his own on learning of the incident, asking, "What could he make of a sugar-cane? One might as well write 'The Parsley-bed, a Poem;' or 'The Cabbage-Garden, a Poem'" (615).

assembly's disdain for Grainger's poetic efforts recapitulates the larger drama of the period's transatlantic literary relations by showing how English elites consistently devalued colonial literary production. Critics regard the laughter of the London wits as evidence not just of georgic poetry's declining value for sophisticated European readers but also of the cultural belatedness of any writer foolish enough to emulate so unfashionable a form in the face of changing aesthetic expectations.[2] Grainger's later attempts to satisfy his metropolitan audience by replacing the offending line with a reference to "the whisker'd vermine-race" (II.62), a substitution Boswell dismissed as "still more ludicrous" than the original (614), only proves the point. In staging a minor clash between georgic poetry's didactic, pseudo-documentary impulses and the rules governing poetic refinement, the argument goes, Boswell's anecdote shows how colonial writers could emulate established literary models and yet still fail, in the eyes of metropolitan cultural arbiters, to prevail in what Shaun Irlam describes as their efforts to "produce, stabilize, and legitimate" colonial settings as equal participants in the production of "capitalist modernity" (378, 391).[3]

Differentiated from his metropolitan counterparts by his failure to follow the dictates of poetic decorum, Grainger appears to us in Boswell's anecdote as colonial in just the way Michael Warner has defined the term. "Colonial culture," Warner writes, "is a set of spatial

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[2] For instance, see Karen O'Brien, "Imperial Georgic," 174. Irlam similarly argues that the story reveals "the limitations of the georgic as a viable literary form" (390). See also Juan Christian Pellicer, "The Georgic at Mid-Century and the Case of Dodsley's 'Agriculture'," for the claim that georgic forms experienced a "loss of authority" in the 1760s (67).

[3] Indeed, I suspect the episode has become a minor staple of recent scholarship on both Grainger and georgic poetry more generally precisely because its rejection of the colonial "transvaluation of sugar," to borrow Keith Sandiford's phrase (76), seems to point so clearly to the vast divisions separating metropolitan and colonial experiences of modernity. In addition to Irlam, O'Brien, and Sandiford, other scholars who have referenced Boswell's anecdote include John Chalker, *The English Georgic* (1969); Jim Egan, "The 'Long'd-for Aera' of an 'Other Race': Climate, Identity and James Grainger's *The Sugar-Cane*" (2003); John Gilmore, *The Poetics of Empire: A Study of James Grainger's* The Sugar-Cane (2000); Thomas Krise, *Caribbeana: An Anthology of English Literature of the West Indies* (1999); and Steven Thomas, "Doctoring Ideology: James Grainger's *The Sugar-Cane* and the Bodies of Empire" (2006).

and temporal hierarchies […] experienced in many indirect ways—as an orientation to the modern, a spatial imagination, a moral language of civility, even as a prose style" (63). Forced to situate themselves within these hierarchies governing the "colonial interaction of cultures," writers in British America found themselves pulled in two directions at once. For Warner, the deliberate and sustained process of subordinating the textual traces left by these colonial "localities" inevitably permeates colonial consciousness: "every colonial writer looks both homeward to the seat of imperial culture and outward to the localities that would remain for them subordinate" (65). Consequently, it is the persistent "dialectic of provincialism and cosmopolitanism" that allows us to identify British American writers, most of whom considered themselves unmistakably English, as participants in a truly colonial culture (67).

For scholars of early American literature eager to claim Grainger's four-book georgic poem on the cultivation of sugar cane as part of a distinctly American tradition, reading Boswell's brief anecdote according to Warner's dialectical paradigm makes a good deal of sense. The poem's immersive attention to detail—what one reader calls its "massy, bristling record" of the "physical and topical world" (Pellicer, "Georgic" 414)—mines the West Indian environment for imaginative material and yet continually struggles, as Boswell's account reminds us, to reconcile it with the polite forms of metropolitan verse. This uneasy give and take bears all the markings of a coloniality that recent scholarship identifies with the gradual emergence of a hybridized English—and eventually American—identity in the New World. It comes as no surprise, then, that many critics have discerned in *The Sugar-Cane* a "growing sensibility regarding the peculiarity of an English American identity as creole," an awareness that emerged out of clear "difference[s] from […] English counterparts who otherwise treated them with denigrating smugness because of the colonials' distance from

the metropolis" (Mulford 88).[4] In this regard, the response Boswell records so assiduously pulls Grainger into what Susan Scott Parish has called "dynamic conversation with the metropole" (21) while simultaneously exposing how this transatlantic dialogue inevitably subordinated the awareness of colonial difference to exacting metropolitan standards of written expression.

Yet the seamlessness with which Grainger's poem and Boswell's anecdote appear stitched together within this colonial dialectic should give pause to scholars of both American and British literary traditions. Warner's account of the "distinctive tension" between metropolitan and colonial experience is broadly representative of the way we have come to understand English cultural reproduction in the New World as a transatlantic phenomenon. Indeed, it's fair to say that the division Warner identifies between the "fundamentally extralocal imagination" of "an indefinitely urbane sense of audience," on one hand, and the "very local imagination of territorial possession … and the invention of a creole community," on the other, has become a mainstay of current literary and historical study in both early American and British Atlantic contexts (67).[5] With its foundational assumption of a growing rift—and in many cases a direct opposition—between local and metropolitan modes of writing, this model of transatlantic literary relations offers a fresh

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[4] See also Sandiford's observation that the poem's negotiation of the differences between metropolitan expectations and "the invention of a landscape aesthetics from the possibilities of local place" aided the "continued concretizing of the Creole dissensus: the gradual transformative effects on consciousness exercised by the colonial experience" (76).

[5] Since the postcolonial turn of the 1980s and 1990s, scholars working in and across multiple disciplines have devoted considerable energy to exploring how these various "tensions" shaped what the historians Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler have labeled "the contingency of metropolitan-colonial connections." As they note, "identifying the social and political reverberations between colony and metropole is a difficult task," but it is one that—explicitly or implicitly—typically functions as an initial starting point, rather than the conclusion, of scholarship on early American and transatlantic English culture (1). For one very recent example, see Russ Castronovo, "Progaganda, Prenational Critique, and Early American Literature" (2009), where the relationship between propaganda and nation unfolds, in Castronovo's telling, according to a prenational logic of transition between the "merely national"—for which we might read "local" in this context—and "the transit of commodities, people and power across the entirely of the world-system" (202).

take on the old notion that culture itself radiated outward from an authoritative imperial center to be picked up, fitfully and unevenly, in the farthest reaches of England's empire.[6] In the latter formulation, writing from and about Britain's colonies is an exercise in repetition, as provincial writers adopt the established literary forms of the metropolis in local settings, thus mirroring and yet also distorting, as Paul Giles has suggested, metropolitan cultural practices.[7]

For all its familiarity, however, this critical account is less than convincing when applied to Boswell's anecdote and Grainger's georgic poem, if only because biography is not on the side of those who would portray Grainger as representative of English colonial identity more generally. Despite living on the Caribbean island of St. Christopher (present-day St. Kitts) for some five years, Grainger was hardly an outsider struggling to comply with the dictates of a distant metropolis, but rather an established poet and critic whose activities in the 1750s had already won him Samuel Johnson's friendship. Moreover, as a writer for the *Monthly Review* from 1756 to 1758, Grainger was well versed in the expectations of elite London readers. His review of John Dyer's *The Fleece* (1757) had shown him to be familiar with the prevailing views on georgic poetry, and his later clash with Tobias Smollett on the subject of poetic translation suggested he was on equally sound footing when it came to poetic standards in general.[8] Grainger's proximity to the centers of metropolitan cultural

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[6] For instance, David Shields asserts "Belles lettres enabled the transmission of a secularized, cosmopolitan, genteel culture in North America during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries." This "transmission" was part of the larger equation of empire through which Britain "gather[ed] commodities and merchantable goods" and "exchange[d]" them for "civility and arts" (*Civil* 12, 11).

[7] See *Transatlantic Insurrections: British Culture and the Formation of American Literature, 1730-1860* (2001). For a somewhat different take on cultural reproduction and repetition, see Leonard Tennenhouse, *The Importance of Feeling English: American Literature and the British Diaspora, 1750-1850* (2007). Tennenhouse reads early American literature as a diasporic cultural formation in which the "cultural renewal" of English practices is imagined "as repetition with a difference" (18).

[8] Among Grainger's poetry from this period are "Solitude, An Ode," published in Robert Dodsley's popular *Collection of Poems* (1755) and *A Poetical Translation of the Elegies of Tibullus; and the Poems of Sulpicia* (1759). See

authority and his participation in important debates about poetic form and practice should thus prompt a second look at *The Sugar-Cane* and its reception. Where, exactly, does the cosmopolitan urbanity of Boswell's London end and the provinciality of Grainger's West Indies begin in an episode set entirely in metropolitan drawing rooms, conducted exclusively in the polite language of elite critical judgment, and acted out solely by a cast of metropolitan characters?

My purpose in raising this question is to make the larger point that *The Sugar-Cane* directly challenges how we generally read early American literature as a colonial literature. Tacitly acknowledging Grainger's metropolitan status, Boswell's anecdote shows that Grainger actually engages the apparent opposition between local and metropolitan modes of writing from an authoritative position at the center of metropolitan culture. In fact, rather than exclude him from the company of London's literary elite, the ridicule directed at Grainger serves to discipline, in a loosely Foucauldian sense, by making him the subject of others' scrutiny and therefore also subject to their shared body of literary and cultural standards. Indeed, the company's laughter organizes Johnson's circle around a principle of similarity: in responding to a poem that navigates an array of intensely local, topical, and (for most readers in London) unfamiliar concerns—ranging from sugar cane cultivation to the acquisition of slaves, and from the refining process that yields rum and sugar to the treatment of tropical disease—Grainger's auditors ultimately can laugh at him because he remains more like than unlike them. Their laughter proceeds *despite* the perceived differences his poem exposes, not *because* of them. Against the backdrop of this response, *The Sugar-Cane* calls into question the binary structure of local interests and metropolitan values within a

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Gilmore, 8-12, for a fuller account of Grainger's activities during this period. For a brief discussion of Grainger's review of *The Fleece* in the context of changing opinions on georgic poetry, see Pellicer, "Dodsley," 71.

larger body of writing that scrutinizes distinctively American environments—texts, in other words, that we typically look to for obvious signs of incipient distinctions between British and American culture. Grainger does not so much abandon the hierarchies that scholars have identified at the heart of colonial experience as transplant them back to England, using his own status as a cultural insider to situate local interests within the metropolitan discourses of taste and poetic decorum that supposedly scorned them. Deliberately drawing metropolitan attention toward the cultural potential of the West Indies, *The Sugar-Cane* thus tells a story of transatlantic literary relations that is notably different from the one we have come to know.

I take this local turn in *The Sugar-Cane* as an attempt on Grainger's part to imagine a mode of cultural authority, found in the center *and* the outer reaches of England's expanding empire, that even the most skeptical metropolitan must recognize as valid. Grainger's evident stake in making the details of West Indian life appropriate material for poetry is, I believe, the initial gambit of a writer seeking to redefine metropolitan standards of critical judgment from within, rather than the last, desperate move of a colonial subject defending himself against metropolitan charges of cultural inferiority. As we shall see, Grainger's treatment of the conflicted relationship between local imagination and the purportedly universal realm of metropolitan taste legitimates the cultural possibilities of the former while simultaneously critiquing the myopia of the latter, at least when it comes to English colonial literary production. I am certainly not the first of the poem's readers to see that Grainger effectually translates the British West Indies into a poetic, epistemological, and cultural asset intended to assuage metropolitan concerns about colonial degeneracy or inferiority.[9] Where I

[9] Susan Scott Parrish makes the claim, in a rather different context, that colonial naturalists used their "local expertise and local access" to the New World's natural phenomena to "turn nature into an asset" (16, 17), a unique advantage over their metropolitan brethren. This line of thinking has been fairly common in readings of

depart from earlier readings, however, is in my contention that *The Sugar-Cane* uses its peculiar mixture of environmental figures, medical investigation, natural history, and didactic agricultural advice to theorize the internal relations of empire—the push and pull of provincial and metropolitan outlooks—as the immediate outgrowths of taste itself. Establishing the very idea of local imagination as the primary aesthetic currency of diasporic English culture, Grainger draws the local into dialogue with taste's elite function as a concept that simultaneously "classifies" and "classifies the classifier," in Pierre Bourdieu's famous phrase (6). *The Sugar-Cane* makes the sources of local imagination—the very things Warner's account of coloniality places in opposition to metropolitan style—travel beyond their immediate sphere of influence to engage and even reconstitute metropolitan conceptions of what it means to be a cultured English subject. Revealing the particularities of local identity and the ostensibly universal abstractions of taste to be mutually informed concepts in the formation and classification of English culture, the poem's formal response to its West Indian setting invokes to new ends the kind of cosmopolitan authority that metropolitan writers routinely associated with their search for standards of taste and judgment.

For readers unfamiliar with *The Sugar-Cane*, the idea that its representations of local concerns could alter fundamental assumptions about metropolitan culture might seem puzzling, given the persistent tendency among some critics to regard the poem as both a marginal and a failed work. In fact, though hardly so popular as, say, Alexander Pope's corpus or James Thomson's *The Seasons* (1730-1746), *The Sugar-Cane* was widely read in its own day. Initially reviewed in several London magazines, it went on to appear in at least five separate editions in England, the Caribbean, and the United States before 1822. Comments

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The Sugar-Cane as well, most notably in Gilmore's assertion that it "can be seen as a far-reaching attempt to rewrite the prevailing cultural discourse which […] in effect dismissed Caribbean society as an unfit subject for literature" (35).

by later writers indirectly confirm the poem remained part of the Anglophone literary imagination for some time, since educated readers were evidently expected to have at least a passing familiarity with it. It was not until later in the nineteenth century, when critics determined *The Sugar-Cane* to be "sterile" and "unstimulating," that Grainger's reputation suffered the damage modern readers believe Boswell's anecdote first inflicted. Only then did the poem virtually disappear from the canon of English writing.[10] Moreover, alongside the poem's rising and falling fortunes we must also remember that Grainger's own uncertain status—his position within those "conflicted, transitional identities" Warner remarks (67)—places him at the center of eighteenth-century struggles to invent nation and culture as recognizable, self-evident categories of identity. A Scot by birth, an English physician-poet by practice and, after 1759, a West Indian émigré by choice, Grainger's writing proves that these overlapping categories did not preclude one from claiming, as he does, to also be a Briton.[11] That Grainger could regard himself as metropolitan and disparage the Caribbean as "a country of Vandals" in private letters (qtd. in Gilmore 46) yet still be seen as "an American poet" by his friends in London shows, if anything, that *The Sugar-Cane* was ideally

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[10] See Gilmore, 48-53, for a discussion of the poem's publication history and its reception in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is worth noting that the negative assessment of sterility, made by Edmund Gosse in 1889, prominently figures the role of "our national poetry" (qtd. in Gilmore 51)—by which was meant "British literature"—in judging the relative merits of Grainger's work. As Gilmore points out, the fact that Gosse believed "*The Sugar-Cane* was written in couplets rather than blank verse" suggests that literary scholars were no longer reading the poem "with much attention," to say the least (51). As scholars of early American literature know, the poem has since undergone a notable revival. Beginning in the 1970s, and accelerating significantly in the past decade, *The Sugar-Cane* has become a minor staple of recent anthologies. Among those to include excerpts are the *New Oxford Book of Eighteenth Century Verse* (1984); The *Norton Anthology of American Literature* (2002); Thomas Krise's *Caribbeana* (1999); *The English Literatures of America: 1500-1800* (1996), edited by Myra Jehlen and Michael Warner; and David Shields's recent collection, assembled for the Library of America series, *American Poetry: The Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (2007).

[11] As Tennenhouse notes, none of these categories "in any way cancel out the more fundamental British identity that tied" colonists "to their country of origin" (2). The description could be applied to Grainger as readily as to most of the other colonists whose work has been placed under the general heading of "early American literature."

situated to stage a confrontation between its colonial setting and the expectations of its London readers as the starting point for reconceiving English culture itself.

The Language of the Nation

There are few better examples of the values structuring metropolitan literary culture at mid-century than the mixture of praise and censure that greeted *The Sugar-Cane* when it was reviewed, in the summer and autumn of 1764, by some of London's leading magazines. Torn between admiration for the poem's "well-wrought description" of the West Indies and disgust with its "unpleasing" "Terms of art to which the ear has never been accustomed," writers for the *London Chronicle*, the *Monthly Review*, and the *Critical Review* concluded that Grainger's "West-India georgic" was both a success *and* a failure. Where Grainger had succeeded as a poet, according to no lesser a critic than Samuel Johnson, was in offering a "new creation" that "reconcile[d] the wild imagery of an Indian picture to the strict rules of critical exactness." In the words of another reviewer, the poem's richly detailed account of the West Indian plantation life was "delightfully melodious, and not a little recommended by the novelty of the scenery." What failed to please, however, were its uncouth "Indian" lexicon and its "indifference" to African slavery. (The latter, especially, led Johnson to censure Grainger's emotive and rhetorical lapse in "talk[ing] of this ungenerous commerce" in the same manner "that a groom would give instructions for chusing a horse.") Seemingly haphazard and, at times, directly contradictory, these responses reveal that the consensus view of *The Sugar-Cane*—consistent across three very different magazines, each with its own politics—sought to read the poem's peculiar blend of practical instruction, natural history, medicine, ethnography, and imperial prophesy through the reassuringly normative critical lens of neoclassical precedent.

This, of course, is precisely the charge modern readers have laid at Grainger's feet as they debate the extent of his neoclassical borrowing. Among recent critics, the prevailing view has been that the poem exposes "the abiding strain European literary forms are under to respond adequately to exotic peripheries" (Irlam 378). Tony Bareham, for instance, has argued that *The Sugar-Cane* epitomizes the unfortunate condition of "ebullient content […] constricted and constrained by form," proof that in the eighteenth century "well-established poetic kinds provide […] the straightjacket of Augustan and pre-Romantic poetry abroad" (249). But as Johnson's reference to "the strict rules of critical exactness" suggests, the "straightjacket" of form was every bit as binding in London as it was in the less familiar reaches of Grainger's "Cane-ocean isles" (IV.675). Faced with a work that openly signaled its allegiance to recognizable poetic forms yet deviated significantly from their standards, metropolitan readers responded by insisting on reading Grainger's poem according to the standards they knew best. Thus, when reviewers praised this "new creation" for the "novelty" of its subjects, they invoked a critical discourse largely unchanged since Joseph Addison had identified "whatever is *new* or *uncommon*" as one of the primary "Pleasures of the Imagination" (402; emphasis original), the same basic principle Edmund Burke later affirmed was essential to all other "powers and passions" of the mind because it broke through the "stale unaffecting familiarity" of "daily and vulgar use" (31). By the same token, those critics who objected to Grainger's apparent lack of "tenderness and humanity" and his "unpleasing" vocabulary did so by fitting the poem within a capacious, yet also highly rigid, set of pre-established formal expectations.

What those general expectations were, exactly, and how they could be parlayed into a precise set of formal standards for defining the proper bounds of polite written expression had been the subject of controversy since the end of the previous century. Literary scholars

and historians have long emphasized the role these running battles played in shaping "a new English literature" and the English culture it imagined (A. Williams 3). As John Brewer has noted, the fact that culture's "content and boundaries" were "a persistent source of dispute" meant that its "fugitive spirit" lived in such "strident disagreements and frequent controversies" (xxx). Thus, Alexander Pope's *Essay on Criticism* (1711) could argue that modern poets should always show "for Ancient *Rules* a just Esteem" (139), while Addison countered by imagining a Whig poetics that favored "negligence, grace, looseness and familiarity" over devotion to classical models (Womersley xviii-xix). The precise differences charted by such debates, however, mattered far less than the shared assumptions about cultural authority and literary form they ultimately established.[12] By the 1760s these included the conviction that poetry could be both politically engaged and classically authorized; that established rules of versification provided uniform structures within which significant variation was acceptable, even encouraged; and that the standards best suited to judging literary value were primarily linguistic and rhetorical. This final, seemingly obvious, point is worth noting because it is the element of eighteenth-century critical agreement that modern readers most frequently overlook when mining neoclassical verse for its hidden political and ideological content. Yet it is also the aspect of eighteenth-century verse that carried the most weight for contemporary readers. Boswell's laughter at Grainger's "ludicrous" attempts to excise low speech, reviewers' disgust with the poem's unfamiliar vocabulary, and even Johnson's charge that it failed to master the "appearance" of proper feeling all indicate that metropolitan readers, though hardly unconcerned with the twists and turns of literary form,

[12] Discussions of competing Whig and Tory conceptions of culture and poetry—to say nothing of eighteenth-century poetry's myriad entanglements with politics more generally—are far too numerous to list. A few representative examples, in addition to Williams and Womersley, include Howard Erskine-Hill, *Poetry of Opposition and Revolution* (1996); Christine Gerrard, *The Patriot Opposition to Walpole* (1994); and Dustin Griffin, *Patriotism and Poetry in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (2002).

were still more interested in how Grainger's language shaped what today we might call his textual politics.

That responses to *The Sugar-Cane* faulted Grainger for failing to control the rhetorical dimensions of his georgic undertaking is unsurprising if we consider how routinely eighteenth-century critics treated language and georgic poetry as two sides of the same literary coin. Recent emphasis on georgic poetry's imperial functions notwithstanding, Grainger's contemporary readers understood the form primarily as an exercise in rhetorical balance—the "fitness" between linguistic register and thematic content.[13] As Juan Christian Pellicer reminds us, Addison "placed the issue of poetic decorum at the head of the georgic agenda for the entire eighteenth-century" ("Dodsley" 71), something he did so effectively that subsequent critics came to see Virgil's *Georgics* and its numerous neoclassical heirs "through Addisonian spectacles" (Chalker 17). For the remainder of the century, Virgil's poem was seen as "the most complete, elaborate, and finisht piece of all Antiquity," a work whose reputation for giving "the meanest of […] precepts" a "solemn air" of "grandeur" led Addison to define the georgic mode in general as "some part of the science of husbandry put into a pleasing dress, and set off with all the Beauties and Embellishments of Poetry." These "Beauties and Embellishments," as Addison and his followers made clear, were the principal means of ensuring that the "low phrases and terms of art that are adapted to husbandry" did not permeate poetic works, thereby "sinking them into the plebian style" (qtd. in Gilmore 27). At its core, then, georgic poetry was a rhetorical exercise in matching "elevated circumlocutions" to mundane things (Chalker 20), a "contrastive" activity perfectly aligned with the belief that georgic's other project—its function as a venue for imagining an emerging modernity as a "natural" condition of civilizing trade and labor—was to represent

[13] For discussions of georgic form and imperial ideology, see Irlam, O'Brien, and Thomas in particular.

variety, complexity, and "impurity" of all sorts as essential threads in the fabric of national life (Pellicer, "Georgic" 405, 406).

It is this perceived nationalizing function, cast as georgic poetry's formal *and* rhetorical obligation to narrate the inexorable march of national progress, that explains the contemporary scrutiny of language in *The Sugar-Cane*. In the second half of the eighteenth century, language theorists like Adam Smith, Hugh Blair, and even Johnson himself posited a mutual dependence between language and national culture, emphasizing that a nation's language and character were so deeply intertwined as to be virtually indistinguishable. Smith launched his famous lectures on rhetoric with the claim that an English writer's words inevitably "must not only be English and agreeable to the custom of the country but likewise to the custom of some particular part of the nation" (4). Implicit in Smith's assertion, and later echoed in Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783), was the assumption that habits of speech and writing linked an individual to particular places and, potentially, situated him according to social position as well. Language, in this sense, merged the physical and cultural geographies of the nation, and Smith and Blair hoped to use this connection to establish the community of polite letters—a community their own writing on rhetoric helped imagine—as the embodiment of a cohesive nation.[14] Explaining the motivation for his *Dictionary* (1755) as stemming from a desire to correct the increasingly "arbitrary" manner in which English was being used "without order," Johnson confirmed the merits of such a project by asserting a written linguistic standard could replace the "various dialects" spoken

[14] In the case of Scottish thinkers like Blair and Smith this link was especially significant, for it permitted them to make the case that their own participation in debates about English language placed them within, rather than outside, the English nation as a cultural entity. See Robert Crawford, *Devolving English Literature* (1992); Clifford Siskin, *The Work of Writing: Literature and Social Change in Britain, 1700-1830* (1998); and Leonard Tennenhouse, *The Importance of Feeling English: American Literature and the British Diaspora, 1750-1850* (2007). For a slightly different account, in which linguistic diversity within the nation is seen as essential to the development of metropolitan "prestige languages," see Alok Yadav, *Before the Empire of English: Literature, Provinciality and Nationalism in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (2004), especially pp. 21-53.

throughout Great Britain with a single language based on the traditions of elite practice (A2r). No doubt made all the more appealing by its suitability for an aspiring class of newly professional writers, among them Johnson himself, the construction of fixed written standards blurred traditional markers of social distinction and allowed writers and critics alike to legitimate their own role in producing a unified national culture.[15]

In the context of this drive to recast elite writing as the foundation of a modern national "literature" increasingly set apart from—and defined against—diverse local language practices, Grainger's "unpleasing" diction exposes the high stakes of the encounter between his poem's metropolitan form and its "Indian" content. On this score, the poem's failure to give lofty expression to lowly content in properly Virgilian fashion was the least of its faults. Far more damning was Grainger's evident relish for unfamiliar words linked to the poem's distant tropical setting. By arguing the poem was full of uncouth "terms of art" that deviated from accepted patterns of polite usage, critics rendered *The Sugar-Cane* culturally suspect despite whatever advantages it could claim on the basis of its otherwise refreshing novelty. As a result, metropolitan judgments of the poem recast it as a work strangely unsuitable for either of its professed aims: to replenish Europe's supposedly depleted stock of poetic imagery and to expand the world's store of practical knowledge. While Grainger's immediate goal was to persuade his English readers that the economically rich West Indies could also be made to yield equally impressive cultural riches, the project metropolitan critics were assigning to "literature" in the middle decades of the eighteenth century—namely, the task of modeling refined standards of written English—demanded a very different approach to

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[15] I am partly following Terry Eagleton's discussion, in *Literary Theory* (1996), of the transition from the eighteenth-century conception of literature as "polite letters" to the nineteenth-century view of literature as "'creative' or 'imaginative' writing" (15). While Eagleton places this transformation after the revolutions of the late eighteenth century, however, I believe slightly earlier debates concerning national language helped give embryonic form to this new understanding of literature at a somewhat earlier cultural moment.

the transvaluation of environment into culture. The fact that Grainger's poetic vocabulary was so obviously aligned with discourses of New World settlement and economic exploitation meant that it functioned as a reminder of the vast differences that seemed to separate an idealized English nation, narrowly circumscribed by the geography of one small island and a particular body of language, from an expansive British empire seeking to assimilate new lands—and new words—around the globe.[16]

Viewed in this way, the poem's language reprises the more cultural problem of coloniality more generally. Threatening by virtue of its unfamiliarity and unfamiliar by virtue of its connection to strange colonial geographies, Grainger's "Indian" vocabulary challenges the relation between national terrain and collective identity and thus prompts questions its metropolitan readers are largely unprepared to answer. How could language originating in the Caribbean's "unclassic ground" be expected to function as a model for cultural refinement back in England? Even if it could, did not such language violate the "particular connection," so integral to the georgic tradition, that the period's elite writers posited "between nation-building and the soil" (Crawford 94)? Under what conditions could the soil, language, and commodities of some distant part of the world, however economically important to the growing British Empire, hope to attain the same cultural status as the linguistic patterns and familiar domestic geographies that had long served as the basis for English pastoral and georgic traditions? These are the pressing questions to which Grainger's reworking of the English georgic most insistently calls our attention.

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[16] On the subject of linguistic change resulting from England's early forays into New World colonization, see William Spengemann, *A New World of Words: Redefining Early American Literature* (1994). Spengemann argues that the production of the category of writing we call "literature," especially the category of "American literature," came about largely through a process of "eroding the conceptual foundations of the Old, pre-American world, and replacing these with the linguistic structures of the new" (45).

The "pleasure and profit" of Georgic Form

Even before the first line of verse, Grainger firmly stamps *The Sugar-Cane* with the imprint of these overlapping concerns for cultural authority, language, and geography. Borrowing a line from the minor first-century Roman poet and astrologer Marcus Manilius, the poem's epigraph suggests it is Grainger's appointed task "to be the first to stir with these new strains the nodding leaf-capped woods of Helicon, as I bring strange lore untold by any before me" (87).[17] The epigraph's classically-authorized promise of a knowledge that is unique to the colonial world attempts to strike a balance between the competing demands of novelty and convention Grainger will negotiate throughout this "poem on the cultivation of the Sugar-Cane" (89). It is a goal presented in terms that simultaneously promote the aims of English national and imperial poetry and offer radically new interpretations of those aims. Citing the "novelty of the subject," Grainger proceeds to argue that his verse description of a "country" so "wholly different from […] Europe" will produce "new and picturesque images" as well as bold new "precepts" that he hopes "stand some chance of instructing the reader" (89). Yet however novel and instructive the "precepts" it offers, the poem also closely follows the authoritative patterns of "didactic composition" established by no lesser writers than Virgil and Hesiod (89). As Grainger is quick to point out, the "terms of art" necessary to speak clearly on matters of "rural oeconomy" and "plantership" make routine appearances in the work of these ancient writers, whose example "is a sufficient apology" for any modern poet following "in their steps" (89, 90). Far from being out of place, Grainger suggests, any "terms of art" that contribute to the useful project of expanding knowledge of the British West Indies is authoritative simply by virtue of its support for the valuable cultural project begun so long ago by the ancients.

