

Paper Boats: The American Sea Travel Narrative and Archives of Knowledge, 1815-1850

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
1. Captive Audiences: Jared Sparks, Robert Adams, and the Book of Travels	20
2. Monikin Business: Cooper's Satire of Enlightenment	61
3. Raiders of the Lost Archive: Poe's <i>Pym</i> and South Sea Exploration	94
4. Violent Ends: Melville's <i>White-Jacket</i> and the Man-of-War's Powerful Fictions	125
5. Works Cited	160

INTRODUCTION

James Fenimore Cooper's preface to his 1847 novel *The Crater, or Vulcan's Peak: A Tale of the Pacific* forestalls readers who might wonder why they cannot find records of the volcanic island his shipwrecked protagonist inhabits. Wryly inverting the testimonial value of real islands and the documents that describe them, Cooper admits "under ordinary circumstances, it would be *prima facie* evidence against the existence of any spot on the face of this earth, that the geographies took no notice of it" (3). The repeated image of a "face" in the Latin "*facie*" and in the figurative "face of the earth" stresses that the object of knowledge in question is a surface, an assumption that appears often in exploration writing of his day. Cooper implies that the first place to look for this surface is the library. If unsure of the reality of "any spot," readers need not board a ship to the Pacific. They can turn to "geographies, histories, and other works of a similar character" (3). After suggesting that the description of the earth's surface is nearly complete, Cooper contradicts his initial confidence in the archive. These works of geography are not completely comprehensive: "much as is now known of the globe, a great deal still remains to be told" (3). Cooper's own narrative, then, can add to the "evidence" of this "new" isle's existence: he promises that "the 'inquiring mind'" can "seek for information in our pages" (3). For an island in the Pacific, the move from being a blank in a geography to a quotidian subject of headlines is a move from nonexistence to

existence. Paper—and not the volcanic rock of *The Crater*'s island setting—establishes the reality of distant spaces.

Cooper's prefatory obsession with "matters of fact" (4) may seem surprising given that *The Crater* is a fiction. What is more surprising is how often fictional accounts of maritime adventure highlight their value as records of "information" or "knowledge" about geographical spaces and foreign peoples. This dissertation examines these fictions in order to analyze the ways antebellum American novelists reimagine the link between maritime travel writing and the information they promised to provide. American maritime travelers from this period describe naval engagements (like conflicts with North African states and European fleets), document organized exploration expeditions (like the 1838 Wilkes' Expedition to the South Seas), and detail the commercial, whaling, and sealing voyages from the "golden age of American sail" (roughly 1815-1850).¹ This literature engages a larger cultural narrative that imagines the newly-formed nation as an advanced, refined civilization and an intellectual guide on a global stage. Overseas travel literature relies on connections to earlier European projects of exploration and imperialism, but simultaneously attempts to disassociate American maritime activity from European empire building.

Cooper's preface expresses a set of tensions that I explore in this dissertation: he conceives circumoceanic spaces as both familiar and uncharted, voyaging as both a real and a readerly experience, and knowledge as both calcified and emergent. I examine the

¹ In *America and The Sea: A Literary History* (1995) Haskell Springer argues that "American literature of the sea during the last third of the nineteenth century looks remarkably different from that of the golden age of sail of Cooper, Dana, and Melville, of Longfellow and Whitman" (190). Springer links this change to the demands of industrial production after the Civil War, which helped fuel the switch from sail to steam-powered ships.

ways that narratives of maritime travel link the democratization of print with a shifting “planetary consciousness,” Mary Louise Pratt’s term for the Eurocentric vision of the globe as filled with species waiting for description and categorization. In Pratt’s definition, “Blanketing the surface of the globe, [planetary consciousness] specified plants and animals in visual terms as discrete entities, subsuming and reassembling them in a finite, totalizing order of European making” (37). Antebellum American novelists explore the ways maritime travel writing from this period is conceived as an archive and the ways this conception contributes to a larger cultural narrative of the progress of knowledge. Novels by Cooper, Edgar Allan Poe, and Herman Melville adapt the “truthful” narratives of their contemporaries.² In doing so, they tap into a discussion that links the progress of Enlightenment learning to the movement of Western influence around the globe. Their novels refer to an archive of knowledge created through travel writing, and they link their fictional accounts to this archive. In the process, their novels challenge concepts of certainty and the progress of knowledge by short-circuiting the pathways through which individual accounts of maritime travel are meant to fit into the larger narrative of Enlightenment knowledge. I argue that antebellum American writers adopt the conventions of “truthful” sea travel narratives in order to expose their promises of certainty to be fictions.

While each of my chapters focuses on a specific text, with the last three discussing novels, the narratives I examine all speak to the popularity of maritime travel writing in this period, and they all intertextually engage with both contemporary and

² Although a distinction between “nonfiction” and “fiction” may seem applicable, I do not use it in this dissertation because, according to its entry in the *OED Online*, the first recorded use of “nonfiction” appears in the 1860s.

historical voyage accounts. Literary scholars and historians have established the popularity of narratives written by sailors and other maritime travelers in the antebellum period. They have evaluated these works for their specific articulations of nationalism or their representations of the details of maritime labor.³ As several studies observe, the seizure of merchant vessels by foreign fleets, the captivity of Americans in North African States, and disputes over the conscription of American sailors by the British navy were early naval engagements that helped define American maritime identity against other maritime powers.⁴ In the wake of these engagements, a proliferation of writing by sailors

³ Nathaniel Philbrick's *James Fenimore Cooper and the Development of American Sea Fiction* (1961), one of the earliest discussions of American literature of the sea, argues that, prior to 1850, "the American frontier was primarily a maritime one, that the sea rather than the continental wilderness was the principal focus of the yearnings and imaginings of the American dream" (vii). More recently, scholars have explored archives of writing about the sea, analyzed the specificity of American sailors' labor, and considered the sea narrative's influence on the novel. Myra C. Glenn's "Forging Manhood and Nationhood Together" (2007) examines autobiographical writing by American sailors during the golden age of sail in order to "explore how antebellum notions of national identity, patriotism and manliness" informed representations of maritime experience (28). Historian Paul Gilje's *Liberty on the Waterfront: American Maritime Culture in the Age of Revolution* (2007) describes the specific articulations of rights and democracy that circulated among maritime laborers in the decades after the American Revolution. Shifting focus to the "interrelationship between sea and land" (2), Daniel Vickers gives a historical account of American sailors' careers and lives on shore in *Young Men and the Sea: Yankee Seafarers in the Age of Sail* (2005). Jack Berger's "Antebellum Fantasies of the Common Sailor" (2009) uses a Lacanian lens to view representations of mariners; Berger observes that "the early nineteenth century marks a new horizon in the way common sailors were popularly figured" and attributes this shift to changing notions of the marketplace, labor, and class (30). Hester Blum's *The View from the Masthead* (2012) describes the epistemological problems explored by first-person sailor accounts arguing that sailor writing expresses a "materialist epistemology" that combines practical knowledge with reflection and imagination (109). Cesare Casarino's *Modernity at Sea* (2002) and Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker's *The Many-Headed Hydra* (2000) analyze the influences of the maritime economy and nautical labor on the development of modernity. Margaret Cohen's *The Novel and the Sea* (2010) argues that features of the different genres of maritime writing (logbooks, narratives, and sailors' manuals, for example) influenced the development of the European novel; she focuses on the way this nautical writing values craft and practical problem solving. Cohen contends, "Across its different forms, the maritime corpus depicted the exploits and techniques of work," and these depictions brought together the "practical" and "entertainment" functions of literature (5-6).

tracked the American presence in circumoceanic space as an agent of commercial and military power.

While the role sea literature played in imagining forms of labor and concepts of nationalism has been well-studied, American maritime narratives' persistent claims to add to knowledge—particularly geographic, ethnographic, and natural historical knowledge—have been largely overlooked. Not only do maritime travel writers of all kinds assume the self-evident value of documenting their experiences and observations, American sea narratives claim a privileged relationship to knowledge through their access to distant spaces of the terraqueous globe. Antebellum Americans consider the collection and preservation of disinterested information to be the work of civilized societies and part of a narrative of Enlightenment progress. The idea that documenting knowledge is self-evidently a role for “Enlightened” nations not only adapts earlier discourses of European imperialism (which used this idea as a kind of alibi for conquest),⁵ it also feeds into an early American ideology that, as Michael Warner points out, assumes that the increase in print correlates with the ideals of republicanism.⁶ Part of this ideology, I argue, promotes the value of disinterested engagement with

⁴ After the Revolutionary War, American ships from the new United States lost the protection of the British navy; this forced the United States into early maritime conflicts with the states along the coast of North Africa, known to Europeans as the “Barbary Coast.” Americans also critiqued the British, not only for their policy of conscription, but also for encouraging North African fleets to attack United States vessels. These conflicts accelerated the development of a permanent navy. For more on Barbary captivity see Lawrence A. Peskin’s *Captives and Countrymen: Barbary Slavery and the American Public 1785-1816* (2009), Robert Allison’s *The Crescent Obscured* (1995), Philip Gould’s *Barbaric Traffic: Commerce and Antislavery in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (2003), 86-121, Paul Baepler’s introduction to the anthology *White Slaves, African Masters*, 1-58, and Blum’s *The View from the Masthead*, 46-70.

⁵ See my discussion of Pratt and natural history in this introduction.

⁶ Warner makes this argument about the cultural meanings of print in *The Letters of the Republic* (1990), 1-33.

circumoceanic territories, which is meant to be distinguished from the interested engagements of European powers.

In the antebellum period, this disinterested engagement with the globe had a variety of supply lines. Describing the popularity of overseas exploration narratives from both American and European sources, William Lenz argues, “American interest in continental exploration, an accepted fact of the period following the Louisiana Purchase, rides side by side with American interest in international exploration” (42). The first overseas exploration expedition organized by the United States government would not begin until 1838, with the Charles Wilkes-led United States Exploring Expedition. However, American naval vessels, merchants, whalers, and sealers were routinely envisioned as sources of information. The works I examine in this dissertation speak to the variety of maritime writing that could be considered sources of information.⁷ Testifying to the popularity of naval memoirs and their descriptions of circumoceanic travel, J. Sidney Henshaw (who sailed under Commodore George C. Read) prefaces his 1840 narrative with the claim, “a public ship is always an object of national interest wherever she goes; it therefore cannot be uninteresting for her republican parents to know of her wanderings” (1). Henshaw uses circular reasoning to authorize the value of his account: a naval ship is always interesting to the American public, so it cannot be uninteresting to them. The value of his descriptions, he implies, is self-evident. Abby Jane Morrell, who travelled with her husband Captain Benjamin Morrell on several of his circumoceanic voyages of commerce in the 1820s, similarly attests to the self-evident

⁷ As William Lenz points out, “In the early nineteenth century, American readers of these narratives characteristically viewed commercial voyages as voyages of exploration, and voyages of exploration as surveys for commerce” especially because they did not have the state-sponsored exploration corps European powers did (45).

value of knowledge, even if this knowledge is collected during a profit-driven cruise. She commends American whalers' contributions to "discovery": "To Nantucket, New-Bedford, Stonington, and few other places, is most of the credit due for all the discoveries we have made in the Pacific Ocean" (164). As Hester Blum observes, American sailors who wrote of their experiences in Barbary captivity offered useful information with "technical specificity" for their fellow mariners, but they were also lauded for their appeal to a wider audience and their "ability to provide interesting pictures of unfamiliar modes of life" (*The View* 42). Whatever their original purpose for heading to sea, mariners of all stripes stake their claim to public attention through their unusual access to knowledge about the makeup of the globe.

What kinds of knowledge or information did nineteenth-century readers expect to find in overseas travel narratives? With striking regularity, the texts I examine call upon and adapt models of knowledge generated by eighteenth-century natural history and ethnography. Henshaw claims that although he has "not hesitated" to borrow materials from "the common stock of history of science" in order to add to the descriptions in his book, he distances himself from "[l]earned travels" which include "complete treatises upon the Botany, Mineralogy, and Zoology of every place" (x). In marking himself as an exception, Henshaw helps illuminate audience expectations. Henshaw's idea of science consists of the work of taxonomy and description. In travel narratives, observations of specific locations are linked to discourses of cataloguing nature.

By claiming to contribute to these systems of describing nature, American travel writers put themselves in a lineage with European texts. Mary Louise Pratt's seminal work examines the intersection of natural history and eighteenth-century travel writing.

In *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992), she argues that the “eighteenth-century systematizing of nature was a European knowledge-building project” that was part of the rhetoric of “anti-conquest” (37). Eighteenth-century travel writers adapted the project and language of natural history; their narratives developed “strategies of innocence . . . constructed in relation to older imperial rhetorics of conquest” (9). The description of nature offered an alibi for imperialism, as it stressed the project of disinterested knowledge over the motives of profit or conquest. Pratt explains how Swedish botanist and zoologist Carolus Linnaeus developed a system of nomenclature and classification which helped organize and describe the new species encountered through growing networks of trade, exploration, and colonization.⁸ The simplicity of Linnaeus’s system gave it a “markedly democratic dimension” (Pratt 26). Pratt argues for the impact this system had on travel writing:

In the second half of the eighteenth century, whether or not an expedition was primarily scientific, or the traveller a scientist, natural history played a part in it . . . Travel narratives of all kinds began to develop leisurely pauses filled with gentlemanly ‘naturalizing’ . . . [T]he observing and cataloguing of nature itself became narratable. It could constitute a sequence of events, or even produce a plot. (26)

These “leisurely pauses” were still prevalent in nineteenth-century travel writing. For instance, Melville’s (largely fictionalized) account of his time on the island of Nuku Kiva in the Marquesas includes a section on natural history; he introduces the section with a justification that, like Henshaw’s preface, comments on readerly expectation: “I think I must enlighten the reader a little about the natural history of the valley” (210).⁹

⁸ Linnaeus’s *Systema Naturae* (1735), *Philosophia Botanica* (1751), and *Species Plantarum* (1753) among others explained his taxonomical system.

⁹ Melville, as I discuss in my fourth chapter, is making a self-reflexive comment on the structure of travel narratives: his introductory comment points to the arbitrary location of such leisurely

Pratt bases her understanding of natural history's narrative dimensions on Michel Foucault's discussion of it in *The Order of Things* (1966). Foucault describes natural history's project of naming as a new relationship between the visible world and language. He locates an epistemic break in the eighteenth century, which entailed "a new way of connecting things both to the eye and to discourse" (131). Foucault observes the way natural history prioritizes the visual features of the plants and animals it describes; it thus authorizes a specific kind of seeing. Linnaeus's system tried to distill from the variety *within* species those characteristics which would define a species. For instance, a naturalist would not use the color of a horse as an identifying feature of the species since horses can come in a variety of colors (133). Foucault observes that this method of observing and naming required a kind of "screening" (133). In Linnaeus's scheme, a species is identified by specific features and the arrangement of these features (Foucault calls this "structure" (136)), and, thus, "the area of visibility in which observation is able to assume its powers is thus only what is left after these exclusions" (133). Lorraine Daston calls this "description by omission" and links this to a "more fundamental shift in the category of the scientific fact" (12).

According to Foucault, natural history has a specific relationship to language: "By means of structure, what representation provides in a confused and simultaneous form is analyzed and thereby rendered suitable to the linear unwinding of language" (136). Foucault analyzes Linnaeus's attempts to "reduce the distance" between language and things "so as to bring language as close as possible to the observing gaze, and the things observed as close as possible to words" (132). Armed with the language of natural

pauses, rather than their necessity. He says he "must enlighten" his audience but he does not explain why.

history, a naturalist could trust that his observations were understandable and classifiable. Pratt emphasizes the way the language of natural history “extracted specimens” for organization and classification in European metropolises (31): “The eighteenth-century classificatory systems created the task of locating every species on the planet, extracting it from its particular, arbitrary surroundings . . . and placing it in its appropriate spot in the system” (31). As I will discuss in my third chapter, with reference to Poe’s *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, the project of classifying species has a telos; with “species” as a smallest unit of difference, scholars could theoretically complete a picture of Earth’s variety. As Jonathon Lamb puts it, describing British exploration of the South Seas, “the focus of this empire of science is the human eye, and its limits are the space and time of the world” (77).¹⁰

Although my dissertation is not a systematic study of developments in natural history, natural history does influence how the writers I examine understand their own contributions to knowledge. Lamb argues, “Science not only endows the curious observer with a means of uniting disparate facts into a true history, and of gathering specimens into a universal taxonomy, but it also dignifies them with a vision of territory as truth”

¹⁰ Recent scholarship has pushed back on Foucault’s characterization of natural history. Joanna Stalnaker explains how Louis-Jean-Marie Daubenton, a collaborator of George-Louis Leclerc de Buffon (a naturalist whom Foucault groups with Linnaeus), disagreed with Linnaeus’s taxonomy as “arbitrary” and attempted to find a method of “complete description” that would, at the same time, not “overwhelm” the reader with details such that the description becomes too hard to follow (*Unfinished Enlightenment* 13-14). Christopher Iannini, who examines the impact of Caribbean slavery on circum-Atlantic networks of knowledge argues that, well into the eighteenth century, descriptions of species in natural history associated them with allegorical meanings: he calls this dynamic the “species-as-emblem” (*Fatal Revolutions* 27). In considering the ways that literary works reshaped and reexamined concepts of natural history, I do not mean to suggest that these works were only reacting to the dynamic which Foucault and Pratt describe. If anything, maritime fiction’s investment in testing the limits of natural history speaks to the unresolved tensions within Enlightenment systems of classifying nature.

(77). Maritime writers claim public relevance by virtue of their access to foreign territories.¹¹ They describe their observations—however brief or desultory their opportunities to make these observations are—of the species, geographies, and cultures met in the course of circumoceanic travel. They also link their observations to works of natural history or to the observations of other travellers. Although a traveler’s experience in any given location might be brief, an account of the surface of things is enough to count as knowledge in a system that categorizes species by their surfaces.

Two factors differentiate the nineteenth-century travel narrative’s understanding of knowledge from its predecessors. First, the writers of these texts increasingly consider and refer to the role of print in housing and disseminating knowledge. Travel writers from this period often imagine themselves as contributing to an archive of information that belonged to the public. This was a useful fiction, and this fiction speaks to “meaning of print”—to use Warner’s phrase—in this period (4). Arguing that cultural and political contexts affect the reception and understanding of technology, and that technologies like print do not have an “ontological status prior to culture” (7), Warner analyzes the “immanent meanings of writing and print in the culture of republican America and in the imperial context of enlightenment” (9). Warner’s premise, that culture helps shape the reception of technology, applies to my discussion of the prevalence of travel writing. Rather than argue that the democratization of print leads to the travel narrative’s picture

¹¹ The idea that individual experience had authority developed over time. See James Egan’s *Authorizing Experience: Refigurations of the Body Politic in Seventeenth-Century New England Writing* (2009), especially p 3-13, for a history of how experience became a form of authority in the American colonies. By the this nineteenth century, we can see Melville invoking experience to authorize his writing (his “unique” experience of living in the Marquesas makes him stand out in the market), but also acknowledging it as a kind of limit (he is not supposed to go out of the bounds of what he personally experienced). See Ann Fabian’s *The Unvarnished Truth* (2002) for a discussion of nineteenth-century personal narratives and their role in print culture.

of knowledge-as-archive, I argue that antebellum travel writing helps to imagine this proliferation of print. Travel narratives offer to depict spaces that are not accessible to the American reading public, and thus, their observations cannot be easily verified. As an imagined solution to this problem, travel writers contend that their works are verifiable against an extant archive of information. The novelists considered in this dissertation conjure this posited archive in order to examine its limitations. Just as Cooper complicates the relationship between real spaces and the written records of them in the preface to *The Crater*, writers of fictional voyages experiment with and reimagine the notion of knowledge as housed in print; their narratives explore the symbolic meanings of this imagined archive.