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[17] The translation from the original Latin is G. P. Goold's, quoted in Krise, 167n2.

Still, as Grainger readily acknowledges, the language of West Indian agriculture differs greatly from even the lowest "terms of art" used by ancient Roman poets or, for that matter, by modern English ones. Whether didactic or pleasingly descriptive, a "West-India georgic" requires by its very nature a vocabulary that includes many "words as are not common in Europe" (90). Recognizing that "an obscure poem affords both less pleasure and profit to the reader," Grainger assures his readers that "some notes have been added, which, it is presumed, will not be disagreeable to those who have never been in the West-Indies" (90). Grainger's defense of footnotes as vital to readerly pleasure is, as far as I know, unique in the eighteenth century, but still more remarkable is his decision to conclude by turning away from the principles of poetic composition he defends:

> In a West-India georgic, the mention of many indigenous remedies, as well as diseases, was unavoidable. The truth is, I have rather courted opportunities of this nature, than avoided them. Medicines of such amazing efficacy, as I have had occasion to make trials of in these islands, deserve to be universally known. And wherever, in the following poem, I recommend any such, I beg leave to be understood as a physician, and not as a poet. (90)

There is nothing conventional about a defense of poetry that concludes with the poet professing to be no poet at all, but rather a physician in poetic drag. Yet it is precisely this unorthodox conclusion, which posits an essential bifurcation of content and poetic form, that allows Grainger to hint at the formal innovation embedded in his surprising disavowal of poetic status. The "mention of many indigenous remedies," he makes clear, is "unavoidable" only in *georgic* poetry—and only in a uniquely *West-Indian* brand of georgic poetry at that. This locational distinction qualifies Grainger's earlier comments on the principles of didactic verse, signaling a willingness to expand the range of formal possibilities that can exist within the category of georgic verse while also maintaining an allegiance to the practices conventionally grouped under that heading. Pulled in these two directions at once, the preface poses crucial questions for the aesthetic and linguistic concepts around which

"literature" was beginning to formulate a national and imperial culture. How can poetic practices identified with discrete regions of the globe represent English and, increasingly, British imperial culture more generally? How can a poem largely confined to describing the environment and staple monoculture of a small portion of the West Indies hope to reform the cultural practices of a distant metropolis and, in so doing, change the shape of the larger transatlantic literary community in which it participates?

Grainger finds a preliminary answer to these questions in the distinctly commercial idiom that James Thomson and other poets of his generation had previously used to imagine empire as a direct function of trade. Invoking the metaphor of commercial "enrichment" to describe European encounters with new imagery and vocabulary, Grainger posits the unifying power of mutual interests linking England to its American colonies.[18] To the extent that Grainger places the economy of "pleasure" on equal footing with parallel systems of material "profit" (90), he implies that trade and belles lettres are deeply intertwined in extra-economic terms as well. He even goes so far as to suggest that in their metaphoric relation to commercial commodities the "terms of art" scattered so liberally throughout *The Sugar-Cane* are the true sources of England's colonial treasures. Only in the act of learning to understand these new words, that is, do European readers derive the full "pleasure and profit" from those "indigenous remedies" that "deserve to be universally known." Grainger thus equates a new vocabulary with new forms of knowledge, and in the process makes his own poem a vehicle for returning to England the practical and epistemological fruits of a rich West Indian lexicon. As a result, the poem's apparent failure to comply with emerging written standards of metropolitan literature actually turns out to be what makes it so potentially

[18] Other scholars have noted the importance of the figure of "enrichment" in Grainger's explanation of his poem's value. See especially Egan, "Climate," p. 195.

valuable to metropolitan readers. Alternately peddling the aesthetic rewards of "picturesque" scenery and the material advantages of local "Medicines of […] amazing efficacy," Grainger translates the poem's "Indian" diction into the valuable currency of metropolitan desire.

We need only look to the poem's representation of its West Indian setting to see how this peculiar logic plays out in verse. Just as the preface shows Grainger artfully balancing georgic convention against linguistic novelty in a defense of his poetic method and language, the ambivalent status of the poem's Caribbean climate and geography—debased and exalted in equal measure—shows how a "West-India georgic" can turn apparent flaws to new and productive purposes. With striking consistency, Grainger begins each of the final three books by referencing the colonial environment's degraded status. Book II opens with the "less pleasing theme" of the "poor exile[d]" Muse, cut off from earlier scenes of "culture," as she finds herself immersed in a tropical world tormented by "red lightning" and "hurricanes tremendous" (II.1, 4, 12, 32). Books III and IV establish similar scenarios, the former opening with the Muse figured as "a pilgrim, in the howling waste" while the latter, through a process of sympathetic identification with the "Genius of Africk," immerses her in a "desart" that "howls […] fearfully around" (III.3; IV.1, 3). Yet, having established the West Indies as a place thoroughly inhospitable to the forms of culture conveyed by his Muse, Grainger suddenly reverses these predictably metropolitan views of the colonial world's self-evident degeneracy. In contrast to its unlikely beginning, Book III concludes with an extended encomium to the suddenly "fair landscape" of "these blissful isles" (III.524, 577). Even the disturbing equivalence Book IV draws among African slavery, the West Indian climate, and European moral decline gives way, in the poem's final lines, to a more enthusiastic appraisal of the land: no longer the stage for "scenes of deep distress," these

"green isles" are ultimately recognized as the benignly pastoral site of "Cane-crown'd vale[s]" and "vast fleecy clouds" (IV.630; III.1; IV.648, 644).

Despite the reluctance with which *The Sugar-Cane* yields its promised "picturesque images," Grainger's "arduous undertaking" (90) pays off in the end by making poetry itself the privileged medium of empire's refining, acculturating potential. Reprising the popular *translatio* theme at a formal level, the poem's triumphal conclusion—the emphatic prophecy that "BRITAIN SHALL EVER TRIUMPH O'ER THE MAIN" (IV.683)—becomes possible only once the Muse's rising and falling fortunes have been safely stabilized in a newly refined New World setting.[19] Measured out in the regular iambic meter of blank verse, Grainger's efforts to cajole the Muse into superintending the literal and figurative cultivation of the West Indies thus replicate the commercial and agricultural labor that the poetry of empire routinely linked to English culture's efflorescence in every corner of the globe, and that Grainger himself promotes as an added benefit of his "terms of art."[20] In a formal sense, the Caribbean's gradual evolution from threatening wilderness to neatly ordered cane-field landscape recapitulates the process by which trade and the arts superintended humanity's progress from barbarity to civility, a teleological course Grainger's prefatory remarks initially hint at when promising new forms of knowledge and aesthetic pleasure.[21] In other words,

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[19] See Shields, *Oracles of Empire: Poetry, Politics, and Commerce in British America* (1990), and Tennenhouse, especially pp. 12-13, for more detailed accounts of the significance of the various *translatio* themes in eighteenth-century Anglophone poetry.

[20] Suvir Kaul's *Poems of Nation, Anthems of Empire: English Verse in the Long Eighteenth Century* (2000) provides a thorough analysis of the progressive narratives that English poets used to explain and justify Britain's expanding commercial power in the Atlantic world. Keith Sandiford also notes Grainger's unusual strategy of presenting his Muse as "curiously reluctant, if not downright sullen and uncooperative," an observation he links to Grainger's "temptation […] to translate West Indian landscape into an English scene" (74-5). Unlike Sandiford, however, I do not see Grainger's use of the conventional *translatio* as a moment of "subtle creolization," but rather as another piece of evidence that Grainger turns to the West Indian environment as an index to a specifically metropolitan culture.

[21] In addition to Chalker, Anthony Low, in *The Georgic Revolution* (1985), makes a similar point about the relation between georgic form and a progressive vision of English culture.

Grainger's ambivalence toward the one feature his metropolitan readers universally praised—the detailed description of the West Indies—shows that *The Sugar-Cane* does exactly what a georgic poem should.

With little regard for its contribution to the conventional georgic project of cultural progress, however, the poem's rapturous conclusion reveals the larger problem of cultural authority that attended any effort to write from, or about, England's colonies—the same problem, in effect, that Grainger resolves by transforming a purported marker of colonial difference, his unfamiliar "Indian" language, into an emblem of Britain's imperial ambitions. By embracing such representational strategies, Grainger borrows from both promotional and anti-promotional traditions of colonial writing developed over the previous two centuries. On one hand, describing the "less pleasing theme" of "poor exile" somewhat perversely allows Grainger to unfold the teleological vision of national progress that was the English georgic's specialty, since only by putting debased and redeemed versions of the Caribbean environment in competition with one another can the poem successfully imagine a future when that environment will finally have yielded to, and thus proved, empire's civilizing force.[22] On the other hand, Grainger's competing environmental assessments play directly into the countervailing skepticism about English culture's ability to survive in distant, foreign settings.[23] By hinting even in passing that life in the colonies is equivalent to exile in the wilderness, Grainger tacitly acknowledges there is some merit to these fears and, hence, a small yet very real possibility that the georgic paradigm of cultural progress can fail. Read in

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[22] See Timothy Sweet, *American Georgics: Economy and Environment in Early American Literature* (2002), for an examination of the overlapping economic and environmental discourses of "waste" in early promotional writing.

[23] It is no secret that metropolitan observers frequently leveled accusations of cultural degeneracy at English colonists. See both Egan and Parrish for discussions of this phenomenon.

this way, the emphatic typography of the final capitalized line projecting Britain's eternal reign speaks as much of desperation as it does of unwavering imperial confidence.

However much the prophetic conclusion obscures them, such doubts bear an obvious relation to the larger concerns about the nature of authority and social order that preoccupy Grainger throughout most of *The Sugar-Cane*. As the poem's final pastoral turn suggests, these concerns often take the form of environmental figures that treat human social relations as reflections of an ongoing contest between nature and culture. In the poem's opening lines, for instance, Grainger plays on the sugar cane's double status as a natural object and a surrogate for human society to call attention to important parallels between the king's power and the poet's voice: "Imperial George, monarch of the main, / Hath given to wield the scepter of those isles, / Where first the Muse beheld the spiry Cane, / Supreme of plants, rich subject of my song" (I.20-3). The metaphor trades the outward signs of power, figured in the monarch himself, for a culturally and economically "rich subject," the cane, which Grainger goes on to portray as the central arbiter of England's imperial authority in both political and literary spheres. Over the course of the following three books, as the cane's "filial young" and "children" gradually reach "manhood" and become "Parent-cane" in their own turn (II.226, 382, 385, 160), this vegetable family symbolically reproduces the monarch's political authority as a function of the cultural authority implicit in the poet's ability to make the natural world symbolize the human one. Repeated at regular intervals throughout the poem, such figures reproduce what Robert Blair St. George identifies as the strategies "colonial regimes used to demarcate, diversity, and screen the unifying logic of imposed rule" (9). Indeed, read as a document that indirectly "promote[s] acquiescence" to imperial rule, *The Sugar-Cane* organizes an almost endless parade of discrete moments where various forms of authority are staged through a similar

pattern of reference and made to seem, in St. George's words, "a 'natural' part of quotidian language" (10).

It is not by chance that Grainger responds to questions of authority by playing on the links between environment and language at precisely this moment in Britain's imperial history. The immediate aftermath of the Seven Years' War was characterized by new challenges to the deeply-seated notions of empire that had once provided the moral justification for Britain's growing influence in the Atlantic world. French defeat confirmed what patriotic English writers had been declaring for decades: Britain's combined commercial and naval strength meant that the nation truly did, in the words of James Thomson's famous refrain, "rule the waves." But the war's conclusion also opened up anxious debates about the conduct of empire, shifting attention away from commercial power—long a staple of Whig panegyric—and toward new prospects for territorial conquest. According to Fred Anderson, the war resulted in "troubled attempt[s] by metropolitan authorities to construct a new British empire along lines that would permit them to exercise effective control over colonies and conquests alike" (xix). And, as Eliga Gould has noted, pre-war confidence in the "seemingly limitless wealth generated by Britain's prodigious maritime commerce" soon crumbled under the weight of pressing concerns about imperial administration; saddled with vast debts and even vaster territories, Britain's "blue water" empire was transformed into a jumbled array of competing "expectations and anxieties" (55, 107, 109). Even as the expanded New World lands Britain now called its own assured Britons of their privileged and powerful position in the Atlantic world, that is, they also threatened to overthrow the very rationale on which that empire had been built.

The unexpected pastoral turn at the end of *The Sugar-Cane*—particularly Grainger's final vision of the Caribbean's environmental redemption—begins to make a different kind of sense if we pause to consider it in light of this shifting economic and political climate. As a response to potent worries about the nature of authority in the new spaces of empire, Grainger's efforts to bring the West Indian environment into line with the georgic imperative of progress signify a renewed interest in the extra-economic forms of "pleasure and profit" that his introductory comments cast as the colonies' lasting contributions to British culture. Following hard on several hundred lines of decidedly unpastoral verse—advice to planters on how best to select slaves accompanied by detailed descriptions of the medical remedies best suited to cure common tropical ailments, among other topics—the sudden return to a vast Caribbean prospect that "charm[s] the sight with many a pleasing form" (IV.646) symbolically displaces commerce from its central position within the English georgic mode. To be sure, Grainger retains familiar elements of Whig paeans to commerce when, addressing "old father Thames," "king of streams," he admits that "Delighted commerce broods upon thy wave" and notes that "every quarter of this sea-girt globe / To thee due tribute pays" (IV.635, 639, 641-2). Yet he implicitly retracts this concession only moments later:

> The moon, in virgin-glory, gilds the pole,
> And tips yon tamarinds, tips yon Cane-crown'd vale,
> With fluent silver; while unnumbered stars
> Gild the vast concave with their lively beams.
> The main, a moving burnish'd mirror, shines;
> No noise is heard, save when the distant surge
> With drouzy murmurings breaks upon the shore!— (IV.647-53)

Instead of returning valuable commodities, as we might expect, the New World mints its wealth in a different kind of currency: the lyrical language that recasts the Caribbean's features as poetic images of a "silver," "Gild[ed]," "burnish'd" landscape. Where an earlier

poem like Alexander Pope's *Windsor-Forest* (1713) ends by reaffirming the function of an "Unbounded *Thames*" in the projection of "*Britain's* Thunder" around the globe (398, 389; emphasis original), Grainger's conclusion, though clearly indebted to such antecedents, softens the language of imperial power considerably. Here, the "wave" initially functions as a potent metonym for Britain's expansive commercial empire, only to be translated into a mere "distant surge" filling the air of St. Christopher with "drouzy murmurings." The poem thus reprises metaphorically the historical process that Eric Hinderaker identifies as the transition from "empires of commerce" to "empires of land," ushering in Britain's "golden aera" (IV.680) by invoking landscape aesthetics as the preferred method for "exploit[ing] American resources more invasively" (xi).[24]

Although its pastoral conclusion signals a retreat from the imperial iconography of commerce in favor of a renewed interest in the poetic potential of the land itself, *The Sugar-Cane* does not abandon the initial premise of the preface. In fact, the ease with which Grainger finally subordinates the commercial concerns of empire to the beauty of such tranquil landscape prospects offers an uncanny parallel to that initial commercial logic. Reacting to uncertainties about the sources and forms of imperial authority, the poem implicitly presents the final West Indian prospect as a landscape in the most ideologically charged sense of the word—that is, as a manifestation of the "broad and comprehensive vision," to quote John Barrell, that disguised intense struggles for cultural and political authority in codified arrangements of rural space ("Prospect" 100, 95). Under the auspices of taste, Barrell notes, the "ideal panoramic landscape" assigned political and cultural meaning

[24] Hinderaker qualifies his historical model of North American empires, both French and English: "In practice the line between these competing views of empire was often blurred" (xi). It is precisely the fuzziness of this imaginary boundary that Grainger's conclusion makes visible as commerce and land, each with their own peculiar ideological investments, appear to jockey for position in the poem's final lines.

to geography, dividing society "into the observers and the observed, the rulers and the ruled" and determining on that basis who could claim the primary "qualifications of citizenship" ("Prospect" 95). Poetic landscapes, in other words, made it possible "to discuss how a society fragmented" could "be understood as still coherent" (*English* 92). For Grainger, though, treating the previously "howling waste" as a source of cultural value equal to England's rural domestic spaces turns the metropolitan discourse of landscape aesthetics to a new purpose. If the preface promotes the unlikely marriage between "profit" and the unfamiliar language of distant colonial settings, the final renunciation of this commercial register assures readers that whatever "pleasure" they derive from the poem springs from the sources they have previously been least likely to credit with the power to please. In other words, the parting view of moonlit cane fields is simply another version, albeit a more conventional one, of the epistemological "profit" Grainger hopes to generate from his experiment in a distinctive New World poetics.

Many of Grainger's modern readers see this final surfacing of a luminous pastoral-georgic vision of prosperity and order as a clumsy attempt to aestheticize the West Indian environment, as if to prompt his readers to forget the "unpleasing" terms that inform the preceding two thousand lines of verse. But to insist that *The Sugar-Cane* fails as a georgic poem because it is unable to sustain "a second-degree aestheticization of agrarian-capitalist relations," as one critic does, is largely to miss the point (Irlam 380). Grainger's efforts to rewrite transatlantic cultural relations depend, in fact, on *not* clothing the commercial and social relations of the West Indian landscape "in the antique weeds of pastoral feudalism" (Irlam 380). Instead, the transition from a didactic, commercial register—the kind of language that communicates mercantile details about the price of commodities, for instance—to a more recognizable metropolitan brand of pastoralism is designed to be utterly

transparent.[25] If anything, this change in tone and vocabulary exposes rather than conceals the artfulness with which georgic poetry generally recasts economic and social relations as aesthetic and spatial ones. By drawing attention to the "aestheticization" implicit in georgic ideology, Grainger highlights the distinctions that necessarily exist between the objects thus rendered aesthetic—that is, between the cultural geographies encoded by an English landscape and the very different conditions of a West Indian one. This is not to say that Grainger is ultimately unable to make the West Indies look just like the rural English countryside, but rather that his failure to do so is productive and, ultimately, *necessary* to the larger project of reconceiving English culture.[26]

If, by metropolitan convention, poets routinely sought to ensure the "fitness" of their words to the subject they described, Grainger's unorthodox disregard for key rules governing landscape aesthetics signals a desire to turn metropolitan conceptions of cultural authority partially inside out. Grainger's take on what Samuel Johnson called England's "pastoral performances" might thus be seen to disabuse English readers of the notion, described by Johnson in *The Rambler* 36, that writing about nature in the modern age consists solely of unimaginatively "transmitting the same images in the same combination" in an endless progression of "servile copies" (197-8). Johnson critiqued pastoral poetry on the grounds that it generally failed to "attract curiosity" because of its slavish imitation, yet noted also that it could hardly fail to do so: "Poetry cannot dwell upon […] minuter distinctions

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[25] The poem's first extended footnote, the longest in the poem, provides exactly this sort of information. In the midst of an extended discussion of imperial history in the Caribbean, Grainger notes the apparently significant fact that in the sixteenth century the English paid "the rate of 4 *l. per C.* wt. for muscovado" purchased from Portuguese colonies (166).

[26] The point here is not that Grainger is ultimately incapable of making the West Indies look just like the rural English countryside, as modern critics like Kaul and, to a lesser degree, O'Brien charge. That claim is admittedly true, for Grainger does fail to make St. Christopher a perfect replica of England. But this failure turns out to be a prerequisite for Grainger's critique of metropolitan notions of cultural authority.

[…] without departing from that simplicity of grandeur which fills the imagination; nor dissect the latent qualities of things, without losing its general power of gratifying every mind" (197). By concluding two thousand lines of verse that dwell extensively on nature's "minuter distinctions" with a scene that approximates metropolitan style while simultaneously announcing its clear departure from that style, Grainger challenges the metropolitan view of poetry's nationalizing function and delivers on his opening promise to reinvigorate stale European poetic practices.

At stake in Grainger's willingness to expose the ideological armature of georgic writing is nothing less than the internal coherence of an increasingly expansive, diasporic English nation. Landscapes in *The Sugar-Cane* display a double value that is not so very different from what metropolitan observers might call taste. For John Barrell's eighteenth-century gentleman the ideal landscape is, in effect, the one best suited to abstraction: the landscape uncluttered and unadorned by "accidents" of nature, and free of any details that disrupt the disinterested relation between the observer and the observed ("Prospect" 83). But for Grainger the existence of a West Indian landscape presumes a correspondence between cultural authority and the kind of specificity that only "uncouth" language can provide. If the poem's landscapes make good on the initial promise to infuse commerce with the aesthetic value of "pleasing form[s]," in other words, the level of detail required for them to do so plays a significant role in translating Grainger's initial commercial idiom of "enrichment" into a warrant for transgressing established modes of poetic composition. Grainger thus suggests the West Indian environment, when properly scrutinized, has something to say about cultural authority itself. What it ultimately tells the trained and receptive observer is that variations of climate, geography, and language constitute the basic features by which English subjects come to recognize themselves as members of the same

nation—not by erasing or obscuring their differences, but rather by exercising shared faculties of taste.

Virtuous Exiles and Their Tasteful Taxonomies

It comes as little surprise that Grainger, having chosen to live in the margins of the British empire, would also choose to highlight the question of who can claim the authority of taste by looking to the new social and environmental spaces *The Sugar-Cane* packages for English consumption. Indeed, the poem repeatedly stages scenes in which model English subjects—individuals who preserve quintessential English virtues despite their residence in the harsh and clearly alien climate of the West Indies—act in ways that prove the transatlantic continuity of a community founded on shared principles of taste. There is Montano, for instance, whose presence at the close of Book I suggests the cultivation of major staple crops—tobacco, coffee, and especially sugar—transcends mere economic self-interest and speaks directly to matters of cultural refinement and identity. Then, at the end of Book II, the tragic account of thwarted love between Junio and Theana, two young creoles who die just at the moment of their long-awaited reunion, shows that British community can also be maintained by strict adherence to rules of social conduct and, just as importantly, by following models of elite education designed to establish shared parameters of taste. And Book III concludes with a similar lesson, using its rich "West-India prospect" to imagine cultural affinities that span the Atlantic, as when its "English swains" rally around "Freedom's standard" to "drive invasion from their native shore"—in this case the Caribbean islands—just as eagerly as they would defend England itself (III.595, 597-8).

Each of these examples unwinds a distinct thread in the poem's representation of English identity abroad. Though their individual circumstances differ, Montano, Junio, and

the unnamed Caribbean "sons" display all the characteristics that a century of writing on public virtue and politeness, often borrowing from classical models, had consolidated in the figure of the gentleman: strong fellow-feeling, a keen sense of duty, spiritual piety, personal integrity, public spirit, and good taste. While Montano embodies this form of ideal citizenship in a semi-pastoral agrarian retreat, Junio proves his equal worth as an Englishman by assimilating the aesthetic precepts of polite metropolitan society. Even the "native" "sons" who stand ready to do battle on behalf of "these blissful isles" assert a common English character in their willingness to oppose the French menace that looms periodically (III.577-8).[27] The true Briton living abroad, Grainger seems to suggest in each case, is known by the strength of these admirable qualities. Thus, in the superlative terms favored by the poetry of empire, the West Indies' defenders show themselves to be every bit as "brave" as the ancient Spartans who marched "to glory" (III.589). Junio proves worthy of our admiration and Theana's love by accepting that "duty, reverence, [and] gratitude" require him to foreswear marrying to satisfy his father's wishes, and later by acquiring those "rare talent[s]" of mind that mark him as a gentleman (II.459, 467). And in like fashion, despite his willing participation in the institution of slavery, Montano emerges with an untarnished reputation for being a "friend of man" who distributes "prompt munificence" to those in need and who, on his deathbed, enjoins his son always to be as "pious," "industrious" and "humane" as he has tried to be (I.580, 621, 631).

Taken together, these varied episodes initially seem to free culture from its immediate surroundings, insisting instead that British subjects derive their virtue exclusively from within. As a result, such moments contribute to the poem's general claim that New

[27] Grainger's references to "natives" can be confusing at times. Generally speaking, he uses the term when he wants to identify individuals as English creoles; he finds other words for referring to the islands' remaining indigenous populations.

World settings produce much the same kind of cultural value as English ones, thereby assisting Grainger's efforts to convince his metropolitan readers of the colonies' cultural legitimacy. This makes it tempting to conclude that the recapitulation of model English gentlemen in the persons of West Indian settlers offers visible poof of virtue's survival in the colonies—the ultimate evidence, in other words, of the lasting integrity retained by a core set of distinctly British values in the face of an increasingly scattered population. Yet if we consider that virtue and taste were two sides of the same cultural coin in the eighteenth century, this careful balance between virtue and its negotiation of environmental differences becomes more unstable. Grainger's account of virtue's life in the New World looks less like an attempt to show that England and its colonies are indistinguishable in their ability to reproduce a particular set of cultural values. Instead, it increasingly resembles an alternative way of thinking about one's cultural authority in direct relation to one's place in the world. Far from unyoking environment from authority, as we might initially expect from his insistence that virtue can prevail anywhere, Grainger casts the abstract notion of taste as a product of the unique features of one's immediate surroundings. According to Grainger's formulation, the man of taste proves himself by discovering and appreciating the particular features of his environment. A closer inspection of Montano's representative success shows how this can be the case.

Montano's special status in the poem—an "exile," the victim of unexplained "persecution"—marks him as a figure whose separation "from his natural shore" endows him with all the authority the period associated with the ideal, disinterested observer (I.580-2). In large measure, Montano's exilic status allows his story to illustrate the commensurability of the colonial environment with the metropolitan ideal of citizenship, something Grainger outlines in the symbolic parallels he fashions between ordered,

productive landscapes and georgic poetry's acculturating premises. Despite being initially "Unus'd to labour" and the region's extreme climate, Montano diligently attends to domestic and agricultural economy and treats his "numerous gang of sturdy slaves" humanely, actions that quickly render him both wealthy and respected (I.591, 609). As Montano progresses from "exile" to virtuous planter, Grainger employs the language of civic republicanism to tease out the relationship between successful social reproduction and the rural economy of the land. In his deathbed speech, Montano authorizes claims that the Caribbean's "sons" are, in fact, "Actuate[d]" by "probity, from principle" (I.73). As the "father" to "all the Cane-lands" (I.647), Montano's success in cultivating soil and virtue alike suggests not only that English cultural authority is capable of surviving in the West Indies but also that agriculture—here read simply as culture— facilitates entry into an enlightened community of British subjects by transforming the land aesthetically as well as economically.

For all its insistence that the patrilineal transmission of social and economic authority remains untroubled in New World environments, however, Montano's narrative is most striking for tacitly recognizing the importance of environmental difference. Indeed, Grainger implies that Montano's virtue only truly manifests itself once it has been exposed to such difference. While Montano was the "master" and "protector" of abundant "green hills" in his former life, the altered circumstances of exile force him into the confrontation with "Indian wilds" and "tropical suns" that will eventually allow him to prove his merit and exercise, through responsible plantership, his true gentility (I.586, 583, 587-8). On this point, Grainger's message is clear. While colonial environments are show to be valuable elsewhere in the poem—for instance, the conclusion to Book IV—because they can be made to look like European landscapes, the real transformation of colonial settings into sites of aesthetic admiration can begin only once they are recognized as substantially different from the

environments they eventually will replicate. It is through exile, an enforced distance from one's home, that this difference becomes visible for what it is.

To the extent that Montano provides a convenient figure for the preservation of English culture in the face of—indeed, because of—environmental difference, he is also instrumental in revealing taste's crucial function within the poem's numerous transatlantic exchanges. Grainger's invocation of classical models of virtue makes clear that Montano epitomizes all the most prized gentlemanly values, among them the faculty of taste. If virtue, in its most basic form, is the ability to act rightly in the world, then taste is the ability to judge rightly, primarily by differentiating among the sensory experiences that accumulate as a result of one's actions. Crucially, both virtue and taste in the eighteenth century are modes of idealized disinterest: the former exemplified in the deliberate distance placed between one's private interests and public duties, the latter in the carefully cultivated dissociation of one's personal preferences from universal standards of judgment. Montano never directly employs the language of taste in the poem, but only because he has no immediate need for it; according to the poem's logic, his actions say all that needs to be known about his virtue. In fact, what really matters is not that Montano exercises the faculty of taste as such, but rather that through him Grainger's readers see how the underlying logic of disinterest legitimates distinction as a cultural principle, placing supreme value on the recognition and evaluation of difference. Indeed, *The Sugar-Cane* asks us to observe in Montano's success the degree to which virtue on both sides of the Atlantic can be evaluated by employing environmental distinctions as the measure of the differences that shared standards of taste are imagined to bridge. Consequently, it matters deeply that Montano's virtue persists *because* of his exile, not in spite of it. Earlier in the century, nationalist writers like James Thomson had employed this mode of imagined exile to provide English subjects with an external vantage point from

which to imagine viewing—and longing for—their nation. The combination of distance and emotion provided a powerful means of articulating the virtues of a unified nation through the act of imagining their absence. By literalizing exile in Montano's struggle with colonial adversity, Grainger takes this earlier practice one step further. With the suggestion that true virtue manifests itself only after it has been tested at a distance from the English landscapes where it had been poetically rooted for centuries, Grainger transforms the colonial geography that most represents physical and cultural distance from the imperial center into the cultural terrain most essential to the production of imperial virtue.[28]

How, exactly, does a georgic poem manage to turn agricultural and environmental didacticism into a commentary on virtue's role in constructing transatlantic English communities? Part of the answer comes in the form of Grainger's poetic debt to evolving practices of natural history, traces of which imbue the poem with the promise of an enlightened imperial science. This means that *The Sugar-Cane* uses its West Indian setting as both the medium of English culture's transformation in the New World and an experiment in what recent historians of science identify as "the difficult task of achieving scientific authority" in the process of "mediat[ing] between […] colonial ambitions and metropolitan botanical networks" (Spary 187-8). In Grainger's hands, descriptive passages in both verse and footnotes provide more than a simple environmental record of his allegiance to the georgic injunction to record the empire's agricultural life in unsparing detail. Instead, the interweaving of these passages with other elements of georgic narrative and scientific inquiry signals a more complex process through which environmental conditions become cultural

[28] By indicating inhabitants of the colonies are most in touch with their Englishness, so to speak, Grainger employs the same logic many colonists used to justify their claim that English subjects living in the New World were, in the ways that mattered most, more English than those living in England. For more thorough accounts of this logic, see Egan, "The Colonial English Body as Commodity in Ebenezer Cooke's *The Sot-Weed Factor*" (1999), and Tennenhouse.

signifiers in ways that directly address the persistent colonial problem of what it means to be English in a location so obviously unlike England.

Take, for instance, the poem's opening sequence, where Grainger promises a theme "most momentous to my Country's weal" only to then preface a description of the Caribbean isles by noting their "ungenial […] soil" (I.17, 26). The passage offers as clear an indication as any that the cane islands are a long way from England's agricultural heartland, yet in characteristic fashion Grainger makes up for this reminder of distance by enumerating some of the region's characteristic plant species. He counsels prospective planters to clear the ground of certain species, like the "wild red cedar, the tough locust," the "sweet-smell'd cassia," and the "vast ceiba" while preserving others, such as guava, guaiac, "golden shaddoc," and "rich sabbaca," from the planter's "biting ax" (I.33-45). This practical advice would be unremarkable were it not accompanied by copious annotations explaining in even greater detail the import of these particular plants, commenting on their botanical names and usefulness as "article[s] of commerce" as well as their alimentary and medicinal functions. In this way, a passage that purports to instruct colonial planters in clearing and preparing their fields links those activities to the commercial life of a nation now defined primarily through its contact with these alien species. It also sets the conditions for the poem's later insistence that English subjects living in the West Indies remain part of a fundamentally English community abroad. When Grainger notes that "beautiful," "chaste" "virgins" and "bold, hospitable, free" "sons" populate the islands, he frames this catalogue of colonial virtue in terms of those alien plants' respect for social order: "Each plant" previously described "own[s]" the sugar cane "her lawful lord" (I.71-4, 81). The New World may be a distant and, at times, inhospitable place, Grainger implies, but even the unfamiliarity of its vegetation ultimately promotes the symbolic authority of Britain's empire.

The precise descriptions of the region's plant and animal life do more than simply provide a metaphoric vocabulary for describing the preservation of Englishness abroad, however. Grainger uses such descriptions throughout the poem to comment more precisely on the conditions to which the imperial project subjects the concept of culture more generally. Grainger's familiarity with the botanical and medical science of the eighteenth century is instrumental on this score, for the poem's sustained engagements with the contemporary practices of the natural sciences places its representation of the New World squarely at the center of one of the most enduring Enlightenment projects for re-imagining the world. References to particular sites in the Caribbean follow patterns established by the natural history "surveys" made popular over the previous two centuries, as Grainger introduces St. Christopher and nearby islands in a series of lengthy footnotes that cite important works of New World discovery like José de Acosta's *Historia natural y moral de las Indias* (1590), Hans Sloane's *Voyage to the Islands* (1707), and Thomas Templeman's *A New Survey of the Globe* (1729). Combined with his formula for merging geographic description, commercial speculation, and botanical nomenclature in the poem's notes, such references make clear that Grainger sees himself following the precedent of modern natural history in much the same way he initially casts the poem as a continuation of ancient georgic practices.

Grainger's efforts to incorporate this mode of naturalist investigation into *The Sugar-Cane* suggest that by the second half of the eighteenth century scientific practices like those which inspire the poem's commentary on its environment were understood as part of a symbolic transformation of colonial and imperial authority. Grainger's extensive discussion of the Caribbean's native species in footnotes reveals a significant debt to the work of the Swedish naturalist Linnaeus, whose *Systema Naturae* (1735) initially outlined a taxonomic system that did much to revolutionize and popularize the study of botany. That debt is most

obvious in direct references, as when Grainger mentions in a note on the "delightful blooms [of] the logwood-hedge" (I.503) that "Linneaus's name for this useful tree is *Haemotoxylon*," but it is evident also in the considerable attention he pays to botanical nomenclature throughout the poem. Grainger consistently informs his readers of both common and botanical names: when he speaks of "the mail'd anana" (I.418), for instance, he hastens to add that "This is the pine-apple," whose "botanical name […] is *bromelia*"; when describing common tropical diseases, he notes that "The lurking evil" of the "yaw's infectious bane" can be cured by burning "hard niccars" (IV.265-9), helpfully described in an accompanying footnote explaining "The botanical name of this medicinal shrub is *Guilandina*." In each case, the rhetoric of Linnaean taxonomy looms large as a technique for legitimating both the object of poetic interest and the language used to describe it. Invoking botany and its verbal apparatus at every turn, Grainger presents his own poem as a contribution to the ongoing Linnaean project and simultaneously participates in the symbolic construction of empire as an exercise in linguistic power, in which cultural authority and imperial control coincide in acts of botanical classification.

Tracing the various naming conventions that incorporate the New World's living species into an established vocabulary for isolating and describing biological and geographical difference, Grainger's investment in the language of botanical classification produces an extended conceit that substitutes the mundane activities of West Indian agriculture and commerce for metropolitan acts of critical and aesthetic judgment. In the Linnaean taxonomy, systematic nomenclature formed the basis of a "descriptive system designed to classify all the plants on the earth, known and unknown" (Pratt 24). Organized around small distinctions in the arrangement and structure of leaves, stems, root, and, above all, the sexual organs of flowers, "All the plants on earth […] could be incorporated into" a

"single system" (Pratt 25). In practice, this meant that naturalists could present their observations of unfamiliar places and species according to a single standard of reason. Consequently, Linnaean taxonomy and nomenclature tacitly made a case for the usefulness of new scientific methodologies to colonial knowledge-making projects, whether in early accounts of discovery and exploration in the Americas and the Pacific to later imperial surveys and catalogues designed to identify likely exploitable resources. In its expression of faith in a deep ideological alignment between "the order of nature" and its reproduction, in "condensed" form, within the specialized "method" of its classificatory system, Linnaean botany proposed that "description[s] of plant life" could be read as "important *social* analogies" (Larson 42; Bewell 133).[29]

In this regard, a universal taxonomy like the one Linnaeus and his followers promoted had profound implications that extended far beyond the epistemological justifications of imperial expansion. Most obvious among them, perhaps, was the use of Latin as an international *lingua franca* that offered botanists, regardless of their country of origin, the opportunity to participate in the classification of the world's species.[30] In its ideal form, botany was an endeavor without national boundaries, a truly cosmopolitan discourse that could claim to offer a full description of the whole world precisely because it was restricted—with respect to language—to no single part of it. Equally important was the fact that the Linnaean system was built around a simple comparative principle. Every plant in the

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[29] The important role played by botanists and other early natural historians in the expansion of European empires in the Americas and Asia has been widely studied, and scholarship on the subject is extensive. In addition to Pratt's important work on the subject, see the essays collected by Londa Schiebinger and Claudia Swan, eds., in *Colonial Botany: Science, Commerce, and Politics in the Early Modern World* (2005). See also David Philip Miller and Peter Hans Reill, eds., *Visions of Empire: Voyages, Botany, and Representations of Nature* (1996), and Neil Hegarty, "Unruly Subjects: Sexuality, Science, and Discipline in Eighteenth-Century Pacific Exploration" (1998).

[30] Pratt, 25.

world, Linnaeus and his acolytes maintained, could be classified solely based on an examination of structures visible to the human eye. By matching the number, size, and placement of stamens and pistils in a given flower, for instance, the botanist could precisely place newly discovered species within a highly ordered, taxonomic grid. Ideally, this meant that the largest tree could be located in a universal taxonomic table as easily as the flower of the commonest weed. This mode of indirect comparison, in which species were identified by inspecting them for the presence or absence of certain ideal characteristics, meant that classification could be independent of virtually all knowledge of external factors like location or climate. Because relations among plants were established through the intermediation of this idealized taxonomic table, comparisons across species assumed the existence of a centralized agent, responsible both for the initial classification and subsequent acts of interpretation arising from it. Like the mercantilist economic principles that in theory had once required virtually all trade to pass through the imperial center, and consequently defined locations on the globe according to their relation to that center, rather than each other, the Linnaean system channeled such indirect comparisons through a purportedly universal grid of knowledge.

The analogical, comparative basis of botanical knowledge-making visible in the poem's Linnaean taxonomy bears an uncanny resemblance to the faculty of taste itself. At the time Grainger was composing *The Sugar-Cane*, the metropolitan conception of taste was coming to be increasingly codified as a disinterested system of aesthetic classification and critical judgment. In contemporary works like Lord Kames's *Elements of Criticism* (1762), for instance, taste is presented as a comparative moral and aesthetic matrix, a "common standard" that can be applied "without hesitation […] to the taste of every individual" (724). That standard, Kames asserts, permits us to determine "what actions are right [and] what

wrong, what proper [and] what improper," and it is by this same standard that "we justly condemn every taste that deviates from what is thus ascertained by the common standard" (724). But Kames's notion of taste is by no means democratic in its operation. Instead, despite its "uniformity" and universality, taste excludes "the greater part of mankind" and is applied only by the most "able judges" (725-6), individuals whose elevated social status, secure property, and inherent virtue qualify them to be taste's elite standard-bearers. A similar principle is at work when Grainger leans on the various discourses of natural history to translate the sugar cane into a figure for the production of scientific knowledge, wealth, power, and culture. Like the transformation of the colonial wilderness into "pleasing form[s]" for a distant English audience's enjoyment, the poem's detailed account of New World natural history turns elite disinterest into a new source of cultural authority. Natural history thus becomes an extension of taste—one that is particularly suited to survival in the unfamiliar reaches of Britain's empire.

In this sense, Grainger's insistent return to model subjects like Montano performs several overlapping kinds of cultural labor, all of them directed at propping up the claim that New World settlers possess all the necessary qualifications for assuming a place atop the cultural hierarchies structuring English-speaking society. First, Grainger asserts that England's West Indian colonies, despite obvious dissimilarities of climate and geography, share more with the English homeland than meets they eye, especially when it comes to the social virtues on which liberty, prosperity, and human happiness—all of the things the period's poetry promises to capture in its poetic snapshots of empire—ultimately depend. Second, Grainger insists that the existence of these social virtues is less the result of a gradual *translatio*, the westward course of empire, than the product of the spatial and social distancing that inevitably accompanies "exile." As figurative outcasts in the New World,

even the most worthy and prosperous English settlers and planters become outsiders, cut off from the scenes of metropolitan life. Yet Grainger translates a state of social isolation that would ordinarily seem to be a deficiency into a potent cultural asset by aligning it with the ideal separation between the gentleman and the object of his gaze or critical judgment. Invoking a direct connection between the geographic space that separates the New World from England and the figurative space separating the man of taste from the scene of pleasure he deems worthy of admiration, Grainger effectively carves out a new set of conditions for colonial cultural authority. The language of taste, with its emphasis on the ability to distinguish, discern, and discriminate, requires a distance between oneself and the object of attention. Grainger's rendition of the West Indian environment and the English émigrés who inhabit it provides just this sense of distance, replete with all the markers of difference and distinction once could possibly want. What was once an insurmountable barrier to colonial claims of full British subjecthood is now, in *The Sugar-Cane*, the key to a cohesive transatlantic community.

Toward a Cosmopolitan Empire

Grainger's unusual introduction to Book II, a prose "Advertisement" announcing his connection to the late poet and landscape gardener William Shenstone, brings into clearer focus the link between the community of model subjects like Montano and the poem's efforts to reconsider taste in the manner I have been describing. Having "originally addressed" the poem to Shenstone before his death, Grainger notes, "he would deem it a kind of poetical sacrilege, now, to address it to any other. To his memory, therefore, be it sacred" (111). As Grainger's readers knew well, Shenstone's reputation as a man of learning and taste rested primarily on his famous decades-long reconfiguration of his Worcestershire

estate, Leasowes, according to the prevailing principles of landscape aesthetics. In keeping with his efforts elsewhere in the poem and his prefatory comments, Grainger's decision to memorialize his friend and patron trades on that reputation to argue that the West Indian sugar economy is not only financially but also culturally important to Britain's imperial self-conception. But the dedication also uncovers an important rift in the cultural logic Grainger places at the heart of his representation of the Caribbean. In turning to Shenstone, Grainger seems to reproduce the same fundamental problem he tries to escape elsewhere: the assumption that cultural authority resides exclusively in England and flows outward, from an imperial center, to the peripheral spaces of contact and conquest.

On closer inspection, however, Shenstone's presence in the poem could actually be said to lend Grainger's position greater credibility. As Grainger's readers would have been aware, Shenstone had deliberately removed himself from the urban literary scene in which he had once participated, choosing instead to retreat to the countryside. Indeed, Shenstone's reputation could be said to rest primarily on the fact that, in one sense, he was no longer metropolitan. His close association with taste in keeping with contemporary principles of landscape aesthetics depended on the fact that he was immersed, hermit-like, in a microcosm of his own creating. Thus, Shenstone epitomized the belief—seemingly outrageous from a metropolitan perspective, yet strangely compelling nonetheless—that one could be most at home in the wider world, paradoxically, by retreating from it. Grainger's regard for Shenstone as the most appropriate figure to "lend a patient ear / And weep at woes unknown to Britain's isle" hinges on the fact that Shenstone's cosmopolitan mixture of "pity," "taste and science" exemplify the process by which distance from the metropolitan and imperial center becomes a unique poetic asset (II.23-4). By making Shenstone a cosmopolitan cultural arbiter, Grainger claims by analogy that anyone similarly engaged in

the aesthetic remaking of the world outside the boundaries of the metropolis can tap into this mode of cultural authority. As a result, the kinds of environmental and cultural difference Grainger mobilizes elsewhere in Book II become the basis for a transatlantic community that resists the monodirectional course of metropolitan culture and power. Not only is a community of feeling constituted by the differences that immersion in the New World makes visible, but this affective community is also shown to be rooted in the highly local circumstances that yield this initial awareness of difference.

Yet within the analogical framework Grainger erects around the parallels between discourses of taste and discourses of natural history, this awareness of difference itself raises crucial questions about the poem's conception of culture. If botany and taste manifest the same underlying cultural logic that assures the universal authority of gentlemanly disinterest and distance, as other portions of the poem indicate, why is it that *The Sugar-Cane* so frequently invites its readers to eschew the universal abstractions so typical of the pastoral-georgic mode in favor of the highly specific, concrete details of colonial life? Why does the poem, in other words, focus on quotidian and mundane topics like the appropriate placement of rat poison in the cane fields (II.83-90) or remedies for constipation (IV.516-7) if it truly hopes to establish a universal system of cultural authority under the banner of British empire?

Grainger's innovative use of natural history, designed to provide a highly specific representation of the local surroundings in which he situates the overarching narrative of cultural refinement, clearly does not tell the whole story. Within the richly detailed environment Grainger's botanic references help construct, the metropolitan language of taste also replicates a similar redistribution of cultural authority. At the conclusion of Book III, Grainger inverts the normal equation of transatlantic cultural exchange by situating acts

of critical judgment and aesthetic evaluation in the New World itself. Following a lengthy description of the sugar cane harvest and the refinement of sugar into rum, Grainger expresses a sudden longing to be reunited with the "friends" he "left in Albion's distant isle": "Johnson, Percy, [and] White" (III.508-9). In this "lonely hour," Grainger admits he fears their "mild wisdom" might reveal the inadequacies of his verse, exposing his inability to measure up to the poetic standards of the metropolis. "How would your converse polish my rude lays, / With what new, noble images adorn?" Grainger asks in a neat reversal of his own prefatory formula justifying the poem's claims to "enrich" European verse. At this moment nearly every promise the poem has made seems forgotten, as Grainger appears to embrace unhesitatingly the metropolitan views his absent friends would surely impose on the tropical scenes he has been describing.

But having briefly glimpsed the world through Johnson's eyes, Grainger just as quickly reconsiders his words and arrives at a strikingly different conclusion about the environment he inhabits. Rather than dwell on the absence of his friends, Grainger imagines them travelling to the New World and joining him "beneath that sand-box shade," positioned so that "the delighted eye expatiates wide / O'er the fair landscape" (III.523-4). What follows is the poem's closest approximation of a conventional English prospect-view, replete with "delightful" scenes of industry, the "ardent gladness" of harvest-time, and the "charms" of viewing the distant "horizon's farthest verge," beyond the town where "commerce toil[s] in each crowded street" "embowered in the different shade / Of tamarinds, panspans, and papaws" (III.531, 536, 539-41, 548-51). It is telling that Grainger does not fold this prospect back into a broader claim about the health and prosperity of the English nation, as Thomson had done in *The Seasons*, but instead chooses to use this seemingly conventional landscape to make a very different point about the legitimacy of

colonial life. Questioning those who would leave the colonies for Europe, where "through all her coyest ways, / Her secret mazes, nature is pursued" (III.625-6), Grainger notes that by way of contrast, "here" in the West Indies nature "reigns" with "savage loneliness" in the sublime "peak[s]," "airy cliffs," and "new shrubs" that abound. Grainger merges the sublimity of this vision (he notes how "giddy fancy looks, / Affrighted" [III.628-9]) with the precept of a "philosophy" which holds—in a direct quote from an earlier georgic poem, John Philips's *Cyder* (1708)—that "naught is useless made." The usefulness of this unadulterated colonial nature, Grainger asserts, lies in the kind of person it rewards as well as the type of reward it offers. This ideal person "Examine[s]" "With candid search" "all the properties of things" (III.637-8). For those who follow this path, Grainger maintains, "Immense discoveries soon will crown your toil, / Your time will soon repay" (III.639-40). Thus does the ideal "son" of the West Indies, through immersion in a different kind of environment, become a man of true "philosophy," an individual who, like the Addisonian man of taste in the early eighteenth century, peers deeply into the "properties of things."

In the larger scheme of the poem, this lengthy and rather rambling progression from missed friendship to philosophical contentment develops the important claim that the relationship between the individual and his environment is what makes possible the performance of virtue, taste, and gentility. Indeed, Book III's conclusion is premised on the notion that the colonies can lay equal claim to a universal cultural authority precisely because they represent a uniquely *local* mode of critical judgment. It is for this reason that Grainger must begin his environmental reassessment not by arguing against metropolitan figures like Johnson, who would deny any lasting value in England's colonial acquisitions, but rather by engaging them more meaningfully through the act of imaginatively transporting them to the Caribbean. Guided by the principle that a change in perspective inevitably must yield a new

appraisal of the colonial scene, the virtual tourism Grainger has Johnson embark on encourages metropolitan readers in general to see the colonies from a different point of view. Once Johnson has been relocated, however, his presence is largely forgotten, replaced almost immediately by the very thing his transatlantic movement first draws our attention to—namely, the clear difference, summed up in Grainger's comments on the state of nature "here" versus "there," that exists between Europe and its American colonies. As in the earlier descriptions of Montano's virtuous exile, Book III thus reiterates the influence of environmental specificity. Just as in Book I Grainger expounds his belief that a study of nature uncovers "Deep, moral truths" (III.570) that are universally applicable, here too he restocks his verse with markers of regional specificity: images of "Jew-fish" and "moulting crab[s]," for instance, accompanied by notes on the settlement, government, and marketable commodities of Barbuda and Anguilla (III.608, 610, 613-4n). Yet, as the final discussion of "philosophy" makes clear, the settings where these natural features may be found are not, like the "shrubs" and "herbs" of the same passage, entirely "useless made" (III.633, 637). Instead, by virtue of their unfamiliarity, they provide a motive for that "candid search" into the "properties of things" which Grainger values as the essential purpose of georgic "toil." In other words, the colonial environment perceived through such details is the essential setting—the prerequisite, in fact—for exercising the kind of critical judgment that constitutes the ideal English subject we see modeled in the poetic figures of Johnson, Percy, White, and Shenstone.

Another way to explain Grainger's reworking of critical judgment vis-à-vis the environment would be to say that taste, as a signifier of cultural authority, acquires a local history in *The Sugar-Cane*. The fate of Junio and Theana in Book II confirms this. Other scholars before me have suggested that Junio and Theana's thwarted love crucially reminds

readers that a distinctly English model of patriarchal authority persists in the New World.[31] But Junio's acquiescence to his father's arbitrary decision to prevent the young lovers' "happy union" can also be read as the catalyst for the narrative intersection of the abstract, ostensibly universal rules of elite culture—represented in Junio's classical education—and the locally situated practice of critical judgment. In fact, the frustrated relationship between Junio and Theana appears in the poem primarily as a conflict not between people but between two very different locations. On the one hand lies England, where "old Thames with conscious pride surveys / Green Eton" (II.430-1). On the other hand is Junio's native Caribbean, the "genial isles" that are the site of the lovers' initial courtship in their "early youth," carried out through exchanges of West Indian resources: "the bending coco's" "nectar" and the gift of "sweet ripe sappadillas" (II.429, 436, 438-9, 442). In the account that follows, these two settings converge and diverge repeatedly as Junio and Theana both cross and recross the Atlantic: he leaves the West Indies to be educated in England, only to be followed by Theana; she returns home while Junio pursues his education on a European Grand Tour, to return only once his tyrannical father has died.

That this transatlantic narrative reaches its resolution in a uniquely Caribbean setting—the hurricane-ravaged shores of a tropical island, where Theana meets her death by lightning just as she is reunited with Junio—is crucial to its function in the poem. Throughout the brief episode, Grainger casts Junio as a model for the judicious application of aesthetic standards. For instance, we learn initially that he arrives in England motivated by a desire to discover the "soft abode of every Muse." As a result of his English education, "Each classic beauty soon he made his own; / And soon fam'd Isis saw him woo the Nine,"

[31] For instance, see Egan's claim that the father's decision to prevent their marriage, and Junio's decision to comply, signals "all is right with the world" ("Climate" 200).

though "fair Theana was his only theme" (II.431-4). Later, having embarked on his continental tour, Junio builds upon this education by visiting Greece, "old seat of every Muse," and Italy, "where painting, music's strains, / Where arts, where laws, (philosophy's best child), / With rival beauties his attention claim'd" (II.470-4). Yet Junio, always faithful to Theana's memory, unwaveringly regards her beauty as superior to all else: "To his just-judging, his instructed eye, / The all-perfect Medicean Venus seem'd, / A perfect semblance of his Indian fair" (II.475-7). Junio's "instructed" eye thus validates his earlier youthful view of Theana, and "His taste mature approv'd his infant choice. / In colour, form, expression, and in grace, / She shone all perfect" (II.447-9).

To the extent that this sequence affirms the original merit of Junio's love for Theana by looking to classical European models of beauty and grace, it could be said that Junio stands in for the persistent colonial turn toward England that *The Sugar-Cane* critiques. But the underlying cultural logic revealed by the couple's transatlantic peregrinations invites a somewhat different response. If anything, Junio's aesthetic training in Europe attests to the significance of West Indian, as opposed to European, locations. Directly contradicting accepted norms, that is, Junio's training in the beauties of classical antiquity does not refine his taste so much as confirm that his initial preference for another West Indian "native" was right all along. Indeed, Grainger takes this novel assertion one step further and gives it a specific aesthetic basis. Showing that Junio's clear preference for West Indian beauty complies with the aesthetic precepts of the metropolis, Grainger creatively inverts the hierarchy of taste thought to shape transatlantic cultural relations. Rather than see Theana as a lesser version of the "Medicean Venus," in other words, Junio sees her as the true original and the European statue as the "perfect semblance." And instead of comparing Theana's voice to Italian song, in the conventional manner, Grainger reverses the formula so that

"when she spoke of love, her voice *surpass'd* / The harmonious warblings of Italian song" (II.478-9; emphasis added).

Junio's status as a man of refined taste means that his appraisal of Theana cannot simply be dismissed as the uninformed word of a self-interested colonial promoter, however startling his preference for New World beauty might be. When he speaks, he does so with the backing of the classical gentlemanly ideal. Yet why, if Junio's English education grants him the full authority of the gentleman to proclaim the superiority of the colonies, must the two young lovers die at the moment of their reunion? Why can they not be permitted to marry, cultivate a rich plantation, and, like Montano before them, pass their wealth, status, and virtue on to a future generation of Caribbean planters? The simple answer is that such a resolution would likely have the effect of diminishing the environmental difference between New and Old worlds on which Montano's example relies. By yoking his strong affection for the resources of the New World to the legitimating power of superior taste and education, Junio is effectively indifferent to his surroundings. The only way Grainger can restore the crucial sense of colonial difference in the poem is to trigger Junio's death—a death that serves, not coincidentally, to remind readers of the unmistakable natural distinctions between Europe and the colonies.

Junio and Theana's deaths come with another advantage as well. Grainger concludes the episode, and Book II, with a single couplet suggesting the story has the status of local legend: "One grave contains this hapless, faithful pair; / And still the Cane-isles tell their matchless love" (II.552-3). This final comment tells us that the precise features of the lovers' story ultimately matter less than the structural relation the episode posits between the terrain of a locally imagined New World environment and the transatlantic community modeled on a decentered, universal, cosmopolitan model of authority. After all, the conclusion suggests

that cultural reproduction takes the form of the story "the Cane-isles tell" even after their death. Moreover, that story's connection to a colonial setting reminds us that this account has the status of a distinctly *local* history, a narrative that unfolds against the backdrop of a wide Atlantic world but which acquires concrete significance only within the particular environment that gives meaning to its representation of colonial space. Coming as it does at the exact midpoint of *The Sugar-Cane*, the literal inscription of this story onto the West Indian geography suggests its primary function is to illuminate English culture as a set of practices that must always be understood in relation to the localities where they occur.

This highly localized notion of what constitutes culture and its reproduction gestures toward a concept of the British Atlantic that relies on cosmopolitan principles more than overtly national ones. As the poem implies in its apotheosis of fictional characters like Junio and Montano, and real ones like Shenstone and Johnson, the ideal citizen of the world is an English subject who performs his elite status in evidently local settings. In the imperial contexts *The Sugar-Cane* provides, the end result is the codification of what we might think of as a local theory of universality, in which the cultural authority appropriated by the discourse of taste takes its shape from the fact that it, too, embodies a particular understanding of local history. In this respect, it is tempting to read *The Sugar-Cane* as an embryonic version of the logic that emerged in Britain's North American colonies during the 1760s and 1770s in the Revolutionary-era claim that English colonists were the true inheritors of a legacy of virtuous liberty—claims scholars of early American literature sometimes make of slightly later writers like Philip Freneau, Timothy Dwight, Joel Barlow, John Trumbull, and Hugh Henry Brackenridge. But Grainger maintains his cultural and aesthetic allegiance to an English metropolis more than any of these later writers. *The Sugar-Cane* ends by insisting that transatlantic relations remain structured in much the same way they always had been,

meaning that Grainger's reformulation of taste as a colonial attribute derives its radical character more from its efforts to reframe a preexisting set of cultural assumptions than any obviously revolutionary sentiment. Indeed, in light of the poem's conclusions about the status of locality, the ultimate irony of Boswell's "little laughable incident" becomes clear: it, too, is a local history not so very different in its framing and its function from the narrative of Junio and Theana, or for that matter, *The Sugar-Cane* as a whole. As a metropolitan myth of origins, a story designed both to show the superiority of the metropolitan community of taste and to retrospectively imagine how such a community came into being, Boswell's story reenacts in the imperial center the same theory of cultural identity Grainger had just worked out at the empire's edge.