The notion that travel writing provides knowledge that then becomes part of a public archive relates to the second distinction between the travel narratives analyzed in this study and those discussed by Pratt. In the nineteenth century, the idea of what constituted “science” was shifting. John Limon argues that by the 1830s factors such as the development of chemistry and the establishment of the American Association for the Advancement of Science led to increased specialization and professionalization. As a result: “Amateur review of science lost its force” (5). In addition, the public could be seen as getting in the way of the practice of science: “By the end of the 1840s, the American Association for the Advancement of Science was protecting professional science from public scrutiny” (5-6). As science became more professionalized, its findings became less accessible to a wide audience. In this context, the version of knowledge offered by travelers was appealing since travel writers frame their writing as a contribution to public knowledge, theoretically available for anyone’s review.

In addition to these distinctions between eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century travel writing, I differentiate between narratives of overseas voyages, which are under consideration here, and narratives of inland travel. Narratives of exploration within North America also featured natural history and were cast primarily as contributions to knowledge (even as they offered practical and ideological support for western expansion).¹² However, my dissertation focuses on maritime voyages for two reasons. First, I am interested in how these narratives incorporate the tropes of maritime adventure, especially the contingency associated with maritime travel.¹³ All of the writers I examine consider how shipwreck, captivity, and other accidents might affect the pursuit of knowledge about the globe. After he describes his shipwreck and captivity in North Africa, sailor Robert Adams, the subject of my first chapter, disappears from the record; not only, then, are his observations brought about by accident, they remain shrouded in doubt. Cooper's *The Crater* follows in the footsteps of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* as his shipwrecked protagonist describes the volcanic island on which he is stranded. In *The Monikins*, the subject of my second chapter, a character reimagines his high-seas

¹² For discussions of the role of natural history in describing North America see Christopher Looby's "The Constitution of Nature: Taxonomy as Politics in Jefferson, Peale, and Bartram" (1991), 41-61., William Goetzmann's *Exploration and Empire: The Explorer and the Scientist in the Winning of the American West* (1966), and Pamela Regis's *Describing Early America: Bartram, Jefferson, Crèvecoeur, and the Rhetoric of Natural History* (1992).

¹³ Margaret Cohen anatomizes the different genres of sea writing in "The Chronotopes of the Sea" (2006); the maritime writing I describe brings together the various spaces she associates with the maritime novel, especially "the open sea," "the island," "the shore," and "the ship" (603). According to Cohen, the spaces of the sea "retain their characteristic traits across different geographies" (603). Of particular relevance here is Cohen's discussion of "the chronotope of white water," which she defines as "a moment when the violence of maritime elements gets so excessive that it throws the narrative into a crisis, threatening its breakdown" (611). This repeated pattern appears in maritime travel narratives, even when their ostensible goal is not to describe adventure, but to record observations and enhance knowledge.

captivity as a planned and deliberate exploration voyage. Poe's *Pym* dies mysteriously before he can finish his narrative and account for his journey home from the South Pole. Melville's *White-Jacket*, discussed in my fourth chapter, pictures the destruction of several texts on board the naval frigate *Neversink*—including a fellow sailor's alternative account of the voyage—and prays for a vortex to swallow up the very ship he is describing. This is a theme Melville continued to ponder. At the end of *Moby-Dick*, Ishmael explains how the story of the *Pequod* could be told because “one did survive the wreck.” He thus reminds us that, with the sinking of the ship, it was possible that there would be “no one” to step forth. Narratives of oceanic travel bring conceptions of the progress and certainty of knowledge in close, dangerous proximity to the threat of disorder brought about by prevarications, misunderstandings, and gaps in the record.

Secondly, by examining overseas travel narratives, I investigate the ways antebellum Americans pictured their role within global networks of trade and imperialism. While scholars have examined literary responses to the imperialism of western expansion,¹⁴ less attention has been paid to the United States' overseas commercial and imperial interests in the antebellum period. One exception to this is John Carlos Rowe's *Literary Culture and U.S. Imperialism: From the Revolution to World War II* (2002); Rowe discusses the “extraterritorial policies of U.S. colonization that began as early as the War of 1812” as well as the “burgeoning U.S. colonialism in the Pacific” of the 1840s (78). Gretchen Murphy's *Hemispheric Imaginings: The Monroe Doctrine and Narratives of U.S. Empire* (2005) similarly expands our understanding of

¹⁴ See Wai-Chee Dimock's *Empire for Liberty: Melville and the Poetics of Individualism* (1989) and Sandra Gustafson's “Histories of Democracy and Empire” (2007) for discussions of western expansion as a form of imperialism.

antebellum Americans' political, commercial, and literary engagements with empire. Murphy argues that we should consider the ideologies of western expansion in connection with the foreign policy delineated by the Monroe Doctrine. Murphy argues, "the vision of a compact and coherent continental empire that annexed 'empty' territory as states equal within its union made sense only by virtue of its inverse conception: far-flung, mismanaged, and racially debased colonial empire" while reminding us that the opposition between these two concepts "was continually belied throughout the nineteenth century" (20). My dissertation engages with this discussion by describing the ways that, through their investment in the project of knowledge, antebellum maritime writers attempt to rework earlier, European projects of conquest into a description of commerce and pure rational interest. The novelists who adopt travel narratives understand that the lines separating these projects are far from fixed. It stands to reason, then, that in the sea travel narratives I examine, British imperialism (and maritime prowess) frequently appears as an object of both critique and emulation.

My first chapter, "Captive Audiences, Jared Sparks, Robert Adams, and the Book of Travels" examines one such discussion of British imperial interests. In 1815, an influential group of British merchants released *The Narrative of Robert Adams*, a work based on a mixed-race American sailor's story of shipwreck and captivity. Adams claimed he had reached Timbuctoo, a city that was considered a goal for European explorers. This chapter analyzes the magazine editor and historian Jared Sparks's skeptical reception of Adams's tale. Sparks uses his review of Adam's narrative to produce a negative portrayal of British culture: he implies that British authorities are unable to manage the geographic and ethnographic facts of the empire they wish to

spread. Sparks stages his authority over these facts in order to position the United States as the bearers of civilization and progress. This chapter contends that, not only do travel narratives draw the defining lines of “civilization” through the comparisons they make between American and overseas cultures, but their presentation of “facts” is also considered part of the routine work of civilized nations. Accordingly, Sparks sets out this expectation for the travel narrative in his review of Riley and in his discussion of other travel works in his magazine.

After explaining the relationship between maritime travel narratives and the production of “facts,” my next chapters explore the ways maritime fiction represent and tested this relationship. My second chapter, “Monikin Business: Cooper’s Satire of Enlightenment,” analyzes *The Monikins* (1835), an overlooked allegorical novel by James Fenimore Cooper. I argue that, in this novel, Cooper turns to the popular genre of the exploration narrative (a shift from his earlier sea novels, which focus on on-deck life) in order to satirize Enlightenment systems of knowledge. Cooper’s novel specifically examines the disciplines of natural history and political economy in order to scrutinize the global scale of their models. Cooper’s protagonists—the wealthy Englishman Sir John Goldencalf and the American sealer Noah Poke—travel to the South Pole to meet with a new, undiscovered civilization. Forced to defend their own systems of understanding in discussions with members of this similarly “advanced” civilization, Cooper’s protagonists end up manipulating empirical facts in order to fit them into their own preconceptions. In effect, *The Monikins* asks the question: if the facts gathered from travel merely confirm already-existing systems of understanding, do these facts count as knowledge at all?

Edgar Allan Poe, the subject of my third chapter, “Raiders of the Lost Archive: Poe’s *Pym* and South Sea Exploration,” similarly considers the confrontation between systems of ordering knowledge and individual narratives of travel. In his fragmented and fantastic novel *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838), Poe links his protagonist’s journey to the South Pole with the United States Exploring Expedition, a government-funded project to explore the South Seas, which Poe publically supported. By intertextually linking Pym’s narrative to an archive of accounts of the South Seas, Poe does not simply fictionalize the exploration narrative. He builds the improbable and fantastic elements of his narrative out of the navigational details, the maritime craft, and the scientific systems maritime explorers use to guarantee that their work would count as contributions to knowledge. Poe constructs his fiction by extending systems of knowledge—especially natural history—to their limits, in order to demonstrate the fictionality within these systems. Poe’s narrative ultimately depicts the ways models of knowledge travel ahead of the explorer; they shape Pym’s perception of the South Pole in advance of his reaching it.