CHAPTER THREE

"An Endless Field of Commerce": Slavery, Locality, and the Beauties of Trade in Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*

In the two preceding chapters, I examined how writers whose work has often been claimed as part of an early American tradition of literary "creolization" employed the vocabularies of taste and trade to position themselves in relation to powerful metropolitan discourses that governed conceptions of cultural authority throughout the eighteenth century.[1] As I have argued, commercial rhetoric's intersection with the concept of taste yielded a capacious lexicon in which writers whose work was published and circulated throughout the British Atlantic world framed their sometimes unorthodox claims to an imperial British identity. Writing within the structures of recognizable verse genres and traditions, poets like Richard Lewis and James Grainger followed metropolitan models of polite expression in order to shed new light on the problems attending life in the Americas—something they accomplished by fabricating a new aesthetics of place and location designed to draw attention away from the transatlantic disparities of climate, geography, and culture modern scholars so often reference in explaining the supposedly divergent paths of "American" and "British" literature.[2] In place of any such obvious signs

[1] Recent works that examine British American culture in terms of creolization include Ralph Bauer's *The Cultural Geography of Colonial American Literatures: Empire, Travel, and Modernity* (2003), Sean Goudie's *Creole America: The West Indies and the Formation of Literature and Culture in the New Republic* (2006), and Keith Sandiford's *The Cultural Politics of Sugar: Caribbean slavery and Narratives of Colonialism* (2000).

[2] For instance, see Robert Lawson-Peebles, *Landscape and Written Expression in Revolutionary America: The World Turned Upside Down* (1988), for the argument that New World terrain was ultimately incommensurable with

of difference, these writers imaginatively situated locality at the center of a cosmopolitan world system they claimed was best viewed from their positions at the edges of Great Britain's Atlantic empire. Consequently, the very act of imagining local communities that were distinct from—yet nonetheless integral to—a British imperial culture heralded a new phase in the history of transatlantic relations, one in which provinciality could be regarded less as a symptom of deep cultural deficiencies than a rhetorical performance designed to legitimate other modes of cosmopolitan authority.

In this chapter I turn my attention to a somewhat different facet of the same general problem: namely, how writers who were *objects*, quite literally, of the trade lauded by imperial poetry succeeded in positioning themselves as authoritative observers and critics of the powerful mythopoetics of local imagination and commercial empire. I am referring, specifically, to the texts that collectively make up the literary corpus of the early Black Atlantic, a body of writing that significantly broadens the political and cultural horizons of those peculiar discursive features I have been arguing contributed directly to the eighteenth-century invention of the local.[3] By confronting the effects of the perverse forms of commerce that the Philadelphia Quaker and antislavery pioneer Anthony Benezet regarded as inseparable from the Atlantic slave trade's "iniquitous traffic" (ii), Black Atlantic authors invited their readers to reexamine the precise nature of the relationships that bound notions

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generic forms developed in England to represent the social experience of place. While adopting a very different approach to the cultural history of British America in *American Curiosity: Cultures of Natural History in the Colonial British Atlantic World* (2006), Susan Scott Parrish similarly begins with the notion that early modern writers on both sides of the Atlantic tended to emphasize, rather than downplay, very real geographic and climatic differences between Europe and the Americas. See also Martin Bruckner, *The Geographic Revolution in Early America: Maps, Literacy, and National Identity* (2006); Bruckner argues new forms of geographic literacy that emerged among British Americans over the course of the eighteenth century formed the basis for recognizing points of divergence among various English-speaking communities.

[3] The term "Black Atlantic" is Paul Gilroy's, though it has gained widespread currency in a variety of sociological, historical, and literary contexts; see *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* (1993).

of local community to contemporary ideas about trade and "civilization." Writing of their progress from a "benighted" existence in a "*Pagan* land" to a state of spiritual "redemption," as Phillis Wheatley put it in the poem "On being brought from AFRICA to AMERICA" (1773), early Black Atlantic figures openly ironized the terms of both transatlantic commerce and cultural refinement.[4] In this way, they exposed what Philip Gould has described as the "crucial ambiguity of the very meaning of free trade […] as both an economic and cultural activity," testing "the boundary between virtuous and vicious commerce" by practicing an "intentional confusion of the categories of civilization and savagery" (*Traffic* 134, 21, 49). In so doing, they not only engaged with commercial poetics as a means of illuminating the shortcomings of global trade but also reinscribed their critique within the distinctive discourse of locality.

Consider, for instance, the terms in which Olaudah Equiano chooses to cast the final antislavery appeal of *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African* (1789). Briefly abandoning the spiritual vocabulary which characterizes much of the text's second half, Equiano outlines his proposal to end "the inhuman traffic of slavery" by appealing, first, to the "benevolence and solid merit" of Britain's legislators, and then, more tellingly, to their commercial interests (192). "It is trading upon safe grounds," he writes of his plan to establish "a system of commerce […] in Africa": "the [African] demand for manufactures will most rapidly augment, as the native inhabitants will sensibly adopt the British fashions, manners, customs, &c. In proportion to the civilization, so will be the consumption of British manufactures" (193). In its vision of a future when Africans, now

[4] In Philip Gould's reading of the poem, the implicit contrast between "the claims of Christian 'refinement'" and "the slave economy's distillation of rum" allows Wheatley to show how "cultural refinement ideologically connects commerce and Christianity" (*Traffic* 66). I would add only that with its prominent titular geography and symbolic mining of the passive, linguistically deferred transatlantic movement ("on being brought") between "Africa" and "America," the poem plays in similar ways with preexisting connections between one's cultural status and one's location in the period's imperio-commercial poetry.

freed from threats of bondage, prove their civilized status by becoming eager consumers of British goods, this yoking of civilization and trade is a conventional expression of eighteenth-century commercial ideologies. Then the passage takes a subtle, yet unmistakable, turn. Finding new markets for British commodities is not sufficient in itself, it would seem, and so Equiano adds to it one further promise: "Population, the bowels and surface of Africa, abound in valuable and useful returns; the hidden treasures of centuries will be brought to light and into circulation. Industry, enterprise, and mining will have their full scope […]. In a word, it lays open an endless field of commerce to the British manufacturers and merchant adventurer" (194). In this way, Equiano quietly introduces a sense of locatedness into his claims of trade's civilizing power, one that casts the discovery and circulation of commodities as a meeting point for discrete places. It is only through a new mode of global circulation, Equiano notes, that the post-slavery commercial realignment of the Atlantic world will equitably adjudicate the differences between Africa and Great Britain: "Cotton and indigo grow spontaneously in most parts of Africa; a consideration of this is of no small consequence to the manufacturing towns of Great Britain. It opens a most immense, glorious, and happy prospect—the clothing, &c., of a continent ten thousand miles in circumference, and immensely rich in productions of every denomination in return for manufactures" (195).

With its references to "endless field[s]" and "happy prospect[s]," Equiano's conclusion recasts antislavery politics in the coded language of the commercial landscape.[5] As we have already seen, that idiom had been instrumental in the gradual evolution of locality as a privileged mode of national, imperial, and cosmopolitan imagination; it was also,

[5] See Chapter 1 for my discussion of commercial landscapes and the principles of mercantile aesthetics they helped disseminate.

as Michael Wiley suggests, tied to the eighteenth-century's shifting "geographical and topographical" terminologies and, hence, to the "cultural boundaries" and "subjectivities" they labored to produce (165, 166).[6] The irruption of that language here, at the end of a narrative devoted partly to documenting the vast network of commercial paths connecting the scattered cities and ports of the Atlantic rim, warrants particular attention. For one thing, it suggests that antislavery writing was itself an important site for negotiating the relationship between the meaning of local community and the visible agents of global trade—the people and the commodities whose circulation linked different, distant sites. For another, it draws out in novel ways the aesthetic dimensions of that relationship, demonstrating how the fictions of empire, inextricably bound to Enlightenment categories like liberty, commerce, manners, and taste, were often presented in ways that allowed these abstract concepts to mask the localized conditions that called their universalist assumptions into question.

It is in the context of this peculiar antislavery aesthetic, I believe, that the concept of locality truly comes into its own as a powerful mode of cultural critique during the final decades of the eighteenth century. For one thing, the conditions of slavery—and the arguments against it—offered fertile ground for the period's antislavery writers to examine the internal contradictions involved in the notion of a benevolent, universal system of commerce. Moreover, as Equiano's concluding appeal shows, they also permitted the kind of commercial, linguistic, and aesthetic substitutions that could imaginatively replace confined bodies and "instruments of torture" with "immense" and "endless" prospect views. It is just this sense of equivalence and interchangeability that the rhetoric of local communities,

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[6] Wiley's comments appear in the context of Equiano's peculiar emphasis on the word "bowels" in the same passage from *The Interesting Narrative* I have just cited, and while his specific aim is to explore how "Equiano's model of corporeal consumption," found throughout the text in references to eating and being eaten, "is consistent with the logic of an emerging consumer society" (166), the idea is nonetheless a useful reminder of the linguistic interconnectedness of geography and culture during the eighteenth century.

grounded as one might expect in the specific experiences of particular places and peoples, would seem to make impossible. And yet, as I have argued previously, these rhetorical features were instrumental in making locality recognizable precisely because the vocabulary of exchange and equivalence proved so successful at identifying, organizing, and classifying differences among places that found themselves connected through commerce. Commercial exchange provided both the material context and the intellectual incentive to consider seriously the cultural work of such comparative differentiation. When antislavery writers probed supposedly universal commercial categories, then, they also exposed the local orientation of the rhetoric they wielded—and unlike the imperial poets of an earlier generation, for whom locality primarily signaled the possibility of speaking in the universal language of metropolitan culture despite their separation from it, antislavery advocates typically had more at stake than admission to the privileged sphere of polite society. Reduced to mere commodities, the slaves and free blacks of the Atlantic world sought out modes of local aesthetics in order to turn the language of commercial cosmopolitanism back upon itself.

In this chapter, I focus on Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* because it shows how the interplay of commercial, geographic, and aesthetic categories, through a sometimes circuitous process of substitution and implication, transformed an already established discourse of locality into a critique of the commercial ideologies from which it derived. In Equiano's writing, the local is a fluid category, sometimes encompassing all of Western Africa and at other times designating a single Caribbean island, a single incident, or even a fleeting interior state of mind. Even as it undergoes continual transformation within the narrative, though, the local remains capable of invoking many of the same cosmopolitan principles that imagined trade to be an essential ingredient of human politeness and cultural

refinement. Like many of his contemporaries, Equiano contests but also embraces the period's obsessive contemplation of global trade as a cultural phenomenon. In rendering the glaring inconsistencies between moral and immoral trade as features of an Atlantic cultural geography, however, Equiano also exposes foundational assumptions about whose voice can speak with the authority ordinarily reserved for elite metropolitan subjects. The deep mistrust *The Interesting Narrative* manifests for the rhetorical tradition that irrupted, for instance, in James Thomson's anxious assertion that "Britons never will be slaves" thus resurfaces, in slightly different form, in the collective gaze Equiano invites his readers to turn on the concept of the local as a repository of political and aesthetic meaning. In this regard, the text directly involves antislavery writing in the changing cultural functions of locality, just as it makes the local a crucial term in understanding how transatlantic cultural communities could be defined in relation to categories of commercial experience.

Reading Equiano's narrative according to its creative deformation of locality's involvement in the period's larger arguments about culture, history, and identity is especially important given the tendency to assume that the Black Atlantic's oft-remarked hybrid, diasporic dimensions were antithetical to more local forms of community. For some time it has been relatively common to argue that early Black Atlantic writing is best understood according to its recovery of "the way people of color in early America recognized their common experiences and condition and, consequently, reclaimed racial categories as a basis for collective identification" (Brooks, "Race" 315). Comments like this one highlight the presence of "shared thought worlds," to employ Joanna Brooks's phrase, emphasizing how such communities transcend, or at the very least obscure, a sense of local particularity.[7] In

[7] Brooks's views appear as part of a roundtable discussion published in *Early American Literature* in 2006, on the concept of race in early American literary and cultural studies. For the other essay contributions, see Gould,

privileging questions designed to reveal how race—rather than, say, place— "assumes new value as a site of common identification" (Brooks, *Lazarus* 14), such efforts to uncover evidence of cohesive racial communities in the past often come at the expense of understanding more thoroughly how the very notion of community in the late eighteenth century was constructed at the nexus of local and global modes of literary imagination. Paul Gilroy's influential description of the Black Atlantic as a "counterculture of modernity" similarly turns away from the idea of locality by stressing the "desire to transcend both the structures of the nation state and the constraints of ethnicity" (18).[8] Scholars who follow Gilroy's lead in observing the transnational phenomenon of the "Black Atlantic" frequently ignore locality's significance to nearly the same degree, choosing to privilege instead the chronotopes of movement and dispersal they view as particularly meaningful signs of Atlantic culture: the ships, roads, and other paths by which people and commodities circulated beyond their initial points of origin. There is, of course, a deep irony to scholarship that purports to view race as "a historically contingent […] construction" yet draws so frequently on metaphors of place and geography without fully recognizing how both that language and the sense of community it authorized were imbricated in a broader commercial redefinition of locality's political, moral, and aesthetic functions.[9]

"What We Mean When We Say 'Race'," and David Kazanjian, "'When They Come Here They Feel So Free': Race and Early American Studies."

[8] In fairness, it is worth noting that Gilroy is partly motivated by the hope of liberating discussions of race and cultural community from the nationalizing tendencies implied even in so common a term as "African American." Brooks would likely object to my characterization of Gilroy's argument; in *American Lazarus: Religion and the Rise of African-American and Native American Literature* (2003), she takes issue with scholars who "conflate Gilroy's formulation of the black Atlantic as a new geographical 'unit of analysis' with the 'decentering of ethnic identity' propounded by Homi Bhabha" (16).

[9] Brooks's spatially and geographically inflected critical vocabulary is hard to miss. In her own words, her central argument about race and community "charts an itinerant path" and "travel[s] from […] the colonies' learned centers" to the "crossroads and margins," all of which function as "scattered sites" in a "transatlantic web of connection" (*Lazarus* 19). These phrases echo Gilroy's own emphasis on the mobility of diasporic subjects; like Gilroy's, they also tend to elide these literal and figurative movements with the spaces traversed,

Brought to bear on *The Interesting Narrative*, this emphasis on "routes" rather than "roots," to borrow Gilroy's formulation, belies the ongoing engagement between the discourses of local imagination and the thematically rich accounts of mobility that black authors employed in their efforts to theorize their position in the Anglophone Atlantic world. Equiano's account proves to be a particularly advantageous site for examining the intersection of local and commercial discourses within the period's fraught debates about cultural authority in provincial and metropolitan settings. His efforts to cast himself as a figure caught between these two seemingly opposed communities (a position initially born out of his status as a slave and later, following his manumission, reinforced by his continual back-and-forth movement across the Atlantic) play out against the background of a complex conceptual geography where numerous distinct sites positioned around the Atlantic rim are assigned varying degrees of moral, spiritual, cultural, and commercial significance. Plotting the terrors of slavery and the rewards of economic and spiritual redemption onto this carefully constructed narrative terrain, Equiano recasts the local as a rhetorical space where marginal subjects can turn a critical eye on the discourses of civilization, cultural refinement, and taste they employ to define their own participation in a transatlantic Anglophone community.

The Universal History of Particular Places

How can an "unlettered African" and "private and obscure individual" hope to persuade his readers not just of the accuracy of his words but also the rightness of the abolitionist cause they serve? In many respects, this is the fundamental question Equiano

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rather than bring to the fore the specific places—and ways of talking about those places—thus brought into contact.

poses at the beginning of *The Interesting Narrative*, and, as scholars have noted, its implications form the lattice on which much of the subsequent account is subtly trained. "Equiano's *doubling* of the author's name on his title page," Laura Doyle suggests, is an example of "pointed signifying on the British tradition" (191); as Tanya Caldwell notes, its deliberate echo of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) "underscores the many parallels" that exist between the autobiography and the novel (270). Resonating with such traditions and texts, Equiano's address "To the Lords spiritual and temporal" draws attention to the slipperiness of his position as narrator, literary character, and humble supplicant. Calling the present work "wholly devoid of literary merit" even as he aligns the "genuine narrative" with his antislavery goal of becoming "an instrument towards the relief of" his "suffering countrymen," (30), Equiano initially treads the fine line between representative and exceptional status. Indeed, that fluid boundary is a central part of the double signature he appends to the dedication, first by casting himself as but one of many among his "unfortunate countrymen" and then, a few lines later, by underscoring the uniqueness of his situation: "I trust that *such a man*, pleading *such a cause*, will be acquitted of boldness and presumption" (30). In this way, Equiano signals his intention of making representativeness itself one of the text's major concerns, something that emerges still more concretely in the first chapter when, describing his West African childhood, he asserts matter-of-factly that "the history of what passes in one family or village may serve as a specimen of the whole nation" (34).

For modern readers of various critical stripes, the emphasis Equiano places on his own status and representative authority makes *The Interesting Narrative* a quintessential account of the complicated process through which people of color constructed hybrid identities in the eighteenth century Atlantic world. Woven into the text as a series of

comments on the condition of being "almost an Englishman," as he puts it in one instance (70), the uncertainty of Equiano's position vis-à-vis his metropolitan readership, on one hand, and the community of his "countrymen," on the other, seems to predict what Homi Bhabha has called "the ambivalent world of the 'not quite/not white'" (92). This is precisely how many recent scholars have interpreted the narrative shifts thematized in the text. Terry Bozeman, for instance, argues that Equiano "explores the notion of a hybrid existence" in which he occupies the position of "neither the African nor the Briton," caught instead "between an identity to which he can never fully return and one in which he will never be allowed to fully partake" (61). Even scholars whose work falls largely outside the framework of postcolonial theory have insisted on the "in-between" nature of Equiano's rhetorical self-fashioning. According to Vincent Carretta, the potent "combination of personal experience, conflated sources, [and] recovered memory" that makes up *The Interesting Narrative* is integral to Equiano's continuing efforts "to forge a personal and national identity other than the one imposed on him" (7). Cathy Davidson suggests the narrative's "hybrid form […] replicates the profound uncertainty of the narrator" and partakes of the pronounced "indeterminacy" that was "constitutive of the slave narrative as a genre" (19, 26). Whatever their differences, such readings share a belief that the "power" of Equiano's account lies primarily in its blending of generic and rhetorical boundaries, whether between "historical fiction" and "straightforward autobiography" (Carretta 16, 8) or the "multiple locations of identity" he inhabits when describing childhood in Africa from the perspective of an adult in England (Bozeman 63).

Yet Equiano's opening description of West Africa, in particular, offers more than an "emotional appeal," in Carretta's words, to European readers conditioned to respond to its peculiar blend of personal experience and antislavery polemic. It also begins to suggest how

the traversal of the line separating the modern individual's uniqueness from his participation in larger communities and collectives belongs to the same discursive domain as the interplay of particularity and universality which crops up in so many of the period's debates about cultural authority, history, and aesthetics. In beginning with a chapter describing his (possibly fictional) childhood in West Africa, Equiano makes this larger problematic a question of geography.[10] Chapter 1 of *The Interesting Narrative* begins with what is identified, in its prefatory argument, as an "account of his country, and their manners and customs" (33), but the description that follows provides something more than the conventional "character" this phrasing implies.[11] Instead, details of life in the "charming, fruitful vale, named Essaka" provide Equiano with both the means to establish his own authorial credibility and the opportunity to deploy a discourse that places him halfway between the position of the exemplary individual and the man whose life "does not appear sufficiently interesting to engage general attention" (34, 33).

On its surface, that discourse is geographic and ethnographic, consisting largely of measurements and directions: "That part of Africa, known by the name of Guinea, to which the trade in slaves is carried on, extends along the coast above 3400 miles, from Senegal to

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[10] Vincent Carretta has famously—and controversially—argued for the possibility that Equiano was not, in fact, born in Africa, but rather on a plantation in South Carolina; for a recent version of this claim, see *Equiano the African: Biography of a Self-Made Man* (2005). While I find Carretta's evidence compelling (though not conclusive) the accuracy of the claim is largely unimportant to my argument here. When it comes to Equiano's relationship to eighteenth-century concepts of locality, what matters is his adaptation and modification of an existing discursive strategy for asserting textual authority and cultural status. In this sense, whether or not Equiano was actually born in Africa is ultimately eclipsed by how he describes Africa as his point of origin using a carefully constructed rhetoric of locality.

[11] Such "character" sketches appear frequently throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, prefacing everything from narratives of exploration and discovery to travelogues, natural histories, political and economic treatises, autobiographical accounts, colonial promotional tracts, and even novels. For an early critical account of the significance of this kind of national "character" in the seventeenth century, see Ted-Larry Pebworth, "The 'Character' of George Alsop's Mary-Land" (1976). Though this sense of the term had begun to wane by the late eighteenth century, a quick survey of titles published in England and the United States in the decade before *The Interesting Narrative* shows at least half a dozen instances of this older usage—including texts by Anthony Benezet, a figure whose writing significantly influenced Equiano's own.

Angola, and includes a variety of kingdoms" (34). But closer inspection suggests this seemingly straightforward geography, designed in part to underscore the vast cultural distances Equiano will later cross in his gradual movement toward emancipation and spiritual redemption, sets up distinctions between "savage" Africa and "refined" Europe—as his readers might think of them—in order to interrogate the cultural fictions of which they are a part. Using this initial overview of West African geography as his starting point, Equiano notes the "remote" nature of the provincial setting he inhabits as a child and turns the "considerable" "distance of this province from the capital of Benin and the sea coast" into a comment on the representational strategies implicit in his description. "The manners and government of a people who have little commerce with other countries are generally very simple," he writes, before making the claim, noted already, that "one family or village may serve as the specimen of the whole nation" (34). According to the logic of Equiano's formulation, individual African villages have the capacity to act as representatives of "the whole nation" precisely because of the "simpl[icity]" that arises from their lack of contact with "other countries," a condition implicitly owing both to geographic distance and the resulting lack, in the common eighteenth-century phrasing, of "social commerce" (34).

With its casual suggestion that the family's ability to stand in for a larger community or "nation" is itself part of broader questions about cultural authority, this emphasis on the relationship between the individual "specimen" and the "history" it exemplifies provides an explicit link between the text's politics of identity and the conventions of eighteenth-century historiography. Emerging out of Scottish Enlightenment thinking on the relation between "fine arts" and "mechanical arts," trade and civility, and moral virtue and sensory experience, the notion that human societies gradually moved, in teleological fashion, toward an ever more perfect state of refinement and civilization gained considerable traction in the second

half of the eighteenth century. In the political philosophy of David Hume, and especially in the speculative developmental history of human societies offered by Henry Home, Lord Kames, humanity's social, economic, and cultural progress was divided into discrete historical epochs through which all nations were believed to pass. In his four-volume *Sketches of the History of Man* (1774), a work widely reprinted on both sides of the Atlantic well into the nineteenth century, Kames asserted that humans' "progress from the savage state to its highest civilization and improvement" (I.1) occurs across four basic stages. All human societies began, Kames believed, in an initial period of hunting and gathering, followed by a pastoral phase, an agricultural phase, and, finally, a commercial period supported by trade and the circulation of currency according to basic principles of supply and demand, lack and necessity.

Kames's theory was widely shared throughout the Anglophone world in the final quarter of the century. Writing in the *American Museum* in 1788, for instance, an anonymous contributor identified only as "C" takes as established fact the basic developmental model Kames hypothesized:

> Human society may be distinguished into four general periods […]. The first was that, in which they lived by hunting and fishing […]. The second period of society was that, in which men subsisted by their flocks and herds […]. The third period of society was that wherein agriculture flourished […]. The fourth period of society is that of commerce. (319-320)

While "C" employs his understanding of human history to argue, in neo-Mandevillean fashion, that "an increased number of […] wants" is directly responsible for "the principal excellence of civilized and refined society above that which is rude and barbarous" (319), his acceptance of stage history suggests its importance as an epistemological and moral framework for interpreting the eighteenth-century present in terms of an imagined universal past. Indeed, as a theory of social, economic, and cultural development bound to certain

moral principles, stage history provides what appears to be a rational, objective, disinterested, and, above all, universal model for making cross-cultural, transnational comparisons. Broadly applied in this sense, it is to human history what Linnaean taxonomy was in the realm of eighteenth-century natural history: a comparative matrix into which different individual specimens might be placed and then scrutinized according to a limited set of predefined characteristics.

It is within this framework that Equiano positions Africa at the beginning of *The Interesting Narrative* as a particular place that has, in a manner of speaking, a universal history. Indirectly invoking a vocabulary his European readers already found eminently meaningful, steeped as they were in this view of history and contemporary discourses of civic republicanism, Equiano goes out of his way to render implicit moral judgments on the subjects of his description. Thus, local "elders or chiefs" become "judges and senators," "the honor of the marriage bed" is "sacred," and African society is in every way uncorrupted by either avarice or over-refinement, the twin social vices European commentators always eyed warily in their own self-observation. As the opening chapter unfolds, Equiano proceeds to enumerate a veritable catalogue of African virtues: "our manners are simple, our luxuries are few"; "Our manner of living is entirely plain"; "our cleanliness on all occasions is extreme"; "the natives […] are totally unacquainted with strong or spirituous liquors"; "we study convenience rather than ornament"; "we are unacquainted with idleness"; "cheerfulness and affability are two of the leading characteristics of our nation" (35-39). Even this abbreviated list shows that Equiano's adoption of a preexisting ethnographic and historical discourse—a way of identifying particularly meaningful cultural and historical signifiers, one might say—offers a calculated advantage in its contribution to his efforts to portray himself as a credible and authoritative source. Subsuming Africa into an established narrative of cultural

development through this coded language the text's pattern of identifying "customs and manners" that rank high on the developmental scale offered by Kames and his followers is itself a crucial part of Equiano's strategy for performing cultural authority.

It is telling, then, that much of the chapter lifts material more or less directly from Anthony Benezet's *Some Historical Account of Guinea* (1771), a fact that Equiano himself openly acknowledges.[12] Envisioned as another salvo in the continuing battle against African slavery, Benezet's *Historical Account* yokes antislavery politics to an established eighteenth-century tradition of commercial writing that served as the medium for political and ethical debates of all sorts. From the beginning, Benezet's text reveals its own origins in the commercial ethnography of early European accounts of discovery and exploration in Africa, the Americas, and the South Pacific. Benezet begins, for instance, by noting that "there is scarce a country in the whole world, that is better calculated to affording the necessary comforts of life to its inhabitants […] than Guinea," a sweeping claim he bolsters by offering example after example of West Africa's natural bounty. The land "abounds with grain and fruits, cattle, poultry, &c.," he notes in one typical passage, before observing, a few pages later, that the entire region is "pleasant and fruitful; provisions of all kinds being plenty and exceeding cheap" (5, 9). Such descriptions, already familiar to European readers from two centuries of textual encounters with English exploration in Africa and the Americas, are notable for equating the location described with the particular commodities it supplies in such abundance. Indeed, like other descriptions of Africa from the same period, Benezet's *Historical Account* reprises the basic terms of the Addisonian commercial equation that

[12] Equiano's two brief footnotes citing Benezet give the impression—without stating directly—that the latter's role is more limited than it actually is. In fact, Benezet's influence is visible throughout nearly all of Chapter 1, beginning with the opening sentence of the second paragraph. Of course, Benezet was himself a compiler of other sources; the *Historical Account of Guinea* is essentially a patchwork of extended passages from other published reports and narratives on West Africa.

dominated the first half of the eighteenth century. Under its logic, specific places and the commodities they produce are so closely bound to one another that, as one sees in Benezet's metonymic formulation, "the several divisions" of West Africa have become "known" to Europeans "by the name of *the Grain Coast*; *the Ivory Coast*; *the Gold Coast*; *and the Slave Coast*" (7). Within the discursive confines of the commercial imagination, it would seem, geography and commodity truly are one and the same.

Equiano's allegiance to Benezet's *Historical Account* strongly implies that *The Interesting Narrative* partakes of a similar mode of imaginative commercial geography. For example, take one of Equiano's seemingly matter-of-fact statements about the produce of this "uncommonly rich and fruitful" land: "We have plenty of Indian corn, and vast quantities of cotton and tobacco. Our pineapples grow without culture […]. We also have spices of different kinds, and honey in abundance. All our industry is exerted to improve these blessings of nature. Agriculture is our chief employment" (39). Taken alongside Equiano's pronouncements that West Africa is a "simple" place, with "little commerce with other countries," such claims at first appear to play directly into European expectations, casting Africa both as ideal Edenic garden and primitive wasteland (36, 34). The word "culture" alone does double duty, simultaneously conjuring up an idyllic, prehistoric, and virtuous past—reinforced by the deliberate echo, in the next sentence, of the Biblical "land flowing with milk and honey" (*Exodus* 3:8)—and implying, in a more modern sense of the word, that as a land "without culture" Africa occupies a retrograde position along the historical continuum Hume, Kames, and others had previously defined. Clearly, these sorts of verbal slippages in the text's early passages are designed in part to reflect the fluidity inherent within European discourses of civilization and refinement. Still more striking than this mildly ironic doubling of "culture" is this language's overt flirtation with deep-seated British fantasies of

commercial and imperial dominion. Here and elsewhere in the opening section of *The Interesting Narrative,* Equiano's words are, in effect, a compendium of distilled knowledge of—and desire for—new sources of material wealth.