While all three of my first chapters consider the problems of representing real places within the bounds of narrative, my fourth chapter, “Violent Ends: Melville’s *White-Jacket* and the Man-of-War’s Powerful Fictions” looks at how Melville’s nautical memoir attempts to correlate narrative with a space imagined as already-fictional and already shot-through with convention. Melville adapts the travel narrative’s projects of description and taxonomy to the world of the naval frigate. While Melville’s novel has often been read for the analogies it generates between the naval man-of-war and the United States, my chapter looks at how Melville describes the frigate on its own terms

and as its own specific kind of space. In this chapter, I consider the ways White-Jacket, the narrator of the story, frequently refers to himself as the “writer” of the tale and grants himself agency over the narrative and its representations. I argue that Melville subverts his narrator’s agency in favor of describing the man-of-war as its own powerful fiction: it is an artificial world in which officers use violence to keep its occupants in the orders predetermined by the U.S. Navy and its Articles of War. The man-of-war shapes its inhabitants’ experiences, perceptions, even their identities in ways White-Jacket cannot overcome as he attempts to reshape his memory of the ship in his own fiction.

In Melville’s discussion of the frigate *Neversink*, the violence enacted against sailors ultimately spills out as Melville hints at the ship’s role in projects of imperial expansion. Melville takes the travel narrative’s project of describing the borders of geographic spaces and between groups of people and turns it on its head. He describes the shifting borders of the United States in the wake of the Mexican-American War and paints the man-of-war’s role in drawing these borders on the West Coast and in the Pacific. Melville’s version of the maritime travel narrative, then, implicates the United States in imperialist expansion, even as the novel’s overtly descriptive purpose attempts to contain this implication.

Cooper, Poe, and Melville adapt the “truthful” sea narrative in order to think about the larger cultural narrative of Enlightenment progress and to intercept their own fictional narratives into this teleology. When antebellum novels took systems of knowledge into their frames, they reevaluated the boundaries and taxonomies these systems presented. The authors considered in this dissertation saw their fictional sea narratives not as a way of accessing deeper, metaphysical truths, but instead as a way of exploring the forms in

which Enlightenment knowledge present itself as truth. In the process, they display the ways the disinterest collection of knowledge gets bound up with the interested pursuit of power on a global scale.

CHAPTER 1

Captive Audiences: Jared Sparks, Robert Adams, and the Book of Travels

Robert Adams had a story so interesting, strangers would stop to write it down. Between 1814 and 1815, the African American sailor traversed the port cities of Mogador, Cadiz, and London, looking for passage home to Hudson, New York. He described an array of adventures: shipwreck, desert captivity, near escapes, even an illicit affair. However, Adams did not gain attention for these titillating scenes of his captivity in North Africa. Instead, ears perked up at his claim that a group of captors took him to Timbuctoo. For Europeans, this city, located in modern-day Mali, was a legendary object of imagination, made more legendary by the scarcity of written accounts of it accessible to Western readers. Adams never set out for Timbuctoo, nor could the allegedly illiterate sailor write down what he saw there. However, a set of influential men in London thought his testimony could be relevant for Great Britain, which had turned its “imperial eyes” on the interior of Africa.¹⁵

Adams’s tale would become an object of discussion in centers of transatlantic print culture after a group of British merchants published a narrative version of his travels and Jared Sparks, the new editor of the *North American Review*, criticized the work as a “fabrication” (162).¹⁶ The discussion, which centered on the reliability of Adams’s

¹⁵ “Imperial eyes” is Mary Louise Pratt’s phrase; see especially 1-12; Pratt discusses British interest in the North Africa on 67-83.

depiction of Timbuctoo, reveals key assumptions about the forms and cultural roles travel writing takes in the early nineteenth century. Examining these assumptions can help us understand the pressures travel narratives put on early American concepts of democratic political culture and enlightened civic engagement. The space Adams describes may be a world away for his transatlantic audience, but, for Sparks, obtaining correct information about foreign locales is part of the duty of an enlightened populace.

Both Robert Adams's account of Timbuctoo and Sparks's response to the sailor's story build off of earlier aesthetic considerations of travel narratives. By examining discussions of the "books of travel," to borrow Sparks's term, we can see how writers recalibrated the genre for an early nineteenth-century public sphere, imagined as burgeoning, rational, and improved through Enlightenment learning. Not part of *belle lettres*, travel narratives from this period were valued for the information they contained: descriptions of geographic features, ethnographic details about the people encountered en route, and natural historical accounts of plants and animals. Works of "statistics" captured facts and figures about a country and its population (though, importantly, the term "statistics" refers to numerical information but not the calculation of percentages).¹⁷ For Sparks, travel narratives like Adams's could be usefully integrated into public discourse: an enlightened public, he reasoned, is naturally curious about other countries.

¹⁶ In-text citations for both Adams's narrative and Sparks's review of the sailor's account are from *The Narrative of Robert Adams, A Barbary Captive: A Critical Edition* (2008), edited by Charles Huntsford Adams.

¹⁷ See Pratt, 20; *The North American Review* included evaluations of "statistical works" like the English William Walton's 1814 translation of Le Chevalier Félix de Beaujour, French Consul General in the United States' work, *Sketch of the United States of North-America, at the commencement of the nineteenth century from 1800 to 1810; with statistical tables, and a new map; containing all late discoveries, and exhibiting the division of Territorial zones, boundary lines, &c.*

Foreign policy, too, could be influenced by the collection of information. Travel narratives addressed questions about the cultural make up and the commercial potential of other countries; the information they provided, in turn, influenced the ways domestic audiences imagined their relationships to these countries. Since travel narratives could also contain falsehoods masquerading as facts, they could have a negative impact on policy and public debate. The public could be made to look foolish by contemplating and discussing fabrications in the place of real information. Sparks, in an attempt to contain the influence of inaccurate information, displays a confidence in Enlightenment paradigms of knowledge even as the essay he writes draws attention to the likelihood of mistakes and misinformation entering the discussion. The tensions that arise during Sparks's discussion of Robert Adams suggest how depictions of foreign travel affect concepts of citizenship, civilization, and the public sphere.

In what follows, I analyze Sparks's reaction to *The Narrative of Robert Adams* in the context of the aesthetic and political roles Sparks imagines for this genre. I begin by discussing the ways Sparks conceives of the norms for "books of travels"; I argue that his criticism of Adams serves to promote the role of literary reviewer as the arbiter of public concerns and a check on the potentially deleterious role of fabrication. Then, my chapter goes on to analyze the ways Sparks positions the United States against other "civilizations": Sparks's comparative work prioritizes the travel narrative as a gauge of civilizational progress. As Anthony Pagden describes, "Civilization . . . suggests both a process (that of civilizing) and comparative evaluation. It describes a state, social, political, cultural, aesthetic—even moral and physical—which is held to be the optimum condition for all mankind, and thus involves the implicit claim that only the civilized can know what it is

to be ‘civilized’” (“Defense” 33). Sparks thus plays the evaluation of North African civilization against his implicit evaluation of British civilization. His goal is to position the United States as inheritors and refiners of the British culture. Sparks imagines that the British press, in promoting a fabrication, has done damage to their status as an enlightened nation, tasked with spreading that enlightenment around the world. In this comparative work, Sparks also uses the population of the Maghreb as a different kind of foil, picturing them as the objects of and not the creators of knowledge, and ignoring any evidence to the contrary. The book of travels, a frequent object of critical consideration, could be used to differentiate the United States as a new player in global politics. By demonstrating his ability to manage the information contained in travel narratives, Sparks situates the United States’ literary culture as more suited to defining and disseminating Western values than their British counterparts, who had let interest and profit distort objectivity.

Robert Adams, Western Eye-Witness

When Robert Adams’s story circulated in the 1810s, his tale stood out because of both the real dearth of information Westerners then possessed about the city because of the symbolic value Timbuctoo held as a goal of exploration (even now Timbuctoo is used in English as a figure for a far-off place).¹⁸ As an American sailor in the transatlantic trade, Adams promised a specific, valued perspective. Since at least the fourteenth century, rumors of a rich North African empire had spread around the Mediterranean.

¹⁸ For the use of Timbuctoo as a symbolic concept in the West, see Michael Heffernan, “A Dream as Frail as Those of Ancient Time: the In-credible Geographies of Timbuctoo” (2001), 203-225.

These rumblings were inspired by the pilgrimage of Mansa Musa, the ruler of the Kingdom of Mali, who visited Timbuctoo in 1324 and 1325, on both legs of his journey to Mecca.¹⁹ However, no European or American had travelled to Timbuctoo and produced a first-hand account of it since Joannes Leo Africanus in the sixteenth century. Even then, Africanus escapes stable identification as a European subject: originally named Al-Hassan Ibn Mohammed Al-Wezâz Al-Fâsi, Africanus was born into a Muslim family in Ottoman-ruled Grenada and had travelled through North Africa before an encounter with Spanish corsairs led to his captivity and conversion to Catholicism in Rome.²⁰ His *Description of Africa*, written in Arabic and published first in Italian in 1550, etched a memorable image of Timbuctoo under the Songhai Empire as an “exceeding rich” and complexly-organized city (287; Book VII). Africanus describes imposing architecture, impressive centers of learning, and a vibrant marketplace, with “many shops of artificers and merchants” (287; Book VII). Most tantalizingly, in his “princely palace,” the king displays his “many plates and scepters of gold” in his “magnificent and well-furnished court” (288; Book VII). Translated into English by John Pory in 1600, Africanus’s account, with its emphasis on conspicuous wealth and

¹⁹ For more information on King Mansa Musa see Joshua Hammer’s *The Badass Librarians of Timbuktu* (2016), 14-16, and *Timbuktu and the Songhay Empire: Al-Sa’dî’s Ta’rikh al-sūdân Down to 1613 and other Contemporary Documents* (2003), edited and translated by John Hunwick, 9-12. As an example of the enduring nature of the story of Mansa Musa, the *New York Daily News* capitalized on Timbuctoo lore when, on October 18, 2012 it published an thinly-researched article by Erik Ortiz, dubbing Mansa Musa perhaps “the richest person of all time.” Although the research (gathered from celebritynetworth.com) is spurious, the casual appearance of Mansa Musa in a clickbait article speaks to the lingering imprint of the figure of an unfathomably rich African king. The fantasy of a foreign source of unending wealth seems to take on new urgency today as critics of globalization grow more numerous; in fact, the article compares him to the 1%, a term popularized after the 2008 global recession.

²⁰ For more on Leo Africanus, see the Jeremy Jeffs’s *BBC* documentary *Leo Africanus; A Man between Two Worlds* (2011).

marketable goods, quickly helped reinforce extant myths of Timbuctoo as an object of imperial fantasy.

Since Africanus, narratives by British, Spanish, and French travelers often incorporated information about the city and its environs from Arab merchants, even including full translations of Arabic accounts; Christians themselves, however, were banned from Timbuctoo. The writings of Africanus and the rumors of Mansa Musa served as useful references, but they did not offer the kind of empirical knowledge that Sparks and his contemporaries claimed to seek as Anglo-American interest in North Africa grew. Although Adams's authority was limited by his class, race, and lack of connections, his identification as an English-speaking Christian added value to his testimony.

When British bureaucrat and merchant Simon Cock spearheaded the effort to transcribe Adams's story, he framed his decision as a contribution to knowledge that was both new and pressingly desired. A committee secretary of the Company of Merchants Trading to Africa (often shortened as "the African Company" or the "African Committee"), Cock helped produce a third person narrative out of interviews with Adams. The African Company presented the narrative to the British Secretary of State's Office for the Colonies, and, in April 1816, released the account as the headliner of a book called *The Narrative of Robert Adams: A Sailor, who was wrecked on the western coast of Africa, in the year 1810, was detained three years in slavery by the Arabs of the Great Desert, and resided several months in the city of Timbuctoo*. Published by Murray in London—a house famous for releasing travel narratives—the tome included an editorial preface and coda, two appendixes of information on North Africa, and a map of

Adams's movements all meant to present the narrative as a serious contribution to the growing trove of research into the region.²¹ Joseph Dupuis, the British counsel to Mogador in Morocco had ransomed Adams: he not only vouched for the American sailor, he provided extensive endnotes for the narrative based on his knowledge, gleaned from traders visiting Morocco.

When Adams's narrative appeared, the idea of Timbuctoo in the West was still shot through with fantasy, but the city was also seen as a realistic milestone of global exploration. Information on the areas around Timbuctoo started to trickle in from the travel accounts of the British explorer James Grey Jackson and the American sailor James Riley. The Association for Promoting the Discovery of the Interior Parts of Africa (also known as the African Association) sponsored travelers to this region, including the Scottish explorer Mungo Park, to whom Adams is frequently compared. Park produced one of the most popular travel accounts of his day. However, he never made it to Timbuctoo. In the account of his first attempt, Park notes with regret that he was forced to turn back before he reached the city, which he labels "the great object of European research" (195).²² The French explorer Rene Caillié reached Timbuctoo in 1828, winning a round of imperial competition for France. Intervening after Park and before Caillié, the

²¹ Innes M. Keighren, Charles W. J. Withers, and Bill Bell's *Travels into Print: Exploration, Writing, and Publishing with John Murray, 1773-1859* (2015) charts Murray's role in releasing popular travel narratives and discusses the publication and reception of Robert Adams's story (127-130). Keighren, Withers, and Bell suggest that Murray was eager to follow up on his 1815 publication of Mungo Park's journals; since Park died "amid uncertain circumstances" on his second attempt to find the source of the Niger, British public interest in this mystery piqued a parallel interest in the region (128).

²² The British press was focused on the link between Adams and Park; a reviewer from Edinburgh's *Caledonian Mercury* notes that if people would like search for signs of Park in Adams's text, they would be disappointed" (July 11, 1816). See also, Stephen Wolfe "Robert Adams in Transatlantic Review" (2012) who argues that Adams's editors literally tail Park in their mapping of Adams's route.

African Company's narrative should be read in dialogue with these other attempts to depict North Africa. In fact, Adams's editor explains that he hoped the information could be useful to the upcoming Peddie expedition, sponsored by the rival African Association. As Charles Huntsford Adams observes, the African Company's narrative can be viewed as "a performance" that asserts the group as "a player in the new game of African discovery, and the march of human progress" (xxix).

Across the Atlantic, Sparks used his response to *The Narrative of Robert Adams* to enact a wider criticism of the British Empire's cultural institutions, who had disrupted the cadence of this march of progress with their misinformation. Sparks extends his criticism from the African Company to the British press and, finally, to the British public at large. While taking on such institutions may seem like a lofty goal for a review essay, Sparks matches this ambition with a critique that does more than discredit the authority of one narrative. Sparks works to perform mastery over an archive of travel narratives, imagined as part of a coherent project of discovery. Like the African Company, Sparks performs expertise and frames it in terms of the self-evident virtue of global exploration and the uniform process of seeking knowledge. As European powers increasingly sought to penetrate the interior of regions of Africa, Sparks used the release of Adams's narrative to build cultural capital for his paper and for the new nation. In the early decades of the United States, maritime conflicts with North African and European (particularly British) maritime powers demonstrated the weakness of American political and commercial influence.²³ No longer under the protection of the British navy, sailors on

²³ For more on the complex maritime relationships among European, American, and North African states, see Robert J. Allison's *The Crescent Obscured: The United States and the Muslim World, 1776-1815* (1995) and Philip Gould's *Barbaric Traffic: Commerce and Antislavery in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (2003).

American ships were subject to capture by Barbary corsairs or impressment by the British military. In contrast to these disadvantages, Sparks's critical performance implies that American institutions may be better suited to evaluating and ordering information about foreign locales and, by extension, better suited to forging political and commercial relations with them.

Writing anonymously (a common practice for literary reviewers of the time), Sparks dedicated two articles to debunking *The Narrative of Robert Adams*. The first, "Interior of Africa" from May 1817, reports on the London publication of the African Company's work and anticipates the release of the American edition by Boston's Wells and Lilly (also the publishers of the *North American Review*). In addition to hinting at the "general excitement" the book caused in Britain, Sparks's first article scoops the African Company's story by including an alternative account of Adams's travels (147). The short account, told in the first person and as if from Adams's perspective, was written by Samuel Storrow, a Bostonian merchant who had encountered Adams in Cadiz. Struck by the sailor's claims, Storrow had taken notes on their conversation several months before the African Company decided to sponsor Adams's narrative. Unlike the British group, however, Storrow kept his information "withheld from the publick" because, as the *North American Review* frames it, "upon further inquiry, [Storrow] found reasons for suspecting the veracity of Adams, particularly in regard to what he says about Tombuctoo" (Adams 147). Storrow's prudence here contrasts with the clamor of approval from the British press. Because the "Cadiz narrative," as Sparks sometimes called Storrow's account, deviated at several points from the African Company's rendition, Sparks uses the

conflicting points between the two as one method of disassembling the African Company's work.

Sparks's first article plants suspicion, while his second is a fully-sprouted denial of Adams's veracity. In addition to enumerating differences between the Cadiz and London narrative, Sparks's July 1817 review essay describes conflicts between Adams's testimony and extant accounts of the Maghreb, the Sub Saharan region Adams crossed on his way to Timbuctoo. According to the *North American Review*, Adams's account went against orthodoxy on the placement of rivers, the size of animals, and most noticeably, the wealth and culture of Timbuctoo. Adams described a city that was much less impressive than popular lore suggested: its buildings, including the palace, were single-storied and made of grass and clay, their rooms lacked furniture, and there were no shops (36-37, 46). Sparks counters this picture, saying, "it is certain, that Timbuctoo is yet the theater of a very extensive commercial intercourse" and "a place of wealth, activity, and a large population" (178-179). As René Caillié discovered in 1828, Timbuctoo in fact had declined as a site of trade and learning; in that way Adams's tale was somewhat correct, though there were still impressive buildings and libraries in the city. Sparks is right to suggest, however, that no written records prior to Caillié's would have given the impression that Timbuctoo had declined since Africanus had visited.

The specific way Sparks characterizes Adams's mistake—as a "fabrication" and a "fiction"—is notable. He does not suggest that the sailor had mistakenly described a different city, or that perhaps, after the privations of the desert, Adams's senses or memory had become distorted. Sparks instead strongly implies that Adams was a huckster, (according to Sparks, Storror "assures us" that "Adams was not the stupid,

unthinking, simple being, which we are led to suppose him from the remarks of the London editor” (170)), who had changed his story as needed to fool these self-important officials. Adams altered his narrative between Cadiz and London, changing “things in which it would not be possible for him to mistake or forget” (174). As a rational individual, Adams’s capacities for observing, remembering, and recounting facts are not questioned. Sparks claims, Adams “could not be daily in the streets of a large city for none, even six months, without learning the occupations of its inhabitants, and being able to describe them minutely” (173). If Adams really had been in Timbuctoo, he would have been capable of reporting accurate observations that fit in with already extant information about Timbuctoo. In Sparks’s view Adams proved capable of inventing answers to his interrogator’s questions; these were active lies and not the result of fragile memory or poor observation skills.