Once again, Equiano's proximity to Benezet is significant. "[T]here is scarce a country in the whole world, that is better calculated for affording the necessary comforts of life to its inhabitants, with less solicitude and toil," writes Benezet early in the *Historical Account* before citing other texts that confirm Africa's status as "a perfect image of pure nature," a "pleasant spot" (2, 15). Quoting Michel Adanson, the Scottish-French author of *Histoire Naturelle du Senegal* (1757), Benezet continues:

> [A]n agreeable solitude, bounded on every side by charming landscapes; the rural situation of cottages in the midst of trees; the ease and indolence of the *Negroes*, reclined under the shade of their spreading foliage; the simplicity of their dress and manners; the whole revived in my mind the idea of our first parents, and I seemed to contemplate the world in its primitive state. (15-16)

The Interesting Narrative resonates strongly in its opening chapter with Biblically and poetically authorized language whose function is to imply more or less directly that Africa occupies a moment in its historical and cultural development that English poets working in the pastoral tradition had celebrated for two hundred years. These verbal echoes are important for other reasons as well. By cloaking tacit representations of Africa's potential role in a new world of British trade and commodity goods beneath the accepted—and highly potent—language of English pastoralism, Equiano introduces a commercial basis for local identification even as he defers his primary discussion of it.

Equiano's early enumeration of commodities that appeal to the English commercial imagination encapsulates a specific mode of thinking about the relationships among discrete places in the world. Following the basic commercial logic of lack and necessity, the opening portion of *The Interesting Narrative* articulates a fairly conventional vision in which Africa,

because of its "abundance" of desirable goods, establishes its difference from European centers of trade that lack them. Although Equiano does not explicitly treat Africa as a source of marketable commodities until the narrative's final pages, the initial catalogue of marketable commodities associated with the physical geography and perceived pastoral landscapes of a particular part of the world serves rhetorically to localize Africa. That this rhetorical strategy runs counter to the tendencies of Enlightenment historiography in which *The Interesting Narrative* is also firmly rooted is partly the point. For Kames and his many followers the history of any given human society could be abstracted into nearly universal terms; indeed, when writing of Africa, or the South Pacific, or other areas removed from direct European control, these thinkers typically subsumed particularities of environment, geography, social customs, and cultural practices to a single universal principle: the steady passage of time.[13] Yet while appealing to English readers on the general—if unspoken—grounds that Africa represents a kind of temporal mirror in which they may catch a glimpse of their own developmental past, the opening pages of *The Interesting Narrative* also reinscribe Africa within the more highly particularized commercial geography that was feeding the "incipient planetary consciousness" Andy Martin identifies in the "network of dangerous liaisons, real and imagined," between Western European nations and other parts of the world. Representations of Anglo-African interaction—as Equiano, Benezet, and others conceive of it—share in the "intimation that these two vast and indeterminate entities were obscurely mimetic, remote yet intimate, inverted images of one another" (143).[14]

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[13] As John Brewer has suggested, the fundamental question that shaped so much of England's engagement with the wider world during the eighteenth century was not "Where is this place?" but rather "What *time* is this place?"

[14] In "Surfing the Revolution: The Fatal Impact of the Pacific on Europe" (2008), the introductory essay in a special issue of *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Martin sums up in a single phrase how the loose body of ideas I am referring to as the "geographic imagination" acted as a powerful counteragent to the abstract universalism in

In this way, Equiano positions an incipient sense of African locality as an important counterpart to the prevailing view that Africa's commercial underdevelopment signifies a deeper cultural lack. Adam Smith, whose *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776) departs in numerous ways from the model offered by Kames, nonetheless speaks of Africa in similarly abstract terms whose effect, if not intent, is to obscure variation and particularity beneath the shadow of a monolithic, temporally bound history: "All the inland parts of Africa […] seem i*n all ages of the world* to have been in *the same* barbarous and uncivilized state in which we find them *at present*" (35-36; emphasis added). Yet even Smith, who claims elsewhere that "an African king, the absolute master of the lives and liberties of ten thousand naked savages" has a status beneath that of "an industrious and frugal [European] peasant" (24), concedes that this uncultured status is a product of geography. In words we find echoed in Equiano's opening paragraphs, Smith describes the situation thus:

> [T]hey are at too great a distance from one another to carry commerce and communication […]. There are in Africa none of those great inlets, such as the Baltic and Adriatic seas in Europe […] to carry maritime commerce into the interior parts of that great continent: and the great rivers of Africa are at too great a distance from one another to give occasion to any considerable inland navigation. The commerce besides which any nation can carry on by means of a river which does not break itself into any number of branches […] can never be very considerable. (36)

Equiano's own comments on coastlines, distances, and the "considerable" separation of his "province" from the sea and centers of trade, begin to make a different kind of sense in light of Smith's commercial geography. What Smith regards as a geographic limitation that encodes the moral and cultural principles separating Africa from European nations, Equiano

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some strands of Enlightenment historiography: "Happiness was not a concept but a place" (142). This is much the same statement Equiano repeatedly makes when he reminds us that Africa is a "simple," happy place.

revalues as commercially significant markers of local distinction that are themselves crucial to the self-substantiating rhetoric of English cultural commercial and cultural refinement.[15]

I will return later to the connection between theories of commercial exchange and Equiano's careful portrayal of Africa as a cultural and historical signifier whose meaning derives from its localized geography. For now, however, I want to emphasize a slightly different point—namely, that this opening sequence, with its myriad discursive influences and shifting points of view, works towards an initial solution to the problems of cultural authority and representation raised in the very first words of the narrative's title. That solution, of course, will continue to be revised throughout *The Interesting Narrative*, but the preliminary shape it takes here is one that would ultimately have been familiar to the British poets of empire who, like James Grainger, struggled to make locality the universal currency of refined taste. For Equiano, writing two decades later in the wake of the American Revolution and its consequent influence on British imperial self-understanding, that line of hopeful reasoning is not longer fully available. Nonetheless, its basic contours are still visible, albeit with an important difference. By wrapping Africa in what remains of an authoritative discourse of commercial geography, Equiano recapitulates the alluring view of the outsider looking in, as imagined from the provincial reaches of the Atlantic rim. At the same time, as a source of idyllic virtue and simplicity that speaks in the universal formulae of Enlightenment history, Equiano's Africa affords an inward view to readers anxious about

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[15] Smith's comments on the supposed geographic obstacles to Africa's commercial—and, hence, cultural—development, come in a chapter titled "That the Division of Labour is limited by the Extent of the Market." Smith's views on the division of labor serve as the basis for more elaborate theories of the domestic and international circulation of goods according to principles of lack and necessity. By postulating a similar set of principles within the domain of human labor, the effect of which is an increasing specialization among different communities of laborers, Smith identifies what might be thought of as a core component of locality itself. That Smith goes on to link the specialization of labor to the effect of localized geographies on human cultural development is striking, and it suggests that Equiano's adoption of the more portable parts of Smith's terminology signals a deeper grounding in Enlightenment political and social theory, history, and commercial ideology than modern readers often acknowledge.

their own culture's perceived faults of over-refinement and luxurious decline. To speak of African customs, in this sense, is to speak of European debasement, a reversal authorized by Africa's relationship to its own image in English commercial and cultural discourse. This difference, though, is crucial. Unlike those whose language he bends to this purpose, Equiano writes, in a very real sense, as an article of commerce—the very currency of locality itself.

The Transatlantic Geography of Terror

Shortly after his capture and enslavement, Equiano describes the relationship between African "savagery" and European "civilization" in darkly humorous terms:

> I was now persuaded that I had gotten into a world of bad spirits, and that they were going to kill me. Their complexions, too, differing so much from ours, their long hair, and the language they spoke […] united to confirm me in this belief. […] I asked […] if I were to be eaten by those white men with horrible looks, red faces, and long hair (53-54).

As numerous readers have remarked, Equiano's fears for his safety at the hands of his English captors and would-be white cannibals dramatize a powerful inversion of the terms in which English claims to cultural refinement usually communicated themselves. Yet most commentators have tended to focus on what looks, to modern eyes, like an emerging consciousness of racial difference—the outward signs of "complexions" and "horrible" appearances—at the heart of this inversion. As Roxann Wheeler notes, however, the very notion of "complexion," even so late in the eighteenth century, was highly complex and signaled, at various levels, a geographic and climatic consciousness that suggests this passage

is as much about the physical distances separating Africans and Europeans as it is about race.[16]

Compounding the geographic dimensions of this key passage detailing Equiano's first contact with Englishmen is its embeddedness within a basic commercial idiom. In the middle of describing the "horrors" of his "views and fears at the moment," Equiano makes a commercial comparison that is no less striking for its conditional phrasing. "[I]f ten thousand worlds had been my own," he announces, "I would have freely parted with them all to have exchanged my condition with that of the meanest slave in my own country" (53-54). Seeming so natural as to pass by almost unnoticed, the statement compresses Enlightenment concepts of freedom, property, self-ownership and self-mastery, equivalence, exchange, and even basic principles of community and nationality, into a surprisingly ambivalent statement that is, ultimately, both an expression of fear and a confession of unfulfilled longing. In effect, at the moment when Equiano finds himself transformed from person to property, he expresses his fears in the very terms of ownership and exchange that define the commercial boundaries of the "iniquitous traffic" by which he is now enslaved.

In a very real sense, to unpack Equiano's claim in a meaningful way is to examine how this apparent paradox at the heart of *The Interesting Narrative* both disguises and performs the multivalent work of commercial ideology in Anglophone writing. Although it presents his fear in the innocent voice of the child, Equiano's commercial metaphor is loaded with irony, for it imagines the free individual's hypothetical willingness to trade himself into slavery as the means of escaping his present captivity. At the same time, by expressing a longing for home in the proscribed language of the slave trade, Equiano enunciates his desire to return to his "own country" in a way that closely conforms to

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[16] See *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture* (2000).

theories of "national love" advanced earlier in the century by the Scottish philosopher Francis Hutcheson. In *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725), Hutcheson observes that "Love of one's native country" is an affect produced by contact with "Whatever place we have liv'd in for any considerable time," our recollection of the "Friendships, Familys, natural Affections, and other human Sentiments," and the "Association of the pleasant ideas of our Youth, with the Buildings, Fields, and Woods where we receiv'd them" (115). Hutcheson's notion of the moral foundation for love of nation is predicated on absence or distance from the object of one's affection.[17] As Equiano slips into a similar idiom in speaking of his deep affection for his "own country," he paves the way for the displacement and seemingly endless transatlantic peregrinations that are the focus of so much of the autobiography. Within moments of this scene's conclusion, the "horrors" of the Middle Passage have begun and Equiano, "sick," "low," and "wish[ing] for the last friend, death," finds himself "deprived of all chance of returning" to his "native country" (54). What follows in the *Narrative* is Equiano's gradual transition from an initial reliance on Scottish Enlightenment terminology and principles to a more extensive view of the spatial context for the subsequent events in his "checkered" "life and fortune" (195).

Treated novelistically, as part of the broader rhetorical strategy through which he presents his life as simultaneously representative and unique, this turn to an expanded Atlantic geography helps Equiano both thematize and interpret his own uncertain status within Anglophone culture. Over the course of his narrative, Equiano visits some three dozen separate places, and he treats nearly all of them—from Montserrat, Jamaica, and

[17] Hutcheson's description of national feeling is closely tied to the outwardly commercial orientation of the individual subject who experiences it. In an earlier passage, he describes commercial activity as a precondition for such "distant Attachments": "suppose a Person, *for Trade*, had left his native Country, and with all his Kindred had settled his Fortunes abroad, without any View of Returning […] ask such a Man, would it give him no Pleasure to hear of the Prosperity of his Country? […] I fancy his Answer would shew us a Benevolence extended beyond Neighborhoods or Acquaintances" (114; emphasis added).

Savanna to Philadelphia, London, and Cadiz—as major sites around which to organize the story of not only his personal development but also the development of the narrative's central ideas about liberty, spiritual salvation, and cultural refinement. Put another way, the places Equiano visits, sometimes by choice but more often through coercion, serve as the principal milestones marking the narrative's path toward various forms of redemption—religious, economic, cultural. This is not, in itself, a particularly unusual phenomenon, especially if we consider that the eighteenth-century novel whose conventions inform *The Interesting Narrative* in more ways than one began as a form with deep roots in traditions of early modern travel narratives, commercial tales, and accounts of exploration—and sometimes captivity—in distant lands.[18] Considered in the context of a critical tradition that has stressed the interstitial, transitional, and in-between status of early Black Atlantic writing, however, the attention Equiano devotes to situating events in his life within a highly detailed Atlantic geography raises questions about the cultural work these locations perform on the text's commercial imagination. More than a simple catalogue of the locations he moves between, Equiano's rich Atlantic geography signifies a profound and highly nuanced engagement with the aesthetic and cultural dimensions of transatlantic trade.

That Equiano draws on a number of contemporary discourses involved in representing discrete places as markers of cultural worth becomes evident in his description of his arrival in the British Caribbean. Following a voyage that is, by turns, horrifying for the "hunger," "severe floggings," "misery," "suffocation," and "death" suffered by his "wearied countrymen" (56-57), yet also remarkably full of "surprise," "curiosity," and "wonder" for the young Equiano himself (57), the initial landfall in Barbados marks the moment when the

[18] Scholarship on *The Interesting Narrative* has increasingly turned to comparisons with eighteenth-century novelistic forms of late; see Doyle and Davidson for two recent examples of this trend.

physical distances traversed in the service of commercial exchange become part of a new aesthetic problem in the text. The white sailors' joy at the "sight of the island" stands in marked contrast to the slaves' horror:

> Many merchants and planters now came on board […]. They put us in separate parcels, and examined us attentively. They also made us jump, and pointed to the land, signifying we were to go there. We thought by this, we should be eaten by these ugly men, as they appeared to us; and, when soon after we were all put down under the deck again, there was much dread and trembling among us, and nothing but bitter cries to be heard all the night from these apprehensions, insomuch, that at last the white people got some old slaves from the land to pacify us. They told us we were not to be eaten, but to work, and were soon to go on land […] (57).

The passage resurrects fears of white cannibalism to replay the earlier moment in the chapter, but it does so in a novel way by suggesting that the form of human consumption Equiano and his "country people" should be truly concerned about is the labor they will be forced to perform. Not surprisingly, this tacit understanding that the forces of capitalism require humans to be "put […] in separate parcels" and made to work involuntarily on British plantations—a perverse reformulation of Adam Smith's theory of the division of labor—lays bare the commercial ideologies of imperial power driven by literal and symbolic consumption. Yet this critique of slave capital and the mercantile interests that structure it also takes a less predictable path when Equiano highlights the geographic and aesthetic registers of an episode that is, on its surface, about the evils of the slave trade. In the space of just a few sentences, Equiano references multiple times the proximity of Barbados ("the island of Barbadoes … off Bridgetown … pointed to the land … from the land … soon to go on land … after we landed"), suggesting through insistent repetition that the island's physical presence is perhaps the most important feature of the passage. At the same time, the appraisal of the traders' physical appearance—intended, no doubt, as a comment on their "ugly" complexion as well as their souls—implies a shift toward a moral and aesthetic

register. The intersection of terror and terrain crystallizes in the narrative around a fleeting moment of aesthetic judgment.

If such a reading of Equiano's entry into the degenerate world of Britain's presence abroad seems implausible at first glance, we need only turn to another moment, a few pages later, for further confirmation. There, in a famous scene describing a West Indian slave auction, Equiano pushes these aesthetic, moral, and geographic strains into a still closer embrace. "We were not many days in […] custody," Equiano begins, "before we were sold after their usual manner":

> On a signal given (as the beat of a drum), the buyers rush at once into the yard where the slaves are confined, and make choice of that parcel they like best. The noise and clamor with which this is attended, and the eagerness visible in the countenances of the buyers, serve not a little to increase the apprehension of terrified Africans, who may well be supposed to consider them as the ministers of that destruction to which they think themselves devoted. (58)

As he does upon first arriving in Barbadoes, Equiano again passes moral judgment by reading the depraved "eagerness visible in the countenances" of potential buyers. Through an act of metonymic substitution, we see the physical appearance of the English planters as symptomatic of the conduct in which they are engaged, to say nothing of the larger commercial and imperial system of which that conduct is a part. Indeed, read in concert with the earlier description of the ship's arrival, the scene of the slave auction reveals just how much these assessments depend on the their location. Given the reputation enjoyed by West Indian merchants and planters throughout the eighteenth century for their rapacious self-interest and moral degeneracy, the fact that this "unusual" scene takes place in Barbados is in many ways unsurprising. What is striking, however, is Equiano's care in situating the scene geographically—on Barbados, in the port city of Bridgetown—and spatially, within the confined spaces of "the merchant's yard," where the initial groupings that had been enforced aboard the ship during the Middle Passage now disintegrate chaotically. The slaves are "all

pent up together, like so many sheep in a fold, without regard to age or sex" (58), a sudden dissolution of earlier divisions ("the put us into separate parcels") that coincides at this point in the narrative with the reemergence of a powerful—and highly productive—sense of terror.

For Equiano the defining characteristic of the Middle Passage, and the slave experience in general, is the ineffable terror imposed by the loss of liberty and self-possession and dramatically intensified by its arbitrary cruelty. These early scenes enforce the notion within *The Interesting Narrative* that the forces of terror are not a free-floating, unanchored product of the in-between state of the Middle Passage, but rather the horrifying result of the particular places where slavery and the commercial system it supports take place. In making this point through such scenes as the slave auction, Equiano constructs what we might think of as an aesthetic geography of terror, and through it instructs his readers in a mode of Christian sentiment—as when he makes his plea to the "nominal Christians" whose "new refinement in cruelty" yield "fresh horrors"—conveyed according to geographically situated principles of taste and judgment. Throughout the narrative, this ongoing aesthetic response to terror's affective power indirectly mobilizes many of the other categories Equiano employs to discuss cultural identity and cultural authority.

Equiano soon comes to gauge his own status in the British Atlantic against this index of fear. After initially disavowing any claims to European status, he later announces he has come to see himself as "almost an Englishman" (71), a shift some readers have responded to by stressing the fluid, hybrid terms in which the text represents cultural identity. But Equiano's peculiar notion of "almost-Englishness" is predicated on the cultural logic of terror itself:

> [I] began to consider myself as happily situated, for my master treated me always extremely well; and my attachment and gratitude for him

> were very great. From the various scenes I had beheld on shipboard, *I soon grew a stranger to terror of every kind, and was, in that respect at least, almost an Englishman*. I have often reflected with surprise that I never felt half the alarm at any of the numerous dangers I have been in, that I was filled with at the first sight of the Europeans, and at every act of theirs, even the most trifling, when I first came among them, and for some time afterwards. *The fear, however, which was the effect of my ignorance, wore away as I began to know them*. I could now speak English tolerably well, and I perfectly understood everything that was said. *I not only felt myself quite easy with these new countrymen, but relished their society and manners*. (71-72; emphasis added)

This passage is remarkable for several reasons. For Equiano, it appears, Englishness is not initially defined by the positive attributes of "society and manners," though they certainly are important, as the concluding sentence indicates. Rather, what authorizes the confident claim to be "almost an Englishman" is the absence of "terror of every kind." Englishmen are not subject to terror, and so to become inured to the terrors provoked by earlier experience is to become, "in that respect at least," English. Like "ignorance," whose "effect" can gradually wear away in time, terror is a response that can be unlearned; within *The Interesting Narrative* that process of unlearning, much like the process of becoming a polite individual by polishing one's "society and manners," is the foundation not merely of Englishness but of culture itself.

In holding up his own gradual eradication of terror as a prerequisite to the process of "improvement" he so desires, Equiano follows a conventional narrative of cultural reproduction across the Atlantic. It is a process in which the "desire to resemble" their "superior" English "countrymen" leads English-speaking individuals (a group to which Equiano now belongs) from distant regions of Britain's empire to refine themselves by "relish[ing]" the "manners" of their metropolitan counterparts. Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* (1793), for instance, initially imagines—and later satirizes, with its notorious table of virtues—a similar conception of self-improvement vis-à-vis transatlantic emulation

when the young Franklin describes learning to write in the style of *The Spectator*. In another sense, however, the removal of terror itself constitutes the most basic act of "improvement." Indeed, the passage invites us to read the presence or absence of terror in cultural terms, by positioning terror as a crucial keyword in the discourse of cultural refinement as Equiano adopts and reworks it. In this way, Equiano suggests that the affective experience of terror is not so much an obstacle to the project of self-acculturation and narrative self-authorization, in the English model, as a major point of entry into it.

Such a linkage between terror and culture, writ large, evokes the ideological proximity of commercial geography and civilization itself. Because terror in *The Interesting Narrative* is the product of cultural upheaval masquerading as mere spatial displacement, terror's uneven distribution throughout the Atlantic world of the text offers an alternative register of cultural authority. Particularly during the text's West Indian section, terror substitutes for other ways of measuring and accounting for cultural and geographic differences. Most of Chapter 5, for instance, consists of Equiano describing his "despair" at being sent to the West Indies, and discussing the brutal conditions under which slaves there suffer "instances of oppression, cruelty, and extortion" (86). Partly owing to the "debauched […] West India climate," he suggests, conditions in the British Caribbean yield a superabundance of terror, a peculiar product of the slave plantations that "corrupts the milk of human kindness and turns it into gall" (97, 99). This is commercial "traffic" rendered as a disease: it "spreads like a pestilence, and taints what it touches" (99).

For metropolitan readers grown accustomed to reviling West Indian creoles, Equiano's strategy is a natural one precisely because it employs the familiar cultural geography of the British Caribbean to promote a message those same readers are already primed to accept, thanks to their prior doubts about the moral integrity of West Indian

planters. Still, what is most interesting about Equiano's manipulation of the narrative conventions governing climatic degeneration and its moral outcome is the more precise geographic context in which it occurs. Equiano's discussions of the various islands that make up Britain's West Indian holdings revolve around the particular cruelties associated with each. Resurrecting the specter of terrors he now claims to have become a complete "stranger" to, the middle portion of the *Narrative* (most notably Chapter 5), is a compendium of descriptive passages designed to conjure up just such terrifying experiences. Equiano constructs his account of the decision to "commence merchant," which he casts as a major turning point in his life, in the larger context of a sequence of places that suggests the particular site of each calamitous instance of cruelty matters—or ought to matter—profoundly. After landing in Montserrat in 1763, for instance, he views with horror "a Negro man staked to the ground and cut most shockingly, and then his ears cut off bit by bit" (94); speaking of St. Kitts, the setting for Grainger's *The Sugar-Cane*, he describes how slaves are "branded with the initial letters of their master's name; and a load of heavy iron hooks hung about their necks" (96). Through these and other examples of cruelty, Equiano develops, in effect, a set of locational coordinates on the basis of the particular abuses and terrors associated with them: a West Indian topography of terror.[19]

Having established a local context for the terrors of slavery, Equiano abruptly shifts tactics at the end of the chapter. "Nor was such usage [of the types he has described] confined to particular places or individuals," he states; "in all the different islands in which I have been (and I have visited no less than fifteen) the treatment of the slaves was nearly the same; so nearly, indeed, that the history of an island, or even a plantation, might serve for a

[19] This kind of catalogue of cruelty would later become a staple of the slave narrative genre as practiced in the United States, though more often linked to particular owners or foremen—Mr. Covey in Frederick Douglass's much later *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845) comes to mind—than to particular places.

history of the whole" (99). What initially looks like a reversal of his former strategy proves remarkably consistent, however, if we consider this brief statement's marked parallels with Equiano's affirmation of his own representative status at the beginning of the narrative. Indeed, the rhetorical formulation of a "history of the whole" echoes almost exactly the initial claim that in West Africa "the history of what passes in one family or village may serve as a specimen of the whole nation" (34). Much as he does earlier, Equiano here traces the connections between the individual "specimen" and the larger collective it belongs to and simultaneously represents. This, of course, is central to the larger strategy of presenting himself as a representative of the problems of slavery—something that informs Equiano's overall preference, as Robert Allison puts it, for "one person's sad story" over "the collective sorrows of the mob" (19). When Equiano gestures toward local differences in the conditions of terror while also asserting near-universal similarities that apply equally to all locations, he is employing particularity as its own kind of universal proof. The horrors and cruelty of slavery hold universally true, in other words, precisely because they transcend the kinds of local distinctions they help make visible. According to this logic, the severity of slavery is evidenced in the fact that minor variations in local conditions are so clearly overcome by the similarities Equiano remarks. It is precisely *because* the sources of terror are ubiquitous across a wide range of distinct places that terror proves so valuable a term.

There is another way in which Equiano's continual return to the experience of terror exposes locality's valuable cultural function in the text. Terror has something of a second life in *The Interesting Narrative* as a peculiar, troubling sort of commodity. While terror initially appears as little more than a natural and largely involuntary response to the traumas and despair of slavery, it gradually accumulates a larger burden of meaning as the narrative progresses. As we have seen, terror functions for Equiano as a badge that marks its bearer as

occupying a certain cultural position. Through its absence or presence terror places an individual along a continuum of cultural refinement; it functions as the perverse mirror image of a civilized mode of consumption in which commodities gain and lose value as markers of social status and cultural authority according to their relative scarcity or abundance. There is, in other words, a basic economy of fear that operates within the text, and while it may seem strange to speak of a supply and demand for terror, this is in a very real sense what Equiano does when he enlists fear in the service of the text's antislavery principles. Terror is the currency in which Englishness is bought and sold in *The Interesting Narrative*.

Spiritual Economy, Beautiful Trade

The text's economy of terror dovetails with the narrative's spiritual turn following the success of Equiano's oft-noted plan to "commence merchant" and accumulate sufficient capital to purchase his freedom. It comes as something of a surprise to see that for Equiano, contrary to his expectations, manumission does not bring with it the absence of fear. Instead, even after he is nominally free once more, Equiano narrates repeated occasions where his initial fears are renewed. Cast partly as outrages against personal freedom and natural economic self-interest, these moments nonetheless profoundly affect both his self-conception and his strategy for positioning the text's larger antislavery project. Scarcely two pages after being made free, Equiano describes how legal freedom—his return to an "original free African state" (121)—offers little protection from the abuses of unscrupulous whites. When he loses his temper with a "merchant of Savannah" who "persevered in his insults," and ends up "beat[ing] him soundly," his initial response is one of justified, if somewhat passive, outrage: "I was a free man […] I therefore refused to stir" (121-122). But

even as he exercises his newfound freedom by resisting the merchant's demands, he remains fearful of his actions' likely consequences: "I was astonished and frightened […]. When he was gone, I thought his threat might prove too true to my sorrow" (122). Because of prior experience, in which he has witnessed free blacks whipped and imprisoned in similar circumstances, Equiano professes he is "very apprehensive of a flogging at least," before continuing, "I dreaded, of all things, the thoughts of being striped" (122).

Despite the "rage" that leads him to insist, "I would sooner die like a free man, than suffer myself to be scourged by the hands of ruffians, and my blood drawn like a slave" (122), Equiano's recognition that he is "free" in name only and still has much to fear is directly linked to the narrative's gradual turn to religious salvation as an alternate register for considering the nature of human liberty. It is on his return from Savannah, where he fears he will be publicly flogged, that a series of incidents turn his mind to the condition of his soul. When his "dear friend," the ship's captain, dies on the voyage home, Equiano immediately expresses his relief that his death had not come sooner, since "had it pleased Providence, that he had died about five months before, I verily believe I should not have obtained my freedom" (125). Similarly, when Equiano's small stock of turkeys on the ship survive, while the bullocks he had considered investing in all die, he attributes "this otherwise trifling circumstance as a particular providence of God, and was thankful accordingly" (125). Yet even here, the text's spiritual dimension is yoked to its spatial imagination. Equiano describes his "troubled conscience" as he labors under "strong convictions of sin" by contextualizing it within the ongoing account of his post-emancipation travels. Thwarted in his "determin[ation] to go to Turkey […] and never more return to England," Equiano recasts his momentary immobility in scriptural terms: "All this appeared to be against me, and the only comfort I then experienced was in reading the Holy Scriptures, where I saw that 'there

is no new thing under the sun' […] and what was appointed to me I must submit to" (152). In similar fashion, a "delightful voyage to Cadiz" undertaken shortly thereafter sets the stage for renewed spiritual struggles: "I had many opportunities of reading the scriptures. I wrestled hard with God in fervent prayer." It is a situation that finally resolves itself in a deeply moving vision, in which he sees "clearly with an eye of faith, the crucified Saviour bleeding on the cross on mount Calvary; the scriptures became and unsealed book" (159).