Why did Sparks spend so much time attending to one sailor’s yarn? As it turns out, Sparks’s skepticism of the African Company and the British press was justified. Adams in all likelihood did not go to Timbuctoo, though the other parts of his account are plausible. The best piece of evidence against Adams’s version of Timbuctoo is the lack of religious worship he claims he saw there. Adams “did not see any mosque or large place of worship there; and he does not think they had any” (47). Timbuctoo has several distinctive mosques and its residents would have practiced Islam.²⁴ Indeed, Sparks was right to worry that Adams’s misinformation might spread. Even twentieth-century

²⁴ Charles Huntsford Adams agrees that Adams “almost certainly” did not go to Timbuctoo, although Huntsford Adams reminds us that his narrative is “heavily mediated” by his editors (xiii). Ann Fabian suggests that the whole story may have been a hoax: Simon Cock, she hints, may actually be a pseudonym that hints that this is a “cock and bull story” (16). This seems unlikely to me, as the African Company was a real group with no motivation to risk its reputation with a prank; thus I agree with Huntsford Adams’s take.

scholars have taken Adams at his word and included his narrative as truthful evidence.²⁵ On a practical level, the immediate consequences of these falsehoods could have affected explorers in the region, giving them the wrong cues about where to find Timbuctoo or where bodies of water were located. However, Sparks does not emphasize this practical problem. His article claims that the falsehood itself is worth dismantling for its own sake. In addition, as I suggest below, Sparks puts his discussion of Adams into a much larger historical and moral context, as he imagines a very Eurocentric history of interaction between the West and North Africa and a similarly Eurocentric view of future civilizing and Christianizing missions.

The *North American Review* articles use Adams's "fabrication" as a conduit to the real objects of Sparks's critique: the sailor's editors and Britain's cultural and scientific institutions. In Sparks's view, the publication of Adams' testimony was a "gross attempt to impose on the credulity of the public" (163)—it was a successful attempt given that the narrative "gained universal belief in England" (162). Sparks throws some transatlantic shade, noting that Adams's falsehoods are "so obvious" that he "did not think it worthy of any serious examination" (162). However, a serious examination does ensue as Sparks points out the many clues that Adams's Timbuctoo must be a fictional one. For Sparks, the narrative itself is insignificant; what is significant is the fact that British institutions bought into the narrative's lies. Framing the issue this way, I want to suggest, allows Sparks to subtly promote not only his own expertise but also a vision of the prowess of the American institutions and reading public. The context of Sparks's other writing sheds

²⁵ See Christine E. Sears's discussion of Adams and other captives in the Western Sahara, *American Slaves and African Masters: Algiers and the Western Sahara, 1776-1820*, 114-133.

light on this particular episode of transatlantic competition; from his various positions of authority, Sparks continually contemplated democratic practices. In turn, this particular episode illuminates the specific pressures that travel narratives put on these practices, particularly print culture's role in imagining the public as enlightened and cohesive.

Sparks's Notes: Jared Sparks, *The North American Review*, and the "Books of Travels"

When the pieces on *The Narrative of Robert Adams* appeared in May and July of 1817, the Boston-based *North American Review* was only two years old. Sparks, who was twenty-eight at the time, had just taken the editorial reins from William Tudor, a merchant who helped found the paper. Although his articles on Adams represent an early stage in his career, the nationalistic themes they bring up fit within Sparks's larger, lifetime commitment to defining a distinct American history and culture. Sparks was able to enact this commitment from positions of intellectual and cultural prominence. A Unitarian minister during the Second Great Awakening, his tenure included serving as chaplain for the U.S. House of Representatives. This interweaving of political and academic influence continued when Sparks received funds from Congress to compile the correspondence of American Revolutionaries as well as an anthology of George Washington's papers. Sparks then succeeded fellow *North American Review* writer Edward Everett as the President of Harvard. Although he left the *Review* in 1819 to pursue his ministry, Sparks purchased the paper and returned as its editor from 1824 to

1830, where he presided over an influential cadre of writers and contributed to Alexis de Tocqueville's understanding of American democracy.²⁶

As Sparks's censure of the British reading public attests (though in a more combative key than usual), the *Review* often compared the United States' cultural and political practices to those of other nations. Sandra Gustafson's investigation of deliberative democracy in America shows how Sparks and his coterie, like Everett and Daniel Webster, "developed a comparative methodology that set American republicanism in a broad network of relations that highlighted its weaknesses as well as its strengths" (60). The *Review*'s contributors understood republicanism in an Atlantic context and understood political institutions as embroiled with culture. For instance, early pieces like Walter Channing's 1815 "Essay on American Language and Literature" argues for both America's indebtedness to the English language of its former ruler and the need to take this language in a new direction for original literary production. Channing argues that Americans need to create their own literature, and part of this process requires them to "possess and cherish peculiarities." Channing continues:

These [peculiarities] result from situation, from mind, or rather from the circumstances which most powerfully affect the mind. The institutions of government, &c. in the first instance borrow their peculiarities from the character of the people; and from the government these are transferred to the people, a peculiarity of feeling is thus found at last to result from the government and various institutions of the country. (311)

In Channing's circular set-up, the unique features of a people feed into its political and social practices and these, in turn, "transfer" to the people.²⁷ Channing's logic suggests

²⁶ Sandra Gustafson describes this dialogue between contributors to the *North American Review* and Alexis de Tocqueville in *Imagining Deliberative Democracy* (2011), 41-70.

²⁷ See Gustafson's discussion of *The North American Review* and its "aesthetics of deliberation," 72-96.

that the self-government valued by the drafters of the Constitution derived from the character of the former colonists. The institutions thus formed in the new country would encourage a continuation of these democratic principles in governance and in cultural creation. This focus on institutions that emerge from the “character of the people” gives us a glimpse at the processes of reaching consensus and forming institutions that Gustafson identifies as part of the deliberative work of democracy.

The *North American Review*’s contributors thought often about the connection between political principles and literary production, and travel narratives are a particularly interesting case of this cultural output. Travel writing was a popular genre on both sides of the Atlantic, and these works were often described as contributions to knowledge. However, the genre also offered less sterile interest: it featured exoticized others—especially women—and description of cultural practices, which, when filtered through Western eyes, were considered strange and new. The prevalence of travel writing as a genre could be seen as a political problem. In the same issue of the *North American Review* as his critique of Adams and the African Company, Sparks reviewed American sailor James Riley’s 1817 book, an account which, like Adams’s narrative, describes shipwreck on the west coast of Africa and captivity in the Maghreb. The account became popular and, like Adams’s tale, it was summarized in reviews and appeared in anthologies of writing about disasters at sea.²⁸ Attesting to this popularity, Sparks’s discussion of Riley registers the frequency of travel writing and brings up the norms by which they could count as contributions to enlightened public discourse:

Among the numerous classes of books, which are daily turned out upon the community, no one probably is so variable in its merits, as that

²⁸ See *Robinson Crusoe’s Own Book: or the Voice of Adventure, from the Civilized Man Cut off from his Fellows* (1843) by the publisher Charles Ellms.

comprising books of travels. Almost every man, of different calling in life, and every walk in society, if by accident or necessity be happens once in his life to wander from the precincts of his own native village, thinks it is his duty to enlighten the publick with a narrative of his adventures—the results of his observations on the habits and character of the strange men whom he visits—deep speculations on the peculiarities of their governments, or sagacious remarks on their political interests, civil institutions, and military establishments. (“*An Authentic Narrative*” 389)

Sparks’s comments have strong note of mocking in them: writing about one’s wanderings can be a too-easy way to contribute to an already saturated public sphere. While the mix of classes and occupations Sparks describes could be interpreted as promisingly democratic, Sparks instead hints at the disorder that could result from this state of publication. Writing travel accounts is a duty travelers only “think” they have. Certainly, Sparks suggests, the public need not be troubled by everyone’s idea of what is exciting and new to herself. Indeed, this image of the overly-eager travel writer delineates a provincial character not able to tell what’s new to her from what’s new to the public sphere.

Sparks and his coterie celebrated the enlarged participation of the populace in print culture but imagined ways to contain the potential chaos entailed by this proliferation of views. Scholars have noticed this balancing act throughout the *North American Review*’s early decades. Gustafson shows how the magazine engaged with a brand of republicanism that encouraged “democratic modes of deliberation”; it placed heavy emphasis on Ciceronian values of “civic virtue” balanced against private “contemplation” (79, 77). Edward Cahill’s discussion of the criticism from the Federalist period addresses a similar balance: he argues that early American critical essays, adapting a tradition of criticism from British literary culture, “emerges from two antithetical interests: to regulate the citizens of the republic and to liberate them from ignorance”

(691). These are antithetical because, on the one hand, this discourse envisioned the potential for universal participation and ascribed to the rational capacities of all individuals, but, on the other hand, it worried about the taste and refinement of a heterogeneous population. Cahill notes, “[in] principle, the rational-critical assumptions of the public sphere disarmed and temporarily dissolved class differences” with a “rhetorical universality” (691). The addresses travel writers make to the “public” echo this tension between possible dissolution of differences between men and the need for criticism to curate this potential chaos.

As Sparks’s discussions of the numerous books by travelers show, the editor reasserts the role of criticism as a means of distinguishing among these productions. By reasserting authority over the “universal” capacity of individuals, criticism can reinforce the conservative side of the Enlightenment. Robert Ferguson identifies this line of conservatism in the literary history of the early United States. While the idea that all men had the capacity to reason was a radical one, Enlightenment-era thinking also “assumes that knowledge is harmonious in inclination, that it tends toward unity in form” (154). The progressive image of knowledge, which Sparks conjures up in his discussion of European exploration, indeed tries to work around the potential conflicts that mistakes may present to the unity of knowledge. The disagreements over Adams’s information can be seen as “disruptions,” which, Ferguson argues, “are the reversible signs of ignorance, symptoms of darkness that will disappear in the spread of light” (154). Sparks in many ways invokes the logic Ferguson describes: although setbacks like Adams’s falsehoods present possible conflicts or recidivism, the overall process of illumination moves forward smoothly, especially with the help of critics and scholars.