Episodes such as these, where Equiano silently elides geography and faith by virtue of their narrative entanglement, suggest that the confessional legacy of spiritual autobiography is to a large extent always already embedded within the complex discourses of place in the eighteenth century. This imbrication of spiritual enlightenment and the rhetorical construction of locality is hardly accidental. As Equiano's subsequent participation in Britain's abortive efforts to colonize parts of Spanish-controlled Central America in the 1770s shows, the correspondence between this version of religious experience and geography proves central to the narrative's political and cultural project. When he sets out, in the penultimate chapter, with his "old friend, the celebrated Doctor Irving" for the Mosquito Coast in 1775, Equiano is quick to play up his own missionary interest in the expedition, favorably contrasting his desire to be "an instrument of God, of bringing some poor sinner to […] Jesus Christ" with forms of contact originally initiated by "English traders for some selfish ends" (169). Motivated in part by his recent memories of the terrors of both slavery and damnation, he resolves to attend to the "morals" of visiting Mosquito Indians in London, making it his personal responsibility "to instruct the Indian prince in the doctrines of Christianity" during their Atlantic voyage (169). Once on the Mosquito Coast, however, Equiano's missionary zeal fades noticeably, merging ineluctably with the capitalist impulses that have become nearly synonymous with liberty by this point in the text. Initial

remarks on the region's natural features—from the "hideous roaring" of "different kinds of animals" to the climate's support for the wide range of "different kinds of vegetables" the expeditionary party initially plants (171)—are simply the preface to a more extended ethnography in which mercantile interests, as opposed to spiritual ones, soon predominate. Almost immediately upon arrival his descriptions begin to focus on telling details, such as how the area's native inhabitants "brought […] a good deal of silver in exchange for our goods," or how the would-be English colonists initiate peaceful contact with the "Indian Governor" through an exchange of commodities such as "rum, sugar, and gunpowder" (172, 173). Like the European travelers and explorers whose descriptions of distant territories were designed to record the possible economic exploitation of new lands, Equiano devotes most of his attention to those local practices that just so happen to possess, in modern parlance, the greatest market potential. If a spiritual economy is at work here, it is clearly subordinated to the commercial functions of empire.

The mercantile gloss Equiano gives the Mosquito Coast section is indicative of the significance granted scenes of commercial "first contact" even late in the eighteenth century. Indeed, after flirting briefly with the language of missionary reform, Equiano's return to this more comfortable register suggests there is more than a little strategy involved in the shift. As other scholars have noted, Equiano's larger purpose here, near the end of the *Narrative*, is to establish definitively his credentials not simply to narrate his own life but also to make the last, hopefully successful, antislavery appeal that structures the text's final pages.[20] Moving with ease from religious to ethnographic and commercial description, Equiano polishes his credentials as an authoritative speaker through his performance of a widely understood and

[20] For instance, see Frank Kelleter, "Ethnic Self-Dramatization and Technologies of Travel in *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, The African, Written by Himself* (1789)" (2004).

generally expected set of narrative practices. These practices are themselves inscribed within the spatial rhetoric of eighteenth-century commercial exchange, in which the act of trading goods across geographic space is at once an exercise in negotiating cultural difference and something akin to a moral imperative. Indeed, as the final pages of *The Interesting Narrative* reveal, it is this delicate balance among political, cultural, and ethical understandings of commercial activities that generates the text's last reinterpretation of locality as an aesthetic, as much as a geopolitical, category.

If this appropriation and revision of European discourses of colonization-as-commerce allow Equiano to present himself as an authoritative, representative English subject, it is precisely his sentimental and psychological connections to his native West Africa, long subordinated to an insistent desire to return to the text's cultural center of gravity—London, the "wished-for place"—that makes this transformation possible.[21] It does so through a rather roundabout logic. Initially, Equiano's rendition of Africa as an idyllic, pre-commercial land serves as the basis for his opening commentary on—and critique of—European customs and practices, particularly those pertaining to the slave trade. The introductory account of "customs and manners" provides the baseline against which to measure civility and barbarity in all the circumstances he later encounters. In part, this is because his movement through West Africa, immediately following his capture at the hands of other Africans, masks any sense of local difference between distinct regions beneath a veneer of African uniformity. As he mentions at one point, "all the nations and people I … passed through resembled our own in manners, customs, and language" (52). Implicit in this

[21] To be clear, in speaking of Equiano's "sentimental and psychological connections" to Africa, I am referring only to their narrative construction within the text itself—the way Equiano's language is designed to promote the sense, whether real or calculated, that his status as "the African" entails a meaningful connection to the place of his supposed origin.

statement is the comparison to a descriptive mode, popular in English historical and social writing since the beginning of the century, that deliberately emphasized the diversity of local communities, agricultural practices, trade, and governance.[22] Equiano's assertion of essential sameness not only plays into European tendencies to regard all of Africa as more or less the same but also deliberately draws out the sense of vast cultural difference implied by the very act of comparison. Thus, paying attention to the apparent continuity across large parts of the African continent qualifies Equiano to reflect on European customs and manners in ways that "provincialize" Europe itself. Positioning Africa in relation to a recognizable form of Anglo-American locality that his own native land appears to lack, Equiano also positions himself as a trusted voice of Enlightenment culture.

Less obvious in that equation, however, is how the narrative's antislavery conclusion, which looks back to this beginning and then promises to replace the trade in slaves with an "immense" and "endless" flow of other sources of profit, positions Equiano as the voice of refined taste as well. In concluding, I want to consider briefly how the commercial fantasy that closes *The Interesting Narrative* quietly draws on the enabling language of commerce, freed at last from the yoke that binds it to terror elsewhere in the text, to aestheticize locality itself in a novel way. As I suggested at the beginning of this chapter, the simple claim that Africa represents "an endless field of commerce" functions as a major aesthetic pronouncement. Not only does the phrase gesture expansively to the powerful sense of infinitude that we might, in other contexts, regard as a mode of the commercial sublime, but it also suggests that the implied landscape in question has become more a figurative construct—a figment of

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[22] Daniel Defoe's *A Tour thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1724-1726), which I discuss briefly in Chapter 1, offers one example of this mode of domestic ethnography. Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, despite its very different orientation, provides another; in Smith's telling, variations in geography and climate give rise to the local differences in labor, manufacturing, and skill and knowledge that feed both the division of labor and the international systems of commerce that depend upon it.

the commercial imagination—than a real place. Yet, because the idea of landscape itself structures cultural hierarchies and holds the power to assign authority to observers *of* the landscape but not those *in* it, Equiano's choice of metaphor injects into the narrative's final pages an important question: in whose "interest" (to borrow another of the text's keywords) does this "field of commerce" operate? Who does it place in the crucial position of the observer, and who does it endow with the powerful techniques of refined aesthetic judgment and penetrating vision? In other words, who becomes the metropolitan observer of this future provincial landscape?

The answer is simple, as anyone familiar with the history of the European presence in Africa knows. The "British manufacturers and merchant adventurer" assume that position; it is the European "manufacturing interest," as Equiano repeatedly asserts, that benefits from a commercial relationship with Africa that operating for the "universal good" (194). As it turns out, this is not exactly what Equiano predicts, and at least in terms of his antislavery politics this outcome is not quite what the new, beautiful mode of post-slavery commerce will produce. For, in later editions of *The Interesting Narrative*, Equiano—who retained copyright over the text, and thus exerted considerable authority in editing it—took to adding a footnote that sheds some light:

> In the ship *Trusty*, lately for the new Settlement of Sierra Leone, in Africa, were 1,300 pair of shoes (an article hitherto scarcely known to be exported to that country) with several others equally new, as articles of export. Thus will it not become the interest, as well as the duty, of every artificer, mechanic, and tradesman, publicly to enter their protest against this traffic of the human species? What a striking, what a beautiful contrast is here presented to view, when compared with the cargo of a slave ship! Every feeling heart indeed sensibly participates of the joy, and with a degree of rapture reads of barrels of *flour* instead of *gunpowder*—*biscuits* instead of *horse beans*—*implements of husbandry* instead of *guns* for destruction, rapine, and murder—and various articles of *usefulness* are the pleasing substitutes for the *torturing thumbscrew*, and the *galling chain*, &c. (194n1; emphasis original)

This brief passage raises considerably the aesthetic stakes involved in the text's interpretation of commercially-inflected antislavery politics. Significantly, it does so in a way that radically alters the aesthetic conventions of locality and landscape as practiced elsewhere in the period. In speaking of the various substitutions the end of slavery will bring about, Equiano identifies a more far-reaching principle of exchange in the nearly alchemical commercial transformation of gunpowder into flour and guns into agricultural tools. The text presents the new, post-slavery order as the product of a straightforward exchange, but the sentimental power of that implied equivalence—summed up perfectly in the image of rows of 1300 shoes that are so similar, and yet so different, from the haunting image of bodies arrayed in the same space—acts as an excess, a supplement, the basis for that "beautiful contrast […] presented to view." For that view, as we glimpse it in this moment, is not that of the British merchant, but rather the "artificer, mechanic, and tradesman"—the working class subject whose ability to see and feel what the corrupted slave trader cannot Equiano now elevates to the privileged status of refined taste. Through the radical aesthetic redefinition of commerce such a shift enacts, Equiano performs the ultimate act of provincial self-authorization. No longer is it sufficient to point to the local conditions around which even metropolitan principles of taste are organized, thereby making locality a privileged sign of aesthetic sensibility. In his own words in the final lines of *The Interesting Narrative*, Equiano puts it thus: "To those who are possessed of this spirit, there is scarcely any book or incident so trifling that does not afford some profit" (196). Equiano may be speaking of religion, but in the new British Atlantic world he envisions he tells us also that for the first time locality is the aesthetic property of all.

CHAPTER FOUR

Atlantic Cosmopolis:
Washington Irving's *Sketch Book* and the New Provincialism

In this chapter I look to Washington Irving's *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* (1819-1820) to examine how the complex relationship of commerce, aesthetics, and the literary portrayal of local and cosmopolitan identities helped writers in post-Revolutionary America articulate their views on the new nation's status within a rapidly changing transatlantic Anglophone culture. The first work by an American writer truly to reach a wide audience on both sides of the Atlantic, *The Sketch Book* made Irving a minor celebrity in Europe as well as the United States and, according to many scholars, marked the moment when professional authorship became a viable pursuit in the United States.[1] With its patchwork of sentimental vignettes, nostalgic short-form sketches, and, most famously, gothic tales of twenty-year naps and ghostly horsemen, *The Sketch Book* is in many ways an unlikely candidate for the role—particularly when we consider that the novel, rather than the essay or the short story, has historically been singled out by scholars of American and British literature as the preferred genre for working through questions of national culture and identity. Yet its demonstrated transatlantic success is precisely what makes *The Sketch Book* so intriguing a text, for it exposes the extent to which American and British readers alike continued to value literary debates, conducted outside the generic boundaries of the novel or

[1] This is a common claim among scholars of American literature. Most recently, Edward Cahill makes this point in a recent issue of the American Antiquarian Society's *Common-Place* electronic newsletter.

romance, concerning the nature of metropolitan and provincial cultural authority several decades after American political independence. While the novel's close association with the projection of metropolitan cultural supremacy had all but assured its position as a prestige genre since the late eighteenth century, the far more fluid concept of the sketch—"willfully obscure as to its larger meanings or narrative or generic principles," in Jared Gardner's description of the form (744)—maintained a far more tenuous connection to the legitimating principles of metropolitan literary culture.[2] Cosmopolitan in its heterogeneity of subject and setting, *The Sketch Book* imagines an alternative cultural space where metropolitan authority has largely been replaced by a diffuse, amorphous provinciality. Figuratively displacing established modes for representing metropolitan authority, Irving's sketches of rural life in England and America replace metropolitan refinement with provincial experience as the authentic marker of national cultural identities.

Though not solely Irving's invention, what I call the "new provincialism" of *The Sketch Book* operates by expanding the terms of locality made familiar over the course of the preceding century. Rip Van Winkle's small village at the foot of the Kaatskills, the town of Greensburgh in "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," the Welsh hamlet of Ruthen in "Rural Funerals," and the many other highly localized communities portrayed throughout *The Sketch Book* collectively define a cultural space where metropolitan authority is often at a decided disadvantage. Indeed, within Irving's insular, isolated, and at times comically backwards communities, metropolitan practices and points of view function either as markers of outsider status, and, hence, as invitations to ridicule, or as signs of artificially narrow cultural

[2] Even as the novel portrayed a broad range of life outside of metropolitan centers—whether the terrifyingly foreign lands of Anne Radcliffe's gothic novels or the Welsh and Scottish settings of novels by Charlotte Smith, Sir Walter Scott, and others—it did so from a decidedly metropolitan vantage point, assimilating its highly individuated scenes of personal and domestic life to the notion that such diversity represented, in the abstract, the richness of English national life.

horizons—an ironic inversion of the eighteenth-century notion that metropolitan life prepared one, through continual contact with one's fellow man, for a career as a sophisticated, "polished" citizen of the world. In other words, where Anglo-American writers of the preceding generation would likely have portrayed each of the text's discrete locales as a potential site on which to reproduce authoritative forms of metropolitan culture, *The Sketch Book* departs significantly from this older model by defining such locations according to their participation in precisely those modes of provinciality this earlier notion of locality had once been intended to erase.

Designed to bypass almost entirely the metropolis and its countless local surrogates, Irving's new provincialism thus openly transforms the disadvantages of provincial exclusion and subordination into the substrate of new national and transnational forms of affiliation. Consequently, *The Sketch Book*, like many of its periodical and short-form contemporaries, also establishes the necessity of reconsidering cosmopolitanism's function as a literary construct in the early nineteenth century. The concept of cosmopolitanism in the eighteenth century had historically been one of feeling at home in a world defined largely by urban centers of cultural refinement and commercial activity. But Irving generally sends his principal narrative persona, Geoffrey Crayon, to observe isolated rural scenes in a world quite different from the one Joseph Addison had in mind when he described early eighteenth-century London as the "Emporium of the World." This turn away from a familiar urban version of "the world," in many ways a staple of Romantic-era writing, does not deny urbanity's cultural potency so much as it masks the presence of the urban beneath the nostalgic veneer of the rural.[3] Indeed, as provinciality increasingly becomes naturalized in *The*

[3] For instance, consider William Wordworth's assertion in the 1800 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* that "low and rustic life" affords "a better soil" for the "essential passions of the heart" [xi].

Sketch Book as a way to understand the relationship between Crayon and the vaguely alien surroundings where he often finds himself, it is also increasingly privileged as the preferred route toward the phenomenon Bruce Robbins has labeled "global feeling"—that is, a kind of cosmopolitanism that simultaneously blends an idealized "perspective from above" with "forms of national feeling" (13, 15). In this way, *The Sketch Book* dramatizes the paradox of a cosmopolitan nation born out of its own provincial isolation, or, at the very least, the rather self-consciousness fear among American writers, by no means unfounded, that European observers universally regarded America as the epitome of provincial isolation. On one hand, the text's embrace of provinciality helps it successfully stage scenes of intensely local sentimental attachment designed, as in the case of "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," to construct what Leonard Tennenhouse terms "an American difference"; that difference distinguishes an American understanding of what it means to be culturally English from the English version of the same thing (19). On the other hand, the narrative representation of provinciality establishes these sentimental attachments to particular places as the surest way to enter the global cultural milieu that treats Crayon, the "intelligent traveler," as an international "man of letters" partaking of an expansive cosmopolitan sensibility shared the world over. Seeking to balance these two alternatives as a model for imagining a kind of transatlantic nationalism that simultaneously exceeds and lives within the cultural boundaries of the nation, *The Sketch Book* offers a slightly different take on the phrase Kwame Anthony Appiah identifies as the "slogan" of cosmopolitanism: "universality plus difference" (151).

Irving's peculiar version of what an Anglophone cosmopolitanism might look like merits further attention in part because it challenges conventional literary histories that grant the novel primacy in shaping national cultural narratives. But it also deserves closer scrutiny because it elucidates locality's crucial aesthetic function at a historical moment we are prone

to associate with the "anti-local" consolidation of markets for print culture, dominated by efforts to assert coherent, overarching national tastes and preferences. More often than not, *The Sketch Book* encourages its readers to regard the sometimes uncomfortable encounters between local communities and their cosmopolitan observers—like Crayon—as opportunities for aesthetic contemplation, capable of communicating important truths about ideal forms of comportment, morality, and critical judgment in a world where the expansion of travel and global trade make such encounters increasingly common. Because they situate an aesthetically valued locality within the framework of global markets, the terms in which these encounters are imagined can effect a far-reaching recoding of provincial, metropolitan, local, and cosmopolitan categories. Read in this way, *The Sketch Book* holds up for inspection its own text as a kind of local commodity that travels far beyond its origins and, in so doing, acquires value as a medium of cultural exchange. Blurring the boundaries between cultural and marketable commodities in this way, Irving's fragmentary text articulates a view of transatlantic cultural relations that embraces the cultural logic whereby consumption is itself a form of taste, even as it turns that logic in upon itself by suggesting that those who are most lacking in the material goods capable of ensuring participation in global markets are actually far richer, culturally speaking, than their provincial status would seem to make them.

Speaking Volumes; or, Learning to Read Transatlantically

Scholars who study *The Sketch Book* have tended to develop a strangely bifurcated view of the text and, by extension, the particular moment in American literary history when it was produced. For the several generations of Americanists who have followed Leslie Fiedler's lead in regarding Rip Van Winkle as the quintessential "mythic American" (Leary

23), the text has always presented something of a puzzle.[4] On one hand, it contains such profoundly "American" tales as "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" and the aforementioned "Rip Van Winkle," a story that made so vivid an impression on its American readers that they spent the remainder of the century reinventing it in a variety of popular formats, including prints and illustrations, poetry, and plays.[5] On the other hand, the bulk of the sketches are not about obviously American subjects at all, but instead present readers with an odd jumble of sentimental vignettes and picturesque scenes taken primarily from English rural life—hardly the stuff of American myth. Thus, it is not too surprising that scholarship has given us two very different versions of *The Sketch Book*. In the first, we find "one of the first exercises in ambiguity in American fiction," presented in the form of Diedrich Knickerbocker's complex framing postscript to "Rip Van Winkle" where, we are told, Irving "filtered everything through an American consciousness" (Ferguson 529; Rubin-Dorsky 31). The other treats *The Sketch Book* as a text which "annex[es] the literary heritage of the Old World" and "echoes […] previous descriptions of rural England" (Pethers 145). In this view, Irving's work legitimates itself, in effect, by looking back to an earlier cultural moment. Often viewed as an outgrowth of Irving's personal psychoses and the general anxieties of early nineteenth-century American culture at large, this apparent tension within the text has, in turn, prompted many scholars to take one of two sides. Either *The Sketch Book* documents Irving's "anxiety and ambivalence about the Revolution, democracy, and the status of the expatriated author," as Steven Blakemore puts it, and is thus a testament to the "psychological pressures" involved in "writing out the ambiguities" of Irving's own distinctly

[4] In *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960), Fiedler argues Rip "presides over the birth of the American imagination" (6).

[5] Sarah F. Wood discusses the explosion of popular dramas based (sometimes very loosely) on "Rip Van Winkle" in the 1820s and beyond. See "Refusing to R.I.P.; or, Return of the Dispossessed: The Transatlantic Revivals of Irving's *Rip Van Winkle*" (2005).

American "place and time" (207).[6] Or, alternatively, the text merely "indulges […] American readers' fondness for 'olde England'" (Murray 212), engaging in a bit of sentimental nostalgia for its own sake—an assessment not too far from William Hazlitt's original criticism that Irving's work consisted mainly of tired "literary anachronisms" (5:267).[7]

This neat division of modern responses to Irving's work—one side giving us Irving the anxious, the other revealing Irving the provincial—recapitulates in a fairly straightforward way some of the larger problems that have faced scholars who wish to study American literature in broader transatlantic contexts. Tacitly postulating a direct, perhaps even causal, relationship between Irving's all-too-apparent Anglophilia and the forms of cultural anxiety they identify in American literature from this period, many scholars have come to see Irving's problematic status as representative of early nineteenth-century American culture more generally. It was a culture, we are told, that was troubled in equal parts by nagging doubts about remaining European influence in American life and internal political disputes, divisions manifested in public spectacles and the literary battles waged in the pages of magazines as much as through contested elections and political assemblies.[8] This continuity between debates internal to the new nation's political and cultural life and

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[6] There is a long tradition of psychologizing Irving's work, such that the apparent anxieties expressed in his writing become openings through which to glimpse the hidden psychological struggles of the man himself. Stanley T. Williams, Irving's major biographer of the early twentieth century, made much of the "depression" and "gloom" that repeatedly took hold of Irving early in his career (qtd. in Burstein 115). Brian Jay Jones goes somewhat further in his recent biography, describing Irving as "anxious" and "pressure[d," a man whose "moods swung from one extreme to the other" and who often "wandered zombielike through the streets of Liverpool" (132-135, 145).

[7] Hazlitt wrote, "Mr. Irving's writings are literary anachronisms. Instead of tracing the changes that have taken place in society since Addison or Fielding wrote, he transcribes their account in a different handwriting" (5:267).

[8] See David Waldsreicher's *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (1997) for one account of how public spectacles and performances were involved in the expression of various disputed forms of nationalism in the early United States. See also William Dowling, *Literary Federalism in the Age of Jefferson: Joseph Dennie and the Port Folio* (1999) for a discussion of the role literary periodicals and magazines played in shaping public debate about cultural identity during roughly the same period.

the way early nineteenth-century writers positioned themselves in relation to established English literary traditions has prompted some scholars to suggest that the divisiveness of the former effectively militarized the latter. For instance, Paul Giles, who elsewhere characterizes transatlantic cultural relations during the long eighteenth-century as an "insurrectionary division from within," observes, "The narratives of Washington Irving […] appear in a different light if they are understood as reflecting the suppressed *trauma of internecine conflict*" (3, 142; emphasis added). Fighting a long war to define themselves as distinct from—yet still related to—their English counterparts, American writers like Irving who perfected a "prismatic style" often looked to their peers on both sides of the Atlantic like they were trapped between what Giles classifies as "simple sycophancy to English traditions" and the demands of "literary nationalism" (143, 142).

If scholars are quick to find signs of transatlantic tensions in the work of American and English writers from the period, however, there is evidence to suggest that this sense of conflict has sometimes been overstated. While there was certainly no shortage of heated, antagonistic rhetoric announcing profound transatlantic divisions during the period, such language did little to diminish transatlantic contact or the exchange of ideas. What has often struck scholars as open conflict between English and American writers by no means overthrew the more fluid forms of cultural negotiation that highlighted similarities at least as often as they stressed differences. Consider the evidence offered by the material trade in books during the final years of the eighteenth century and the first two decades of the nineteenth. The American publishing industry underwent an unprecedented expansion during the thirty-year period following the formation of the United States, supplying the nation's growing population with an exponentially increasing stream of periodical publications, short fiction, novels, pamphlets, scientific treatises, primers, maps, and a variety

of other printed materials. Yet despite the growth of domestic print production, Americans continued to be avid consumers of English books as well, often in the form of direct imports from across the ocean. In fact, even as publishers in major American cities like Philadelphia, Boston, New York, Baltimore, and Charleston produced their own pirated editions of English texts, or purchased copyrights to produce English works legally, readers' demand meant the United States continued to participate actively in the transatlantic book trade.[9] As Tennenhouse observes, this "dependence on imported culture" offers important clues about the myriad ways in which an "American readership imagined itself as a nation of English readers," importing and consuming texts produced in England as one means of navigating a broader "conflict between diasporic cultures" (10, 127). And while it is true that American texts were neither published nor read with the same frequency in England as English texts were in the United States, a significant degree of reciprocity nonetheless existed, and American texts circulated with surprising regularity in Great Britain. In the case of Irving's work, no lesser writers than Sir Walter Scott, Lord Byron, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge were all said to have tracked down copies of *A History of New York* (1809), and according to one of Irving's biographers, "Charles Dickens later told Irving he had worn out his copy from carrying it around with him" (Jones 99).[10]

Read in the context of the transatlantic book trade and the cultural cross-pollination of English and American literary enterprises it enabled, *The Sketch Book*'s evident interest in

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[9] Copyright during this period differed substantially from the modern concept and legal codes, but unauthorized editions proved to be a major source of conflict between the U.S. and Great Britain. See Meredith McGill's *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting* (2003) for an overview of the legal and cultural disputes surrounding copyright in the nineteenth century

[10] In fact, the first English edition of *The Sketch Book* was published primarily so that Irving could claim the English copyright for the text, which had been threatened the previous year when English periodicals began reprinting some sketches taken from the early volumes of the American edition—clearly suggesting the existence of an English market for American writing.

books and their travels helps illuminate the fluidity of transatlantic relations and the concomitant questions of cultural identity in the early nineteenth century. Individual sketches function throughout the larger work as compressed meditations on the cultural significance of circulating texts. Running through *The Sketch Book* as a major leitmotif is the figure of the book itself, a continually evolving metaphor for the state of Anglo-American relations. Beginning with the introductory "The Author's Account of Himself" and "The Voyage," where Crayon introduces himself and his reasons for traveling to Europe, *The Sketch Book* repeatedly expresses a desire to see the world as a book. Indeed, Crayon confesses almost immediately that his experiences as a reader of European books motivate his decision to leave his native country. Although he asserts the United States is a nation so full of "the charms of nature" that "an American" "never need […] look beyond his own country for the sublime and beautiful of natural scenery," the young Crayon nevertheless admits to finding his "rambling propensity strengthened" by his textual encounters: "Books of voyages and travels became my passion, and in devouring their contents I neglected the regular exercises of the school" (744, 743). Trained at least in part by the books he has read, Crayon concedes the powerful attraction exerted through the medium of books that have made their way to America, noting how "Europe held forth the charms of storied and poetical association" (744).

On their surface, such comments merely reiterate the commonplace view among nineteenth-century writers that Europe, owing to its extended history and its long-established cultural traditions, had simply had more time to amass a vast store of such "charms." As Crayon puts it, "My native country was full of youthful promise; Europe was rich in the accumulated treasures of age" (744). But Irving's version of this common refrain also tropes England as the contents of the stories and poems readers like Crayon have come

to associate with it: "Her very ruins *told the history* of times gone by, and every mouldering stone *was a chronicle*" (744; emphasis added). Indeed, to Crayon's book-fed imagination Europe so closely resembles a novel or romance that he anticipates his travels will, in the manner of good narrative fiction, enable him to "escape […] from the commonplace realities of the present," granting an opportunity to "lose" himself "among the shadowy grandeurs of the past" (744). Crayon's words strongly echoes the language employed by the standard eighteenth-century critique of novels: namely, that they promoted unrealistic expectations of novelty and adventure, and consequently seduced their readers into lives of disappointment and eventual dissipation. The peculiar fiction that one could "lose" oneself in the world of imaginative writing was a product of the eighteenth-century's blurring of generic and formal conventions, with novels that often called themselves histories legitimating themselves by claiming to instruct even as they secretly promised pleasure.[11] Here, however, Crayon's remarks translate the vocabulary of these earlier critiques into an idiom which recasts as a readerly experience the negotiation of cultural distinctions. By using the familiar metaphor of the book, Crayon can neutralize the potentially uncanny experience of encountering transatlantic differences simply by suggesting such encounters follow the predictable logic of imaginative fiction.

When speaking of Crayon introductory remarks, scholars often focus on the passage immediately following this one, where he indulges in a moment of what Paul Giles terms "the ironic mode of burlesque" (144) by expressing a desire to "visit this land of wonders […] and see the gigantic race from which" he has "degenerated" (744). To be sure, Crayon's

[11] See J. Paul Hunter, "The Novel and Social/Cultural History" (1996): "What did readers seek in novels and what did they find? Pleasure, of course, first and foremost: the joy of escape from drudgery or routine; the pleasure of a story well told and a plot carefully built; satisfaction in seeing outcomes (and even solutions) in the recognizable situations of daily life" (22).

joke at the expense of both the English and American participants in the previous century's debates about physical and cultural degeneration in the New World is just that—a joke. But the sly mockery of the "great men of Europe" also employs a rationalist paradigm to arrive at an irrational—and risible—conclusion, the seemingly logical geographical comparison between the Alps and the highlands along the Hudson becoming absurd only at the moment the vastly different heights of the two ranges begin to predict cultural differences. In light of the passage that precedes it, Crayon's parody of these sorts of transatlantic comparisons and the people who make them takes on a more nuanced meaning, if only because the "gigantic race of men" provide the very "history" and "chronicle[s]" that set Crayon's expectations for his "escape" to Europe. Here, as before, the juxtaposition silently plays upon a transatlantic cultural geography now figured textually. The latter passage recasts in cultural terms its initial emphasis on the two continents' physical features, while the former, working in the opposite direction, derives from an already abstracted textual idiom a means of metaphorically spatializing the process of cultural transmission. If travel to Europe may be experienced in a manner akin to reading a novel, that is, then the act of situating cultural meaning in physical space (signified by the locations of the "ruined castle" and the "falling tower") constitutes a method for narrating alternative textual geographies. Read against one another in this way, the two passages show how the vocabulary of books and reading underwrites the mode of ironic detachment Crayon wields throughout the *The Sketch Book*. That these readerly metaphors help him narrate a tale of European degeneration, drawing attention to "shadowy grandeurs of the past" that imply a diminished state in the present, is merely an added irony.

Although this opening episode hints at how the figure of the book authorizes a rich language for inverting conventional narratives about the persistent cultural ties between England and its former colonies, Crayon generally enlists its aid for conciliatory rather than

antagonistic ends. In the very next sketch, "The Voyage," Crayon deploys the same bookish vocabulary as a trope for the underlying similarities that link the two sides of the Atlantic. Musing on how "a wide sea voyage severs us at once" from "our homes," Crayon describes the transatlantic passage thus: "As I watched the last blue line of my native land fade away like a cloud on the horizon, it seemed as if I had closed one volume of the world and its concerns, and had time for meditation before I opened another" (746-747). Cast as the brief interlude between putting down one book and picking up another, the journey becomes the means of introducing an important sense of equivalence that will reappear at regular intervals throughout the rest of the narrative. Once they have been figured as twin volumes sitting in the same library, in other words, England and America can be placed on equal footing within the analogical framework that reads geography as text in *The Sketch Book*.

Crayon's ability to read the world like a text plays a vital role in the narratives of cultural identity that emerge as *The Sketch Book* progresses. In subsequent sketches, Crayon repeatedly turns to texts and the libraries that house them in order to situate himself both literally and metaphorically in his new European surroundings. In "Roscoe," the story of the Liverpool banker and writer William Roscoe after he has fallen on hard times, Crayon first gets his bearings in the unfamiliar city not by wandering its streets or following a map, but rather by making a beeline for the library. "One of the first places to which a stranger is taken," he writes in the sketch's first line, "is the Athenaeum. It […] contains a good library and spacious reading room and is the great literary resort of the place" (752). Once he has surrounded himself with books, Crayon soon sheds the feeling of being "a stranger in the land" (751) and finds himself at home in this English library. Later in *The Sketch Book*, several comic sketches further develop this reliance on books as means of orienting oneself, presenting "odd day dreams" involving books that come to life and engage Crayon in

dialogue. In "The Art of Book Making," for example, modern authors appear as "lawless plunderers" who collect "the beauties and fine thoughts of ancient and obsolete writers"—but their "pilfering" ways, Crayon makes clear, both drive "the trade" in literary "wares" and preserves valuable "classic lore" that would otherwise be "forgotten" and "seldom read" (810-811, 809). In another sketch, "The Mutability of Literature," Crayon comes across "a little thick quarto" that strikes up a conversation, beginning "with railings about the neglect of the world" and quickly escalating into a charged debate on the status of "modern scribblers" and the competing demands of cultural "circulation" and preservation (856, 859, 857). Both sketches poke fun at conventions of scholarship and the state of modern literary production, but they also remind us that printed texts remain the cardinal directions inscribed on Crayon's cultural compass. Moreover, a sketch like "The Mutability of Literature" implies one's "home" in the wider world is found, somewhat paradoxically, only by retreating into the world of books. It is no coincidence that the dialogue it stages is precipitated when "an irruption of madcap boys" outside prompts Crayon to seek "refuge from their noise by penetrating still deeper into the solitude […] of the library" (854).

This somewhat perverse vision of Crayon's cosmopolitanism as a form of literary retreat calculates "home" according to the presence or absence of books, but it does so by indulging a kind of literary tourism that also serves to level various forms of transatlantic differences. Scholars sometimes regard Crayon as a "tasteful traveller" whose clear predilection for travel "emphasizes his 'homeless' situation" (Schnell; Murray 215). But Crayon's affinity for bookish encounters in dreaming as well as waking life challenges such views by suggesting the literate traveler can effectively find himself at home wherever he goes simply by keeping company with good books. Rather than "*seek* homelessness," as Laura Murray claims, Crayon instead aims to persuade his readers that culture actually travels

quite well, and that the truly cosmopolitan subject is the individual whose familiarity with the world of literature permits him to create new homes wherever he goes. In turn, Crayon's highly self-conscious relationship to books and libraries allows Irving to construct an ideal Anglo-American subject whose relationship to such a concept of "home" makes it possible to contemplate abstract notions of cultural reproduction and cultural loss in transatlantic contexts.

Roscoe's early appearance in *The Sketch Book* vividly illustrates this phenomenon. Soon after orienting himself in his new surroundings by visiting the Liverpool Atheneum, Crayon turns his attention to what appear to be the important cultural differences separating his American "countrymen" from their English counterparts. He focuses particularly closely on the tendency among American readers to apply lofty "poetical ideas" to European writers who he finds do not, in fact, live in a rarified state of "literary glory" but rather are "among the busy sons of traffic" (752-753). While their "involuntary feeling of veneration" for English writers without regard to actual circumstances exposes American readers' provincial naiveté, its significance for Crayon runs much deeper. Roscoe's birth "in a place apparently ungenial to the growth of literary talent" and his initial immersion "in the very market place of trade; without fortune, family connexions or patronage" make him the most unlikely of candidates for titles like "elegant historian," "celebrity," and "genius." Nonetheless, "self-promoted, self-sustained, and almost self-taught, he has conquered every obstacle, achieved his way to eminence, and […] turned the whole force of his talents and influence to advance and embellish his native town" (752-753). Simply put, he acts in every way as Crayon's model subject.

Roscoe's utility as a model for the cultural ambitions of the United States, a country frequently described in the early nineteenth century in terms of its similarly low origins, does

not pass Crayon by unnoticed. In fact, Crayon explicitly calls attention to the possibility of emulating Roscoe's success in America:

> His private life is peculiarly worthy of the attention of the citizens of this young and busy country, where literature and the elegant arts must grow up side by side with the coarser plants of daily necessity; and must depend for their culture, not on the exclusive devotion of time and wealth, nor the quickening rays of title patronage, but on hours and seasons snatched from the pursuit of worldly interests, by intelligent and public spirited individuals (754).

But Crayon does not stop with the suggestion that "public spirited" Americans would do well to emulate this English model and bring cultural advances to the United States just as Roscoe has done for Liverpool. Instead, he turns the tables by suggesting that American readers possess a valuable cultural sensibility their English counterparts lack. When Roscoe is forced to sell his treasured library to pay business debts incurred in the financial crisis of 1816, "the good people of the community" gather greedily "like wreckers to get some part of the noble vessel that had been driven on shore" (756). They are wholly insensible "of what was due to Mr. Roscoe and themselves," and their "regard [for] him merely as a man of business … engaged like themselves in ordinary occupations" blinds Roscoe's fellow Liverpudlians to the "steady value" that has accrued in the intellectual and cultural repository of his library. Roscoe's misfortunes thus provide Crayon with the material for crafting a narrative in which American respect for accumulated cultural knowledge and the physical trappings of cultural refinement triumphs over an unexpected outbreak of English philistinism.

In Crayon's retelling, the loss of treasured books—and the significant diminution of cultural capital it signifies—becomes a way for readers on both sides of the Atlantic to imagine a new mode of cultural refinement in relation to the literary cosmopolitanism *The Sketch Book* champions. Crayon concludes the sketch by reprinting Roscoe's famous sonnet

to his lost books, a poem whose comparison of printed texts to dear friends clearly strikes a chord with Crayon's own propensity to animate his reading material with human qualities. Now, however, Crayon's sentimental description of the poem as "a faithful transcript from the writer's own heart" (757) provocatively upends the formula for treating books as people. In fact, it goes so far as to suggest the individual's cultural position is, in effect, a textual object. If the workings of the heart are made known to the world in the form of a written "transcript," the poem invites its readers to ask, then what is the individual's full emotional life but a vast library of such texts? As Crayon points out, only the act of "parting with his books seems to have touched" Roscoe's "tenderest feelings" and "provoke[d] the notice of his muse" (756): the public dissolution of the physical library exposes the contents of the private emotional one. In light of Crayon's final remarks in the sketch, the sentimental attachments linking people and their books also become an opportunity for introducing what will become one of the central cultural problematics in *The Sketch Book*. In yet another richly metaphoric move, Crayon describes Roscoe as "the literary landmark" of Liverpool, a towering presence "indicating its existence to the distant Scholar" (757). For Crayon, the ideal subject is the "intelligent traveler" sensible to the guiding influence of such cultural markers. This is the same ideal subject who orients himself in the world according to real books—the Liverpool Athenaeum, say, or the archives of the British Museum—as well as the figurative texts he finds in the contours of landscapes and the shapes of buildings—the "blue line" of the American horizon or the "ruined castle" of the European countryside.

Reading the world in light of Crayon's literary sensibilities suggests that the real stakes of Roscoe's situation involve the contested question of who controls the symbolic intermapping of cultural and geographic terrains. Those stakes become clearer in the essay "English Writers on America" which opens the second American volume of *The Sketch Book*.

Ostensibly an argument against the "numerous prejudices" about the United States disseminated in the "London press," the essay initially takes English writers to task for their "splenetic remark[s]" and "illiberal spirit of ridicule" of all things American. Condemning English travelers who write about the United States as members of a semi-literate species of "broken down tradesman, the scheming adventurer, the wandering mechanic, the Manchester and Birmingham agent," Crayon suggests that the "themes" America "offers for contemplation are too vast and elevated for their capacities" (787). Such Englishmen, he argues, lack the inclination do anything but weave a "tissue of misrepresentations" and are too stupid to see their portrayals of a country they don't understand as no more substantial than "cobwebs, woven round the limbs of an infant giant" (789). This is the consequence, it would seem, of *not* cultivating the sort of literate cosmopolitanism Crayon models elsewhere—the natural extension, perhaps, of the way of thinking that led Roscoe's fellow citizens to treat the demise of his treasured library as a public spectacle.

Rather than answer English charges in kind, however, Crayon goes on to praise the strong cultural and literary ties that persist between the two nations in spite of such antagonisms. The United States' birth in "an enlightened and philosophic age," Crayon insists, make it the nation's duty to "shake off" these "national prejudices" and instead focus on transatlantic relations as a new text that deserves to be "studied":

> Let it be the pride of our writers, therefore, discarding all feelings or irritation and disdaining to retaliate […] to speak of the English nation without prejudice, and with determined candour[…]. We may thus place England before us as a perpetual volume of reference, wherein are recorded sound deductions from ages of experience; and while we avoid the errors and absurdities which may have crept into the page, we may draw from thence golden maxims of practical wisdom, wherewith to strengthen and embellish our national character. (793-794).

The passage follows a conventional understanding of English culture as something to be emulated and preserved by American writers, but it also proffers the more novel idea that

Americans will be in a position to avoid "errors and absurdities" in their pursuit of cultural legitimacy only if they learn to read this "perpetual volume of reference" in the right way. It is a view of Anglo-American cultural relations that promises to fulfill on a national level the personal desire Benjamin Franklin had expressed in his *Autobiography* (1771-1790) to correct the great "Errata" of his own life.

If both people and places can be thought of as texts, as Crayon repeatedly insists, then who is qualified to read them, and to what end? What does treating the transatlantic transmission of culture as a book say about the complex relationship among culture, language, and identity in this period? In part, the answer to these questions lies in the period's continued interest in theorizing language itself as a national phenomenon, something that had begun with eighteenth-century Enlightenment thinkers like Adam Smith and Hugh Blair only to be taken up in the United States by people like Noah Webster. As Leonard Tennenhouse has pointed out, language theorists were ultimately less interested in lexicography and grammar than they were in continuing "a process of national redefinition" that had begun decades before in Great Britain; their focus on language became a way to debate "aesthetic matters" and pose "the question of what consequences might ensue from the political break with Britain" (19). Even as newspapers, magazines, novels, and dictionaries helped hash out matters of national language, however, the notion of that there existed certain universal languages of feeling, sentiment, and taste complicated the issue. In sentimental novels and poems, the "citizen of the world" remained a compelling figure precisely because he suggested how nations defined by particular communities speaking a shared language could maintain important cultural contact with the rest of the globe. Frequent expositions on the sentimental language of the heart, for instance, were staples of Anglophone literature from the 1760s onward. In England, Laurence Sterne's popular

Tristram Shandy (1759-1767) and *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (1768), and Henry Mackenzie' *The Man of Feeling* (1771), solidified—even as they lightly satirized—the harmonious integration of national literary language and international modes of feeling.[12] In the United States, English novels like these as well as staples such as Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* and *Clarissa* coexisted both with homegrown versions of the sentimental novel—for instance, William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy* (1789) and Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette* (1797)—as well as more eccentric texts, like Hugh Henry Brackenridge's *Modern Chivalry* (1792-1797), that incorporated close attention to language directly into the narrative.

With the belief that one's language was a marker of national affiliation, and the accompanying understanding that such markers were themselves surrogates for cultural identity, came an equally widespread concern with what this might mean for transatlantic relations. After all, if language defined Americans as different from their contemporaries living in England, then could it not also be said that their linguistic differences, understood as cultural differences, rendered Americans unfit or unable to participate in English cultural practices in general? While such concerns might be liberating in some contexts, they could also be deeply troubling for those who chose to stake their own cultural authority on maintaining a sense of Englishness. In this context, Crayon's concerted efforts to convince readers of *The Sketch Book* to see the world as a book is a strategy that anticipates—and even encourages—questions about the legibility of "books" broadly construed. After all, if there are multiple English "languages," then Americans like Crayon are in essence required to become multilingual, cosmopolitan subjects who count among their skills the power to make

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[12] See, for instance, Everett Zimmerman, "Fragments of History and *The Man of Feeling*: From Richard Bentley to Walter Scott" (1990). See also Stephen Ahern, *Affected Sensibilities: Romantic Excess and the Genealogy of the Novel* (2007); John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (1988); and Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Novel Beginnings: Experiments in Eighteenth-Century English Fiction* (2006).

sense of the world's many languages, or at the very least the Atlantic world's multiple Englishness.

In this regard, Crayon's compulsive reliance on the rhetoric of books—their ownership, their production, and their circulation begins to make a different kind of sense. Construed as a cultural imperative for his fellow Americans to become better readers, and to read the world more widely, this feature of *The Sketch Book* posits a cosmopolitan readerly sensibility as the solution to the uneven distribution of cultural assets in the Anglophone world. Read in this way, the text becomes an instruction manual—it's own "perpetual volume of reference," in Crayon's phrase—that deploys examples of cultural legibility or illegibility to teach American readers how to see themselves in relation to an established English literary and cultural history. An essay like "English Writers on America" thus becomes something other than a complaint against the injustice of English misrepresentation and a simultaneous call for American writers to show a greater generosity of spirit than their English antagonists. Rather, it envisions an alternative cosmopolitan model for Americans to consider themselves culturally English, one in which the ideal subject forms affective bonds by learning to read places and people as if they were books.

Things are not quite so straightforward as the birth of this bookish subject might suggest, however. After all, books appear throughout *The Sketch Book* in contexts that seem to expose the potential for new kinds of transatlantic differences despite reconciling old ones. Even sketches like "The Art of Book Making" and "The Mutability of Literature" implicitly raise such a possibility, since their setting in vast, albeit underutilized, archives suggests England's role as a center of cultural accumulation that the United States could not hope to rival. Moreover, by virtue of its transatlantic publication and its intended audience of educated Anglo-American readers, *The Sketch Book* does not simply model Englishness for

American readers but, in reciprocal fashion, also seeks to model American cultural practices before English audiences. Given the propensity of English cultural arbiters to dismiss the idea that Americans could serve as models for much of anything—something Crayon acknowledges in "English Writers on America"—one might ask what made the text compelling reading for its prospective buyers in England. No doubt the value of *The Sketch Book* for an English reader lay partly in its representation of rural and Native American life in sketches such as "Traits of Indian Character" and "Philip of Pokanoket," and tales like "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" and "Rip Van Winkle" that would become immensely popular. But a more substantial reason for thinking *The Sketch Book* makes a real value proposition to its English readers may be found in the promise of *mutual* legibility it extends to its transatlantic audience. In the end, the point of Crayon's determined textual metaphors and refined literary cosmopolitanism is to instruct his audience to read transatlantically.

Cosmopolitan Legibility Becomes Portable Locality

If the bookish metaphors of *The Sketch Book* suggest how the material circulation of printed texts shaped English and American views of the world by authorizing new discursive and aesthetic possibilities, the text's emphasis on particular sites of textual and cultural consumption indicates the continued relevance of locality in the early nineteenth-century negotiation of Anglo-American relations. As most of its readers would attest, *The Sketch Book* is deeply invested in the construction of highly romanticized—indeed, one might say mythologized—narratives of English rural simplicity and virtue that would hardly seem to qualify as cosmopolitan under almost any definition of the word. And yet, if we consider Crayon's ability to make himself at home anywhere there are books to be read or bookish

comparisons to be made, we can begin to see how such seemingly narrow rural scenes reveal important "cosmopolitan vistas" in the heart of the English landscape.[13]

A brief survey of these vistas in *The Sketch Book* shows that their distinctly local quality has little, if anything, to do with their rural isolation *per se*. Rather, in Crayon's view the likeliest settings for depicting moments of powerful local affection are defined by a somewhat different set of characteristics. At the top of the list is the apparent isolation all such sites seem to have in common. That isolation, however, is less an effect of geographic distance than it is the product of a particular mental outlook, an almost deliberate decision to exclude, ignore, or mask anything beyond a given locale's immediate precincts. This makes such places largely inaccessible to the outside world. At the same time, the places that Crayon generally treats as fully local are widely distributed across England, and range across a large set of possible environments. Sketches like "The Country Church," "The Widow and Her Son," "Rural Funerals", and "The Pride of the Village" appear in relation to rural settings, but others, like "Westminster Abbey," "Little Britain," and "John Bull," imagine the possibility of finding similarly isolated pockets in the heart of a busy metropolis. Indeed, for all the emphasis on the specifically rural nature of Crayon's picturesque style, a significant portion of *The Sketch Book* focuses on the position of such communities within Great Britain's cultural and commercial capital, a setting Crayon deplores elsewhere as "calculated to make men selfish and uninteresting" (796).

It is in the latter group of sketches that Crayon most clearly articulates his notion of what distinguishes local spaces from their surroundings. For example, in "Little Britain," a

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[13] I am borrowing the phrase "cosmopolitan vistas" from the title of Tom Lutz's *Cosmopolitan Vistas: American Regionalism and Literary Value* (2004). The appropriation is a liberal one, since the book examines a much later period in American literary history, but it is not without some basis given Lutz's own interest in the concept of literary cosmopolitanism as it participated in the representation of local and regional spaces.

sketch devoted to a London neighborhood wholly "wrapped up in its own concerns, its own habits, and its own opinions," he notes that its existence as a small, self-contained "fragment" of the larger city makes it ideally suited to be "a sound heart to this great fungous metropolis" (977). The arrangement of Little Britain's peculiar physical features—its "narrow streets and courts" and "venerable and dilapidated houses—as well as its preservation of unique cultural practices like the "holyday games and customs of yore" constitute a major part of its identity as a discrete locality. Crayon even goes so far as suggest that this set of features, seemingly lifted from England's early modern past, are significant precisely because they persist in the midst of the metropolis, drawing their power to signify a distinct local community from their ongoing resistance to the pressures of urban modernization. In fact, this inward sense of collective identity and shared traditions proves to be the central point of contact between the local community and the outside world. Crayon points out that "Little Britain has its long catalogues of city wonders, which its inhabitants consider the wonders of the world" (971). The knowing metropolitan reader would no doubt take such a pronouncement as evidence of the fundamentally provincial nature of Little Britain's view of "the world." That Crayon's description goes out of its way to invite this response, however, suggests that provoking such judgments is a significant motivation for sketching out a general concept of locality in the first place. Through such imagined responses to Little Britain's seemingly naive pretensions to a place on the world stage, that is, Crayon envisions locality as a double-edged mode of critique that stands between the competing claims of provincial and metropolitan culture.

Locality's role as a lens for inspecting both metropolitan and provincial claims to cultural authority means that it also functions as a tool for aesthetic judgment in *The Sketch Book*. "The Pride of the Village" provides an example of how a place, once granted the status

of locality by the text, renders in aesthetic terms the implied hierarchies of metropolitan and provincial cultural relationships. The sketch offers an account of a woman who wastes away after the man she loves, a young military officer, dishonors her by proposing she accompany him, unmarried, to the Continent. Even though no seduction occurs, the woman is so "shock[ed]" by "the destruction of all her ideal world" that she retreats into "silence and loneliness" and ultimately, when she senses she is nearing her final days, writes her former lover a letter blaming him for her imminent death. Predictably, her "repentant lover" returns just in time for her to "extend her trembling hand" to him, smile, and expire (1045-1047). What makes this otherwise unremarkable sentimental tableau stand out is Crayon's desire to treat it as an incident imbued with exceptional meaning by virtue of its cultural and spatial position—features we can think of as having to do primarily with its form—rather than its content. The village where Crayon first hears the story is located at "one of those cross roads that lead through the more secluded parts of the country," a place he visits only because he has already embarked on "an excursion through one of the remote counties of England." From Crayon's perspective, this remoteness is the most significant feature of the place: "[I] stopped one afternoon at a village, the situation of which was beautifully rural and retired. There was an air of primitive simplicity about its inhabitants, not be found in the villages which lie on the great coach roads" (1040).

Emphasizing its existence outside the normal networks of travel and trade that frame *The Sketch Book* as a whole, this description of the village makes what amounts to an aesthetic case for the cultural value Crayon locates in the sentimental events of the story he hears there. For Crayon, the village's "primitive simplicity" is instrumental in rendering the location beautiful; its beauty, in turn, underwrites his claims that the story's contents are neither "trite" nor "insignificant," despite their obvious adherence to the sentimental

formulas of the rakish seducer and the virtuous woman. Indeed, fully aware that the story's derivative nature means it cannot satisfy the "present rage for strange incident and high seasoned narrative," Crayon instead stakes its true value on the formal "particulars" of its retelling in this remote village (1047). Those "particulars," however, do not derive from any specific features of the narrative or its setting. Rather, they originate in precisely that generic quality Crayon fears will lead readers to dismiss the tale as "insignificant." Crayon's desire to persuade us that the unremarkable can be made remarkable or noteworthy by virtue of its "beautifully" remote setting becomes the account's most important feature, a symptom of the sentimental form adapted to the representation of a new sense of locality. In this way, what initially looks like a standard sentimental tale soon reveals itself to be an illustration of how locality functions at the level of form, an aesthetic effect that transforms the absence of meaning—the "insignificant" blankness of undifferentiated rural space—into cultural presence. It is the formation of locality as the act that writes something out of nothing.

Sketches like "Little Britain" and "The Pride of the Village" strongly suggest that the qualities most often mistaken for conservative nostalgia in *The Sketch Book* are actually symptomatic of its investment in interrogating the conditions under which the inwardness of local communities draws the attention and approbation of external observers. The text's examination of isolation is part of its larger meditation on the relationship between local communities and the cultural life of the nation as a whole—a weighing of the competing demands of national cohesion and local autonomy, as it were. From the perspective of many Americans of Irving's generation, this concern for the balance between the local and the national no doubt resonated powerfully with the debates that had shaped the Federalist and Anti-Federalist political battles of the 1790s and that, with the Jeffersonian ascendance of the following decade, still retained a sense of remarkable urgency. But *The Sketch Book* does

not seek to resolve the apparent tensions between local and national perspectives so much as it attempts to understand the nation according to the conditions of locality it invents. This is one of the main reasons we repeatedly find Crayon—or, on occasion, Irving's other famous persona, Diedrich Knickerbocker—praising the representativeness of some village or other on the grounds that it satisfies a *general* sense of what such villages should look like. The true object of attention in such cases, however, is not the village as a *specific* place. Instead, the settings that rise to this level of aesthetic interest across *The Sketch Book* are those that strategically divulge their locality in conspicuously narrative form, namely, through the stories, myths, and legend that only members of the community can know.

The reasons for Crayon's interest in the story he retells in "The Pride of the Village" are instructive in this regard. Drawn to learn more of "this village story" after witnessing the young woman's funeral entirely by chance, Crayon tells us he pursues the matter until he obtains "the whole story of the deceased" that evening at the village inn. Crayon's briefly deferred knowledge is no accident, but rather an important detail whose significance is twofold. On one level it allows him, someone who does not originally belong to the community, to perform the feat of gaining access. As a result, in showing how he enters the community by first learning and then repeating the story, he positions himself as a qualified observer and arbiter of the true cultural value assigned to the conceptual beauty of the "primitive simplicity" the story ostensibly imparts to us. Thus, in a somewhat paradoxical fashion, Crayon's entry into the particular community formed by the narrative becomes a sign of his cultural status as a refined and sensitive man of the world. At the same time, Crayon's retelling of "the whole story" suggests that what is at stake is not access to *this* story (as opposed to all the other stories he no doubt has heard in other village inns), but rather his ability to reproduce the cultural value in *any* story by means of the familiar signifiers of

locality we encounter here. For Crayon, whose bookish cosmopolitanism is already well known to the reader, this represents the possibility of detaching the very concept of the local from any particular location. Instead, it can be treated as a new cultural commodity to be circulated, transmitted back and forth across the Atlantic, or picked up and carried wherever in the world one might want to go. This is the process through which cosmopolitan legibility—the power to read the world—is remade as a form of locality that can travel this world.

The New Provincialism

At the beginning of this chapter, I claimed that Irving's particular brand of locality in *The Sketch Book* aligns itself with a new mode of provincialism, a sense that the local's expressive power ultimately lies in its ability to become provincial instead of metropolitan. As the sketches I have examined so far would suggest, this coordination owes more to locality's apparent rejection of basic metropolitan premises than it does to any overt allegiance to provinciality as such. Indeed, Irving's version of local culture in England is indirectly authorized by an unqualified scorn for urbanity that writers, particularly those using satire for conservative social purposes, had long linked to metropolitan settings. While Crayon presents himself as the consummate cosmopolitan, that is, he does little to disguise his distaste for the metropolis in all its forms. As he notes in "Rural Life in England,"

> In some countries, the large cities absorb the wealth and fashion of the nation; they are the only fixed abodes of elegant and intelligent society and the country is inhabited almost entirely by boorish peasantry. In England, on the contrary, the metropolis is a mere gathering place, or a general rendezvous of the polite circles, where they devote a small portion of the year to hurry of gaiety and dissipation, and having indulged this kind of carnival, return again to the apparently more congenial habits of rural life. The various orders of society are therefore diffused over the whole surface of the kingdom … (795).

Pointedly rejecting the conventional view of the metropolis as the "fixed" center of "elegant and intelligent society" and all other places as the domain of "boorish peasantry," this description of English society's natural affinity for life outside the metropolis imagines provincial settings as the most "congenial" sites for the "sensibility," "refinement," "taste and elegance" Crayon finds wherever he travels in the English countryside (795, 797). Eschewing an "immense metropolis" that he views as being "calculated to make men selfish and uninterested," he argues that the ostensible virtues of the metropolis are best realized outside of it, distributed across the "common features" of the rural "English landscape" and found, appropriately enough, in the "local attachments, that speak deeply and touchingly for the moral character of the nation" (800).

What happens, though, when there is no English landscape, and when scenes that present themselves as provincial alternatives to an unpleasant metropolis are situated in America rather than England? I want to answer this question by considering briefly the two tales that are, outwardly, the most provincial in *The Sketch Book*: "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow." In their status as cultural artifacts endlessly circulated, consumed, and repackaged in the decades following their publication—and later collected in twentieth-century anthologies designed to fix and reproduce a concept of "American literature"—the two stories can claim the unusual distinction of being temporally and spatially removed from imagined centers of Anglo-American culture even as their ubiquity masquerades as the closest thing to metropolitan cultural authority one can find in the early nineteenth-century United States. That rural scenes from a colonial and early national past might be considered provincial is perhaps obvious, but that such scenes should come to dominate discussions of that past indicates just how powerfully alluring the representation of provinciality can be when it becomes the basis for narratives of national origins. As Edward Watts writes,

nineteenth-century "provincialist writing" in the United States employed images of "the bucolic countryside" to assist "the hierarchization of the metropolitan above the local," so that it ultimately "stabilized" the very system that considered local settings to be entirely marginal (168). In Watt's view, a tale like "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" is an example of how scenes of the local, "locked in the past," reinforce metropolitan superiority by reminding readers of "the more sophisticated setting of the writing, narrating, and reading of the story" (168). Rather than accept that Irving's American form of locality only operates as "literary tourism" that serves a "colonialist" metropolitanism, as Watts maintains, I want to explore the alternate possibility that "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" work to consolidate national identity not by promoting metropolitanism but instead by insisting cultural identity in the United States become newly provincial.