Gustafson, Cahill, and Ferguson describe a vein of early American political thought that runs between elite or aristocratic authority and a free-for-all of opinion. Sparks's essays on Riley and Adams fit in with this ethos. Sparks worries about the "variable" quality of books of travel, associating this wide spectrum with the hodge-podge of writers who try their hand at travel writing. At the same time, he believes in the capacity of individuals from different classes to beneficially participate in public discourse.²⁹ Sparks champions Ledyard, for example, who was a sailor-turned-ethnographer, and whose wide-ranging travels became the subject of Sparks's first published history.³⁰

In other words, Sparks does not imagine a calcified class of elites. His essay on Adams, in fact, implies that perhaps this calcification has occurred in Great Britain, much to the detriment of truth. Contrary to critical convention, Sparks only includes one extended quote from *The Narrative of Robert Adams*. This quote is not even from the narrative itself, but from Cock's editorial preface. Sparks claims that Adams's account was "sent into the world . . . under the sanction of some of the most distinguished men in England," and he repeats verbatim the list of names Cock presented: "Earl Bathurst, the Right Honourable the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Major General Sir Willoughby Gordon, the Right Honourable Sir Joseph Banks, John Barrow, Esq. George Harrison,

²⁹ Sparks himself grew up on a farm and worked as a tutor to pay his way through Harvard, but he attained positions of cultural authority after he graduated in his mid-twenties.

³⁰ Ledyard's journey through Russia in search of seal furs and trading routes was cut short by Catherine the Great herself (who claimed he might be a French spy!). In his journals, Ledyard details the physical features of the country's eastern populations as he tries to link them to the Native American populations of the Americas. Not for the last time, Russia served as a point of comparison and a foil for the United States. See Sparks's *The Life of John Ledyard* (1829), which he composed using Ledyard's letters and journals.

Esq. Henry Goulburn, Esq. M.P. and other members of the government” as well as “the Lords of the Treasury” (163). In Sparks’s hands, these impressive titles are re-contextualized, and he repurposes Cock’s authorizing gesture to mock the gullible representatives of British society. Sparks (somewhat unfairly) implicates members of the distinguished Royal Society in the spread of Adams’s false narrative, a sign that these institutions had perhaps more reputation than rigor. Moreover, many of the men on Cock’s list had hereditary titles, and Sparks’s repetition of their titles in his essay slyly suggest that this hereditary order confers undue distinction. British institutions may offer the bells and whistles of authority, but the work they produced defies common sense and is rife with error.

Sparks, then, both asserts his own institutional authority and imagines that individual readers can, with the aid of the right institutions, identify the marks of truth within the text itself. In order to extend his judgement outwards and invite his American readers to partake in it, Sparks turns the issue of authorial class into an issue of literary restraint. The canny reader can detect the marks of prevarication in the narrative itself or through a comparison between new narratives and the archive of travel writing.

Addressing the role of individual travel authors, Sparks prioritizes public interest over personal expression: he critiques those travel writers who express either too much sentiment or partake in too much philosophizing. In his view, a duty to inform the public should take precedent. Authors like Riley can usefully participate in enlightening the public so long as they adhere to the limits of their genre. Sparks’s discussion of the “numerous” and “variable” travel books, quoted above, cordons off abstract topics like “speculations of government” from the domain of travel accounts, which should properly

keep to “matters of fact.” To make up for their limited training in “habits of thought,” writers of travel narratives can “keep in the humbler walks of plain narrative and simple description” leaving the “weighty and less obvious concerns of governments, national character, and historical disquisitions, to statesmen, civilians, and philosophers” who can “sit[] leisurely down in his study” and contemplate these obtuse matters (“*An Authentic Narrative*” 391). The ultimate value of the travel narrative, he notes, is its “veracity” (391). Statements that can be evaluated empirically as “true” or “false” should constitute the contribution of voyage narratives, especially if these narratives are penned by sailors and travelers not voyaging under the aegis of state or institutional sponsorship.

As Sparks’s comments suggest, by the early nineteenth century, narratives of individual travelers were not framed as pieces of persuasion or literary achievement. Rather, their writers offered their books “as a duty,” invoking an authorizing claim that, at the same time, limits authorial agency. Mungo Park begins his *Travels in the Interior of Africa* (1799) with such a stance by saying his narrative, “is now offered to the Public by the direction of my noble and honourable employers, the Members of the African Association” (xi). Park pays homage to the institution that sponsored him, but undercuts his own literary skills, “[a]s a composition, it has nothing to recommend it but *truth*. It is a plain unvarnished tale, without pretensions of any kind, except that it claims to enlarge, in some degree, the circle of African geography” (xxiii). Sparks compliments Park within his review of Adams, praising him for his adventurousness and his “coolness and deliberation,” his “calm,” and his “patient endurance” in the face of the dangers and sufferings (162). Sparks implies that the truth does not simply “recommend” a travel

account (162). Rather, truth can be distilled as the key ingredient of any travel writing worth its salt. Sparks asserts:

There is one indispensable requisite however, in books of travels, without which they can have neither interest nor value;—we mean veracity. Aberrations from truth in this species of writing, which is concerned wholly in matters of fact, cannot be atoned for by any other qualities,—they weaken our respect for the writer’s character, and destroy our confidence in his honesty--we lay down his book always with dissatisfaction, and often with disgust and contempt (*“An Authentic Narrative”* 390-1).

This absolute statement implies that any “aberration” can taint an entire book of travel.

Here Sparks tries to set norms for the reaction to travel narratives. Surely, an imagined narrative in the vein of *Gulliver’s Travels* could hold a reader’s interest. However, the popular narratives which flooded his community’s market claimed to offer glimpses at real-world spaces and to help a community at home imagine the globe’s inhabitants.

Equanimity, as Sparks finds in Park, and “plainness” of style, as he recommends to all travelers, should guide the composition of travel books. The travel writer should stick to the facts, while the reader of these books can react with strong, negative feelings (“dissatisfaction” or even distaste so strong it makes one put down the book). Sparks, like many of his contemporaries, articulates a homogenization of the genre, especially when its writers were not trained in a scholarly discipline. Accounts like Riley’s and Adams’s were evaluated under a rubric that limited the scope and subject of their authority. The need to appeal to other authorities, in turn, shows up as recognizable generic features, like the continuity of the narrative and the simplicity of its language.

Sparks does posit a universal level of reason among men, but he suggests that it is not universally developed. He recommends the intervening role of criticism and scholarship: Sparks circumscribes Riley’s influence by suggesting that travel writers like

Riley, sailors who reached the interior of North West Africa by accident in the course of their work, “are not often men whose habits of life have led them to the arduous exercise of thinking deeply, observing with accuracy, or judging with discrimination. In a word, they are not always scholars, and we should not require them to write or think as scholars” (390-391). Sparks’s simultaneous excuse for and undercutting of the sailor’s authority highlights his own intervening role as a curator of the travel narrative’s relevance.

British institutions, represented by the plethora of gentlemen who interviewed Adams, had failed in their own curatorial role. Rather than simply “contributing [a] mite of information to the *facts*” of a geographic region as Adams’s editors claimed to do with their publication (24), Adams’s tale contributes error to the set of known facts, opening up the possibility of other, yet-to-be recognized errors. Instead of representing the democratization of learning, travel narratives can disrupt the progress of knowledge with exaggeration or fabrication. Moreover, the frequent appearance of books of travel threatens the kind of chaos that seems akin to the potential chaos of democracy. As more viewpoints are represented—so the conservative view of democratic culture goes—the harder it gets to find consensus.

Beyond this analogical relationship, however, the reliability of the “mites of information” that enter the public sphere through travel narratives could affect the success of democratic dialogue itself. Riley’s “weighty” discussion of his sufferings as a captive in the Maghreb, for example, made his book useful to American abolitionists, and Riley himself spoke out against American chattel slavery. Riley’s narrative was even

influential on Abraham Lincoln's antislavery views.³¹ The type of captivity Riley experienced among nomadic Berbers, though horrible, did not match the horror of chattel slavery in the United States. The fact that he was ransomed gives us some indication of this difference. Riley had positive words for some of his masters and describes how they were often in the same situation of privation as their captives. However, if Riley had been accused of prevarication or too much exaggeration, the political impact of his descriptions could be neutralized.

Even though Sparks wants to limit pronouncements on government from writers like Riley, Sparks's own view suggests the influence that new information about a foreign region could have on policy. In his review of Adams, Sparks links the gleanings of information with creation of enlightened consensus on the issue of the slave trade. Sparks calls the Atlantic slave trade the "detestable traffic in human blood" and attributes its abolition in 1808 in part to "the results of the investigations which took place" that showed "the wrongs, oppressions, and cruelties, which were found to be practiced on an inoffensive and unprotected race of beings" (164). Although Sparks does not specify which "few great men" helped bring about the end of the Atlantic slave trade, opponents of the practice, like American Quaker Anthony Benezet, wrote descriptions of the Western coast of Africa, with the intent of correcting the false information that white slave traders may have circulated. Benezet's description of Guinea, an outpost of the slave trade since the 1500s, reflects this logic: he states that he wrote the work "to give some account of the different parts of Africa" and to provide "an impartial relation from what motives the Europeans were first induced to undertake, and since continued the iniquitous traffick"

³¹ Donald J. Ratcliffe's "Selling Captain Riley: 1816-1859" details the ways the sailor's story was digested and shared among antebellum readers, including Abraham Lincoln.