As many commentators have noted over the years, "Rip Van Winkle" theorizes the relationship between national self-understanding and historical memory at a moment when American readers and consumers of culture were clearly concerned with narrating the country's origins.[14] In his study of how such narratives were expressed and shaped by their performance in public settings, David Waldstreicher has persuasively argued that a pattern of "nationalist regionalisms" emerged across the United States in the first decades of the nineteenth century, with different parts of the new country expressing "conflicting visions" of national political identity (247). This profusion of different nationalisms, demarcated by regional, racial, and class distinctions, frequently defied efforts to articulate any single national culture. Instead, national identity during this period was defined largely by its *lack* of

[14] For instance, see Robert Hughes, "Sleepy Hollow: Fearful Pleasures and the Nightmare of History" (2005); David Anthony, "'Gone Distracted': 'Sleepy Hollow,' Gothic Masculinity, and the Panic of 1819" (2005); and Richard McLamore, "The Dutchman in the Attic: Claiming an Inheritance in *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon*" (2000).

cohesion—that is, by the multiplication of possible modes of national feeling and affiliation. As Jared Gardner has suggested, *The Sketch Book* re-enacts this multiplicity formally, using the miscellany's standard generic techniques of juxtaposition, non sequitur, and seemingly arbitrary collection to represent just such an understanding of national communities. And more than any other story in *The Sketch Book*, "Rip Van Winkle" dramatizes this kind of proliferation through its examination of the narrative life of local communities, teasing out and exposing for a transatlantic readership these communities' capacity for generating multiple historical narratives.[15]

The story's beginning in an act of historical distancing, with a comment (presumably Crayon's) regarding its origins in a document "found among the papers of the late Diedrich Knickerbocker," links it humorously to Irving's *A History of New York* (1809), a text whose popularity introduced large numbers of readers on both sides of the Atlantic to the satiric possibilities of reading regional histories as though they were national narratives. Framing "Rip Van Winkle" within this sort of comic history allows Irving to present it as story that will make Knickerbocker's alternative mode of historical memory an instrumental part of reclaiming provinciality. As another production of Knickerbocker's pen, "Rip Van Winkle" announces from the start its position in a field of historical indeterminacy, where particular incidents mean different things depending upon the locations from which the act of remembering them is narrated: local inflection literally made into history. When Rip returns to his native village after twenty years of sleep in the Kaatskills, during which he misses the events of the American Revolution and the political birth of the United States, the narrator's

[15] In "The Literary Museum and the Unsettling of the American Novel" (2000), Gardner states that texts from the early national period "worked to reject any notion of a true voice that would reduce the complex weave of contradictory voices and positions to a monologic discourse." Instead, the aesthetic of the miscellany, with its "motley and cacophonous quality," enabled them to develop "alternative models to the political and literary choices that were being narrated and naturalized at the time" (745).

regard for the small changes to the sign of the village inn is a case in point. Through a little selective editing and the substitution of a few small pictorial details, the original portrait of King George III has become that of George Washington; the royal crown is now Washington's tricorn hat and the scepter has been replaced by a sword. The sign's place within the narrative offers the possibility of arriving at competing interpretations: either it suggests the vast changes that have occurred since the Revolution, or it suggests, just as plausibly, that the political and social changes of the Revolution have been little more than cosmetic. In its ability to satisfy equally both interpretations, however, the sign functions as a reminder of the slipperiness of meaning within historical narratives of collective identity. Understood as the sign of cultural authority, in other words, it offers a visual metaphor for the process through which narratives of national origin co-opt local markers of community to satisfy the aims of those in a position to narrate history.

Knickerbocker's spectral presence, hovering about the story's threshold, is not limited to this understanding of historical indeterminacy, although the narrative does invite its readers to engage with questions about the meaning of history and its relationship to local, regional, and national self-understanding. Knickerbocker's framing narrative also serves as a way of linking "Rip Van Winkle," a story often removed from its context and treated as an isolated point of American literary origins, to the thematic concerns of *The Sketch Book* as a whole. The persistence of the bookish metaphors that characterize Crayon's view of Anglophone culture and its transatlantic circulation is one such element of continuity. The story opens by reviving this set of metaphors to describe Knickerbocker's relation to the community described in its pages. Anything but a typical historian, Knickerbocker approaches his "historical researches" in a particularly revealing way:

> [They] did not lie so much among books, as among men; for the former are lamentably scanty in his favourite topics; whereas he

> found the old burghers, and still more, their wives, rich in that legendary lore so invaluable to true history. Whenever […] he happened upon a genuine Dutch family […] he looked upon it a little clasped volume of black letter, and studied it with the zeal of a bookworm. (767)

Knickerbocker's outlook as a historian initially rejects what Crayon holds fundamentally true, namely, the notion that books may be productively used to situate oneself within one's social and cultural surroundings. But it soon becomes clear that the distinction is a false one, with the narrator using just such a metaphor to describe Knickerbocker's own valuation of his sources. Recast as "little […] volume[s]," the Dutch families that so interest the historian acquire the figurative status of texts, so that they share a powerful claim to cultural authority with the books and libraries Crayon reveres.

Nonetheless, the Dutch family's likeness to a book, like the comparison of Knickerbocker to "a bookworm," strikes an odd note given the narrator's assertion that Knickerbocker generally devalues books in his pursuit of "genuine" historical truth. Books, we are told, are "lamentably" bad at producing the kind of information Knickerbocker values. But if that is the case, why does the narrator provide a hierarchy of historical information and rank the "lore" of "genuine" people above the "scanty" content of mere books, only to then reverse himself and employ the devalued object—a book—to explain Knickerbocker's stance toward the people who are his most valued source of information? This counterintuitive use of one of Crayon's typically bookish tropes signals the transatlantic cultural shift that has taken place in the movement between the preceding sketch and "Rip Van Winkle." Unlike England, where Crayon repeatedly privileges the linkage of cultural authority and the symbolic medium of the printed text, this story's American setting would appear to constitute a different narrative environment where people rule supreme. Yet, as this example shows, even in the United States people act as surrogates for books. If books

produce the material that yields cultural authority in England, then in American people produce the materials that can be read *as though* they were books. This is a neat inversion, but it is one designed to show how these apparent differences ultimately reveal commonalities in the shared symbolic value of the written word collected and circulated in printed form.

In "Rip Van Winkle," this common cultural medium presents itself in "Rip Van Winkle" in the language of provinciality. The same editorial headnote that shows us the similarities between Knickerbocker's vision of historical research also tells us of this tale's provincial origins. In this case, that provincial status is, at first, meant literally; the narrator notes that Knickerbocker "was very curious in the Dutch history of the province, and the manners of the descendants from its primitive settlers" (767). A few lines later, the narrator tells us Knickerbocker's research resulted in "a history of the province" (presumably Irving's own *History*). This emphasis on language of literal provinciality persists in the body of the tale as well. The opening paragraph describes its setting as "a little village of great antiquity, having been founded by some of the Dutch colonists in the early times of the province" (767). And Rip himself is introduced in terms that reinforce the provincial connection: "there lived many years since, while the country was yet a province of Great Britain, a simple good natured fellow of the name of Rip Van Winkle" (770).

At first glance these references to Rip's provincial surroundings seem to be fairly matter-of-fact concessions to the view that colonial New York was separated from a distant metropolis both by geography and by cultural practices. Yet these obvious references are themselves part of the tale's larger efforts to represent a local community that is at once isolated from the wider world and, paradoxically, linked to that world through the condition of its separation. In this regard, "Rip Van Winkle" reproduces in this regard the same version of locality we find in Crayon' English sketches, and in so doing suggests once more

the privileged mode of the local's universal circulation. Rip's world, as we soon find out, is remarkably enclosed. The village inn is populated by a small set of loafers, all known to one another, and Rip's frequent excursions into the nearby woods never truly lead him very far from the village. At the same time, the fact of the village's expressly provincial setting suggests an important link between provinciality and this mode of circulating locality. Its colonial context puts it at the nexus of these circulating concepts just as clearly as it occupies a physical location defined largely through its consumption of commodities from abroad. For instance, the village houses are "built of small yellow bricks brought from Holland" (768), a minor narrative detail that testifies to important material and cultural connections between this place and other parts of the world. While the village is materially connected to the outside, however, it remains a closed discursive community, characterized above all by the fact that its inhabitants converse only with one another. The "good wives of the village" communicate with their neighbors through "their evening gossippings," and Rip and the other men of the village "frequent a kind of perpetual club of the sages, philosophers, and other idle personages" who "sit in the shade … talking listlessly over village gossip, or telling endless sleepy stories about nothing" (770, 772).

This discursive insularity does not suffer under the burden of provinciality so much as it proudly carries provinciality's banner. When Rip first returns to the village, it seems at first that the Revolution has erased all traces of the community he formerly knew. Two of the three people he inquires about by name have died and have been, in some sense, erased from the local history because they have not been memorialized effectively. Nicholaus Vedder's tombstone has "rotted and gone," and Brom Ducher has met an unknown fate (780). Given the central position once occupied by these figures in the discursive network that previously defined the village, this absence of definitive knowledge or precise memory

suggests the political changes heralded by the Revolution have had far-reaching and transformative effects in even the most isolated of settings, disrupting the older patterns that defined local communities and leaving in their place contentious "haranguing" scenes that replace the old order of village gossip with nothing but "perfect babylonish jargon" (779). Yet the fact that the villagers Rip encounters are ultimately able to tell him about these absent and long-dead figures from the village past suggests the persistence of local history in the face of these outward changes. Indeed, in an era when the discourses of the "rights of citizens" and universal principles of "liberty" seem to have pushed aside the power of village gossip to construct the local community, by the end of the story Rip has become the guardian of the local in its narrative forms. "He used to tell his story to every stranger that arrived at Mr. Doolittle's Hotel," the narrator states, and it is the near-universal repetition of Rip's story—the stuff of local legend—that comes to define the village's new discursive order, for in the end there is "not a man woman or child in the neighborhood but knew it by heart" (783-784).

While "Rip Van Winkle" provides an account of how the economy of storytelling values the local for its unique role in constructing provincial history, Irving's other famous "American" tale from the collection, "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" follows a rather different path before ultimately arriving at a similar conclusion. "Rip Van Winkle" envisions the process of developing local and national memory as a fundamentally narrative problem that requires the individual storyteller—neatly triplicated in the personae of Rip, Knickerbocker, and, Crayon—to negotiate his relationship to a local cultural geography commensurate with both provincial and national modes of self-understanding. By contrast, "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" represents the local community as one that is fundamentally hostile to any outsider who seeks to exploit that narrative opening in order to claim for

himself the cultural authority represented in the local's newly provincial orientation. In a brief comment on the story, Leonard Tennenhouse notes that "Sleepy Hollow" flashes its true gothic credentials when it exposes Ichabod Crane's inability to insert himself successfully into the forms of local narrative—the ghost stories told by the old wives clustered around the fire at Van Tassel's house—that define the community cultural boundaries (148n3). According to this reading, the story thus participates in redefining the early American nation as a cultural form best articulated through its creative deformations of British narrative traditions. Like other tales that share its gothic lineage, Tennenhouse suggests, "Sleepy Hollow" "refuses the sentimental gesture toward an ideal unity and culturally coherent nation," insisting instead that "each locale has its own history that unifies the local group as a single body whole and entire to which everyone else is by definition a stranger until he or she learns and embraces that history as his or her own" (113).

I want to offer a somewhat different, though by no means incompatible, reading of local history's function within "Sleepy Hollow," beginning with the observation that the story does not simply work within a pre-formed notion of what constitutes local history but rather undertakes the more substantial project of illustrating how such local histories become the privileged property of the people who reside in places where they circulate. If that distinction seems too finely drawn, it may be worth remembering that elsewhere in *The Sketch Book* Crayon takes great pains to affirm the breadth of access his bookish yet cosmopolitan sensibilities grant him in a world of such local histories. So it is by no means a foregone conclusion that "Sleepy Hollow" would present local history as an exclusionary discursive practice. Indeed, like so many of the sketches in *The Sketch Book*, as well as later works like *Bracebridge Hall* (1822), *Tales of a Traveller* (1824), and *Tales of the Alhambra* (1832), "Sleepy Hollow" begins by underscoring the narrowness of the physical space its narrative

actions occupy, an emphasis that a reader might reasonably expect to yield a similarly cosmopolitan expansiveness in the end. Take the narrator's opening description of Greenburgh, for instance:

> In the bosom of one of those spacious coves which indent the eastern shore of the Hudson, at that broad expansion of the river denominated by the ancient Dutch navigators the Tapaan Zee […] there lies a small market town or rural port, which by some is called Greensburgh, but which is more generally and properly known by the name of Tarry Town. This name was given, we are told, in former days, by the good housewives of the adjacent country, from the inveterate propensity of their husbands to linger about the village tavern on market days. (1058)

On one hand, the world on display here is characterized by its intimacy, evoked as much by the sly fun poked at minor domestic strife between the "good housewives" and their recalcitrant husbands as by the connotative power of the town's position within the region's "bosom." On the other hand, the description subtly contrasts that intimacy with the more expansive suggestion that the town is not only situated in a much wider space (a "broad expansion") but also that its position is crucially central to the region. Beyond simple geography, however, the town is characterized functionally as a "market town or rural port," terms that suggest it occupies an important position within the region's economy, social organization and, hence, collective imagination. This latter point is emphasized by the name the "good housewives" give it, for the town is the central gathering place of all the area's wandering men, the crucial focal point of their social and economic lives.

Irving's narrator takes this mode of insular centrality one step further, constructing within the already circumscribed area he has defined a further layer of spatial contraction standing in for cultural isolation—and for Sleepy Hollow itself. Described by the narrator as "a retreat, where I might steal from the world and its distractions, and dream quietly away the remnant of a troubled life" (1058-1059), Sleepy Hollow resembles nothing so much as

Crayon's experiences escaping into the archival "refuge" offered by English libraries. But it soon becomes clear that in an American setting cast as distinctively provincial the "listless repose" which imbues the residents of Sleepy Hollow with their "peculiar character" takes on a somewhat different role in shaping the events of the narrative. Not only is Sleepy Hollow sequestered, but according to the narrator its inability to shake off the "drowsy, dreaming influence" that "seems to hang over the land, and to pervade the very atmosphere" is a characteristic peculiar to that sequestered setting. Yet just as we come to believe the story simply offers one more lesson in the ways that the "atmosphere" of a place defines the social and cultural relationships of those who live there—a defining assumption of eighteenth-century theories of cultural identity—the introduction of Ichabod Crane, a figure who apparently defies this influence, calls into question any easy attempt to reconcile this notion of locality as mere "atmosphere" with its role as a marketable commodity elsewhere in *The Sketch Book*.

Crane's position as the tale's Yankee outsider whose expulsion from the community marks the boundaries between local differences and national similarities has long been a staple of criticism devoted to the text. What is so striking about his expulsion, however, is that it does not come as the direct result of his inability to participate in the kinds of local community *The Sketch Book* defines. Here, as in Crayon's rural English sketches and also in "Rip Van Winkle," local borders are drawn by the closed discursive loop of village stories and gossip. Ichabod Crane fully participates in this circulation of stories in Sleepy Hollow. In a return to the now-familiar metaphors of print, the narrator describes him as "a kind of travelling gazette, carrying the whole budget of local gossip from house to house; so that his appearance was always greeted with satisfaction" (1063), though subsequent events clearly suggest this "satisfaction" is limited to the housewives who send and receive information

along the circuit created by Crane's perambulations, and not by his male rivals in the community. Moreover, Crane seems to be a welcome participant in the "long winter evenings" when the "old Dutch wives" share their "marvellous tales of ghosts and goblins": "He would delight them equally by his anecdotes of witchcraft, and of the direful omens and portentious sights and sounds in the air, which prevailed in the earlier times of Connecticut" (1064). More than simply gaining access to the stories that function as a repository of local knowledge, in other words, Crane participates in the local discursive community as one of the primary agents of their circulation and of the exchange of information that defines the community's limits. Not only does he disseminate local information, but he also introduces new stories from outside the bounds of this discursive community in the form of his tales of the "earlier times of Connecticut" or, for instance, "the alarming fact that the world did absolutely turn round" (1065). That Crane's contributions, like the stories he borrows from Cotton Mather, are not welcomed equally by all members of the community is largely beside the point; what ultimately matters most to the story's construction of local history is not Crane's ability (or lack thereof) to interpret the information, but rather his role in passing it along. While Crane's later expulsion from Sleepy Hollow stems from his comic misreading of various circumstances, that is, it does little to alter the fact that while he lives there his presence serves a crucial function in regulating the local discursive economy.

More telling in terms of the story's representation of locality is the fact that the object of Crane's affection, Katrina Van Tassel, embodies through her family connections and her home the kind of insularity and withdrawal from the world associated throughout *The Sketch Book* with a privileged form of the local. Although she may be "a little of a coquette" and mixes "ancient and modern fashions," she nonetheless wears "the ornaments […] which her great great grandmother had brought over" and "the tempting stomacher of

the olden time," two details that suggest her personal dress preserves tradition in ways commensurate with Crayon's notion of the local at other moments. Katrina's father, Baltus Van Tassell personifies even more fully this version of tradition enforced by isolation. According to the narrator, he is a man who "seldom […] sent either his eyes or his thoughts beyond the boundaries of his own farm." Indeed, he serves in many ways as the virtuous, exemplary model of the local:

> [On the farm] everything was snug, happy, and well conditioned. He was satisfied with his wealth, but not proud of it, and piqued himself upon the hearty abundance, rather than the style in which he lived. His strong hold was situated on the banks of the Hudson, in one of those green, sheltered, fertile nooks, in which the Dutch farmers are so fond of nestling. (1066)

Echoing the more general situation of Sleepy Hollow itself, Van Tassell's comfort, good sense, and liberality of spirit epitomize the moral function of Crayon's brand of locality. Van Tassell's farm and his satisfaction with it offers a form of locality within an already localized community, a "strong hold" of abundance—but not excess—and the focal point of the community's social life. In other words, it stands in direct contrast to what Crayon labels, in "Rural Life in England," the "cold superficies of character" associated with the "dissipate[d]" metropolis (796).

Through its function as an index of local virtue, Van Tassell's farm becomes the narrative's means of redrawing the lines of locality in a way that ultimately excludes Crane, despite his initial participation in the discursive life of the community. Unlike Van Tassell, whose self-satisfaction involves no pride, and who is pleased merely by "hearty abundance" without regard for "the style in which he lived," Crane's appetitive response to this site of local virtue proves him unworthy of a place among the citizens who gather there. Van Tassell may not be untowardly proud of owning land with the "softest and sweetest water" and having "a vast barn" "bursting forth with the treasures of the farm," but Crane, to the

contrary, is unable to look at the "rows of pigeons," the "Sleek unwieldy porkers," the "stately squadron of snowy geese," the "fleets of ducks," and the "regiments of turkeys" without thinking solely of sating his vast appetite (1066). What begins with the mouth-watering contemplation of "this sumptuous promise of luxurious winter fare," however, quickly escalates into something more troubling within the moral framework of *The Sketch Book*, something altogether more threatening to the isolation that is, for Crayon, locality's signature feature:

> As the enraptured spirit of Ichabod fancied all this, and as he rolled his great green eyes over the fat meadow lands, the rich fields of wheat, of rye, of buckwheat, and Indian corn, and the orchards burthened with ruddy fruit […] his heart yearned after the damsel who was to inherit these domains, and his imagination expanded with the idea, how they might be readily turned into cash, and the money invested in immense tracts of wild land, and shingle palaces in the wilderness. Nay, his busy fancy already realized his hopes, and presented to him the blooming Katrina, with a whole family of children, mounted on the top of a waggon loaded with household trumpery, with pots and kettles dangling beneath; and he beheld himself bestriding a pacing mare […] setting out for Kentucky, Tennessee, or Lord knows where! (1067)

Seduced by his eyes into a speculative fantasy of imperial westward expansion, Crane's twin desires to sell the land and then leave Sleepy Hollow to strike out for the "wilderness" represents the absolute abandonment of local principles. The obvious flaw with Crane's greedy vision its origin in a way of thinking about both land and people that sees them as disposable, valued only for the readiness with which they may be "turned into cash." Less obvious—but more dangerous—is its representation of Crane's failure to understand how the local creates forms of cultural, rather than monetary, value and how that value is predicated on its circulation in discursive forms. The expansive imagination that fuels Crane's desire runs wholly counter to the principles of local imagination.

Having been threatened by Crane's designs, it is only natural that Sleepy Hollow expel him in order to enforce the principles his desiring imagination defies. The opportunity to do so arrives on the night of the Van Tassell's "quilting frolick." After "clattering about the room" in a dance with the Katrina, Crane joins "a knot of the sager folks, who, with old Van Tassel, sat smoking […] gossiping over former times, and drawling out long stories about the war" (1077). As a participant in the group, Crane has full access to the "legendary treasures" with which the "neighborhood is rich," namely, the "Local tales and superstitions [that] thrive in these sheltered, long settled retreats; but are trampled under foot, by the sifting throng that forms the population of most of our country places" (1078). But Crane is poorly equipped to understand the value of such cultural commodities. Not only does his mind tend toward those patterns of mental activity that are more aligned to this "sifting throng," but his own interests in selling the Van Tassel farm and moving on are also symptomatic of the very phenomenon the narrator identifies as most problematic for communities like Sleepy Hollow. There are few good ghost stories remaining, the narrator notes, because there is "no encouragement for ghosts in most our villages," owing to the simple reason that "their surviving friends have travelled away from the neighborhood" (1078). Unlike the discursive circulation of stories, the mobility of people disrupts the conditions that give the local its distinctive shape and cultural function.

In this context, Crane's expulsion is brought about, appropriately enough, through the same discursive medium in which locality circulates and which Crane initially helps distribute as he makes his gossiping rounds. The "chief part of the stories" shared among the participants in the evening's entertainment involve "the favourite spectre of Sleepy Hollow," enhanced further by "a thrice marvellous adventure of Brom Bones" (1079). These tales ultimately prove to be Crane's undoing, feeding his "expansive" imagination and his

appetite for local tales prove his undoing precisely because he cannot incorporate them into a proper framework that puts them in contact with the wider world without destroying what makes their quintessentially local character valuable.

The lesson that "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" offer, then, is that the local affords a formal model for inventing and reproducing a culture that is national only insofar as it remains provincial in its orientation. Despite their obvious divergence from the rural sketches that form of the bulk of *The Sketch Book*, both stories emphatically underscore one crucial point of transatlantic continuity when it comes to their understanding of the local as a cultural form that circulates widely in the world. For while the readers of such stories may be metropolitan subjects who consume literature in the cultural centers of the United States and Great Britain—or, at the very least, use their consumption of literature to imagine themselves in such cultural centers—the stories themselves invite us to imagine a world in which cultural authority is organized along provincial rather than metropolitan lines. More than the signs of a nostalgic indulgence that an early nineteenth-century American population increasingly used to define itself as metropolitan, the redefinition of the local as a rejection of explicitly metropolitan views comes to us in these tales as an effort to construct alternative cultural formations. Those formations, according to the cosmopolitan logic espoused by Irving's surrogates Crayon and Knickerbocker, foster transatlantic cultural accord by renouncing the metropolis as the primary index of cultural value. In its place, and in place of the aesthetic of accumulation that had proven so influential in the Anglophone writings of the eighteenth century, Irving's new provincialism proposes that only the circulation of the local as a provincial phenomenon will preserve its ability to define shared principles of moral virtue, taste, and cultural refinement. Only by unshackling itself from the desire to replicate metropolitan experience and point of view

wherever it goes—only by becoming provincial once and for all—will the local survive as it travels beyond its own borders, defining through its transatlantic circulation an Atlantic cosmopolis.

EPILOGUE

It is one of the small quirks of American literary history that Washington Irving, celebrated as a national literary hero almost from the moment of his death in 1859, was most often remembered by his countrymen for his reputation abroad. In a memorial essay published in 1860, the American publisher and writer Evert A. Duyckinck assessed Irving's "genius" in these terms: "we can hardly attach too high a value to the refined qualities and genial humor which have made his writings favorites wherever the English language is read" (xxi). Speaking to the New York Historical Society in the same year, William Cullen Bryant used similar language in praising Irving's status as the "Evening Star" in "our literary firmament," noting that *The Sketch Book* was the first text published in the United States to have "showed the possibility of an American author acquiring fame bounded only by the limits of his own language" (25, 24). It was a view that proved remarkably durable in the following decades. In a column published in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* more than twenty years later, George Curtis echoed these earlier comments when he argued Irving had succeeded as a writer "by offering to the world an American book which it was delighted to read," an act that made "the name of Irving […] familiar to the English-speaking race" (790). What emerges from these and the many other retrospective essays, biographies, and literary histories published in the thirty years after Irving's death is a kind of critical consensus about what it took to be considered an American literary icon. Success at home was all very well, it would seem, but the power to elicit international acclaim was the true test of an American writer's prowess.

What are we to make of this rejection of national boundaries by those very critics and cultural arbiters who had tasked themselves with constructing a distinctly national literary history?[1] The question is all the more relevant if we consider that the period which saw the rise of this critical consensus overlapped with the years when the Civil War and its extended aftermath were exposing just how fractured any claims to a unified sense of national culture—the same national literary culture these critics claimed Irving helped establish—had always been. In this historical context, it is possible to see remarks about Irving's transatlantic appeal as belonging to a larger project to reinscribe American sectional divisions within an overarching cultural framework that emphasized the unifying power of events in the national past. By placing Irving at the head of a new literary pantheon, these critics, all of them members of a northeastern elite, could imagine an "English-speaking race" whose shared literary tastes and affinities in the tense years immediately after the War of 1812 and American involvement in the Barbary Wars might offer a model for cultural reconciliation in the politically tumultuous 1860s and 1870s. Nearly a century after the political break with Great Britain, in other words, they could gesture to Irving's transatlantic career as symbolic evidence that former enmities could always be smoothed over and that the adjudication of differences could be conducted according to universally recognized standards of cultural value.

That such gestures retained an important place in postbellum critical discourses testifies to the role powerful transatlantic cultural formations have always played in American literary history. The lessons offered by critics' backward glance suggest widespread

[1] Duyckinck, for instance, had been an advocate of the Young America movement of the 1840s, while critics like Curtis and Charles Warner, both of whom produced critical assessments of Irving's work, were linked to major American institutions like *Harper's*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, and, later, the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

acceptance of the terms that had structured the debates about provinciality, cultural refinement, and the function of literature in Irving's own work, as well as that of his contemporaries. In short, this later critical agreement on the proper standard for judging Irving's reputation says a great deal about the stakes of those earlier debates, the views that ultimately won out, and their effects on the direction of American literary culture for the rest of the nineteenth century. As I have argued in the preceding chapters, one of the central questions facing earlier generations of Anglo-American writers in the British Atlantic world had always been how, and under what circumstances, claims to cultural authority made within the uneven dynamic of metropolitan and provincial formations could be reimagined in light of different local conditions. In some rather unexpected ways, Irving's posthumous reception tells us how those who followed him began to reformulate that question and, in so doing, developed their own understanding of what it meant to be provincial in America.

By way of a brief illustration, I want to consider one of the most frequently recurring strategies employed by nineteenth-century critics to translate Irving's popularity into more meaningful terms: specifically, their efforts to recast his financial success as the indisputable hallmark of a universally recognized form of cultural virtue. Speaking of Irving's international appeal as though he were entering accounts into a ledger where literary success can be calculated according to a logic of profit and loss, Duyckinck notes with considerable pride that "Mr. Irving always received handsome sums for his copyrights," then proceeds to back that claim by tabulating the various amounts the English publisher John Murray paid for each of Irving's major works (xix). That total evidently mattered to Irving's nephew and biographer Pierre Munro Irving as well; under the heading "Literary Statistics," he offers a significantly expanded version of Duyckinck's list in an appendix to *The Life and Letters of*

Washington Irving (1862-1864).[2] Even Charles Warner, who would eventually become the editor of *Harper's* in the 1890s, applies a similar financial framework—albeit somewhat less literally—by describing as a form of "national indebtedness" Irving's literary act of "investing a crude and new land with the enduring charms of romance and tradition" (404).

Informed by the powerful logic that equated the literal accumulation of wealth with the accrual of less tangible forms of cultural value, such methods of legitimating Irving's cultural position—and, by extension, that of the nation on whose behalf these critics say he wrote—openly bear the marks of the commercial rhetoric I have been describing. Here, the mercantilist paradigm, broadly conceived, manifests itself in the equivalence between the "respectable sum[s]" Irving enjoyed and the cultural respectability of the United States itself. Here, too, just as in the earlier periods examined in previous chapters, nothing less than the meaning of provinciality is at stake, for under the semiotic regime of literary "investment" and "indebtedness" those who must self-consciously assert their cultural status inevitably remain, almost by definition, provincial.

Yet something has also changed in these later writers' formulation of provinciality: the significance of a metropolitan cultural center around which all such acts of cultural accrual are organized. Where earlier generations of Anglo-American writers sought legitimacy by representing provincial locales as new centers of cultural accumulation modeled after a distant English metropolis, Irving's nineteenth-century critics suggest a shift in the conception of the division between metropolitan and provincial cultures. In Irving's case, we are asked to imagine the accrual of cultural capital around a figure defined by his

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[2] Pierre Irving's total of the "sums realized by Mr. Irving" is nearly thirty percent higher than Duyckinck's, made just four years earlier, coming in at more than £12,000. The discrepancy can be partly explained by the nephew's expanded list (twelve works versus only nine in Duyckinck's version), but the rapid expansion of Irving's estimated wealth on paper is nonetheless worth noting. According to Pierre, Irving earned more than $205,000 from his writing during his lifetime. See pp. 304-5.

international ramblings, his affinity for travel, and the dubious distinction, from the perspective of many of his American contemporaries, that he spent fully half of his professional life abroad. It is precisely this dissolution of metropolitan authority, and the consequent reformulation of alternative modes of cultural refinement whose authority derives from explicitly provincial arrangements, that Irving's writing of locality helped effect. In this context, the metaphoric transformation of Irving's career into this celebratory mode of symbolic transatlantic accounting seems to participate in what Lori Merish identifies as the "discursive process through which commodities first became identified" in the nineteenth century "as privileged vehicles of […] civic identification" (2). Merish writes of a process that endows objects with the power to produce new forms of personal and communal subjectivity, and while there are clear differences in the way his followers articulate the commodification of Irving's literary legacy, the figurative status they grant his life-as-account-book suggests a parallel process at work in late nineteenth-century efforts to formulate an American literary canon. In short, the obituaries and, eventually, literary histories and biographies that followed Irving's death affirm the remarkable degree to which the rhetorical effects of locality persist in the nineteenth-century vocabulary of global reputation. Backed by evidence of the broad circulation of Irving's reputation and that of succeeding generations of writers, American literary culture rests on a carefully crafted set of claims about the cosmopolitan value of transatlantic cultural exchange.

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