(xiii). He does this “in order to enable the reader to form a true judgment of this matter, which, though so very important, is generally disregarded or so artfully misrepresented by those whose interest leads them to vindicate it, as to bias the opinions of people otherwise upright” (xiii-xiv). Correct attention to the issue and accurate information, in other words, would lead the enlightened to the right course of action by putting the lie to the claim that traffickers took African captives for the sake of sparing them from war rivals. A “true judgment,” unclouded by misinformation from “interested” slave traders, cannot countenance the slave trade. The slave traders’ “artful misrepresentations” bear a good deal of the blame for the continued practice of slavery. Sparks, who was opposed to slavery but was far more conservative than Benezet, makes a similar link between more information and the inevitability of the slave trade’s demise.³²

Even though a presentation of the facts can lead a public to the “enlightened” and “Christian” course of action, Sparks wants travel writers to avoid their speculation on policy or proper forms of government. The more “obtuse” reasoning that comes from a review of this information, Sparks argues, should be left to those at home—“statesmen, civilians, and philosophers”—who have time to reflect on “the more weighty and less obvious concerns of government, national character, and historical disquisitions” (“*An Authentic Narrative*” 391). Sparks salvages the value of Riley’s work, however, suggesting that the trained eye can distill the facts from the exaggerations or emotions that may cloud a narrative’s candor. Sparks again distinguishes the genre of travel writing, describing the interpretive frame with which readers should approach these

³² See Benezet’s *Some Historical Account of Guinea . . . With an inquiry into the rise and progress of the slave-trade . . . Also a republication of the sentiments of several authors of note on this interesting subject; particularly an extract of a treatise by Granville Sharp, 1767.*

narratives: “We think, indeed, that none of the book making fraternity have so strong claims on our indulgence as travellers” (390). Sparks hedges the reliability of Riley’s work by passing some responsibility to the reader: “the eye of criticism should pass gently over the pages of the traveller,—it should be contented with gazing on what is new and interesting from its intrinsic (sic) value, although it may not be dressed out in so good a taste, and under so attracting a form as could be desired” (390). Readers should ignore the elements of “bad taste” and extract the relevant data. Riley exemplifies some of these elements of bad taste: “His [Riley’s] lively remembrance of his past sufferings, accompanied with no very marked aversion to the marvellous, caused him, occasionally to give a very high colouring to his descriptions—yet the outlines are not often distorted, and we are persuaded they are sketched, though sometimes roughly, with a hand of truth” (391). In Sparks’s view, the cool and collected Park contrasts with Riley; the latter’s attention to his suffering attends to his subjective experience in a way that can be distorting. Robert Adams’s editors express a similar sentiment: for readers who might question how an “ignorant sailor” has the capacity to collect important information, they note that his travels are “indeed singular and extraordinary, but are told with the utmost simplicity and bear strong internal marks of truth” (111). These marks include his “resisting the temptation . . . of exciting the wonder of the credulous, or the sympathy of the compassionate” (111). Adams does not “fill[] his story with miraculous adventures, or overcharged pictures of suffering” (111). This view of what an accurate travel narrative looks like is consistent with Sparks’s. The truth that Adams’s readers want is the not the truth of personal, felt experience.

Indeed, Cock's editorial preface uses criteria that is similar to Sparks's—the presence of descriptions of pain or a penchant for the “marvellous”—to evaluate Robert Adams. His evaluation, however, is quite different. Preempting readers who might question Adams, Cock asserts that an “ignorant sailor” has the capacity to collect important information, as long as he avoids the trappings of “wonder” and “suffering.” Behind these comments lies a long-term concern about the role of sailors as eyewitnesses. Jonathan Lamb, describing British South Sea exploration, explains that in the course of the eighteenth-century shifts, belief in wonders, such as monsters or miracles, became associated with emotions and unrefined tastes. English writers, like the influential philosopher Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury, “denounced as vulgar and barbarous all literary forms trading on popular credulity, including voyages to remote lands. Common sense became the standard of probability, and facts were accounted true if they were already familiar” (Lamb 83). Even though Timbuctoo was “new” to Adams, the sailor's amanuensis claims that his findings fall within the predictable limits established by natural history and ethnography. The location of these limits, of course, can be a matter of interpretation: Sparks's article agrees with the premise that a credible tale avoids pressing the boundaries of public belief, but thinks that Adams's account deviates wildly from the credible and, thus, is not located within these boundaries.

Adams's editors and Sparks's review in some ways mark a narrowing of the definition of travel narratives, even as a larger array of travelers feel compelled to contribute to the genre. Written half a century earlier and popular on both sides of the Atlantic, Lawrence Sterne's 1768 *A Sentimental Journey* offers a telling contrast, for this *roman a clef* minutely documents its protagonist's reactions to his experience on the

grand tour rather than his empirical observations. Sterne humorously anatomizes the types of travelers with which mid-eighteenth century readers would be familiar. He lists, “Idle Travelers,” “Inquisitive Travelers,” “Lying Travelers,” “Proud Travelers,” and “Splenetic Travelers,” labels which draw attention to the personal characteristics and interior limits of the travel narratives’ authors. Sterne then identifies his narrator as a sentimental traveler (12). From one perspective, being “sentimental” could count as a type of forthrightness, a truthful record of one’s emotional reactions. However, for Sparks, displays of sentiment get in the way of the truth and obscure the path to “new and interesting” facts about the world. The public address that frames Adams’s narrative asks for the kind of “universalizing” rhetoric (which Cahill identifies as one of the sides of enlightenment discourse (17)) rather than the personal expression represented in sentiment.

Just the Facts, Adams

What, then, does Sparks mean by the “book of travels”? And what does he mean by its main feature, facts? Many of the features of Adams’s tale can help us understand early-nineteenth-century connotations of the genre, especially as produced by sailors. These features, as my later chapters discuss, become the object of self-conscious examination for writers of travel fiction. Sparks credits Riley, in fact, for his “sailor-like frankness” even as he asks him to limit his abstract speculations. Hester Blum’s work on American maritime narratives attends to the material facts of oceanic travel and provides two helpful contexts for understanding Sparks’s discussion of travel narratives when it applies to authors who were sailors (as many of the travelers the *North American Review*

documented, in fact, were). Firstly, Blum suggests that Robert Adams's inability to write may have helped discredit him in Sparks's eyes.³³ Sailors, as Blum points out, were more likely than the American population in general to have attained a degree of literacy. Indeed, with some small caveats, Sparks supports the veracity of Riley, who was able to write his own narrative. Secondly, Blum also notes that the observational skills of sailors influenced their writing. Adams's editors indeed credit his skills as a navigator for his ability to so exactly remember the distances and directions he took on his journey.

The transatlantic discussion around Adams takes in some of the realities of transatlantic commerce, accounted for in Blum's scholarship. In the early nineteenth century, travel writing was imagined as work that could be done by sailors of different ranks. Adams's narrative describes a collision of the accidental and the routine, a collision that itself seems predictable. Adams and Riley, among others, gained access to regions previously unfamiliar to Western subjects because shipwrecks took them off their routes of travel. At first Adams's trip was not remarkable: in the first few pages of his account, he describes his ship's stop in Gibraltar, enumerating the items of cargo that were "discharged" and noting the extra deckhand they picked up (26). This routine is disrupted when Adams and his crew crash at *El Gazie* due to the "ignorance of the Captain" (26)—the "old sailors" of the crew seemed to predict the mistake that lead them to shipwreck ("they said he ought to have steered to the northward of west") (27). In other words, this trip was not supposed to be a daring voyage to unknown shores, but a quotidian trip on a well-worn trade route. Unlike sponsored travelers like Mungo Park, Adams had not prepared by reading natural history, ethnography, or the history of the

³³ Hester Blum explores this possibility in "The Prospect of Oceanic Studies" (2010).

region. Booksellers in metropolitan centers of the Atlantic, however, fed a market for these accidental, everyman accounts. *The Edinburgh Review*'s discussion of Adams, for example, considered the sailor's serendipitous access to Timbuctoo to be an example of a larger trend: "We have more than once had occasion to suggest," the article's author brags, "that the accounts received from persons accidentally led to visit the interior of Africa, might possibly afford that information regarding its great towns and rivers, which the enterprize (sic) of professed travelers has hitherto failed to procure" (383; No LII, Art. V). The Scottish paper, which Sparks censures for its endorsement Adams's story, not only supports the sailor but also elevates the accidental traveler in comparison to the fruitless efforts of funded explorers.

While the Edinburgh review groups Adams with Park, and while Sparks uses the blanket term "book of travels" in his essay on Riley, defining this genre is no simple feat. Different types of writing fit the bill. In addition to the "sentimental traveler" who, in the case of Sterne's story, is not a sailor but a gentleman on a trip of leisure, books from the so-called Age of Exploration influenced the notion of what travel writing should look like. Mary Louise Pratt, in her study of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century travel writing, describes the variety of texts that came out of voyages of discovery: for example, the multinational, European La Condamine expedition, launched in 1735 produced "letters, reports, survival tales . . . navigational narratives, monsters and marvels, medicinal treatise, academic polemics" and "civic description," her term for accounts that read like compendia of information on a country (23, 20). Although Pratt argues that "in the second half of the eighteenth century, many travel-writers would dissociate themselves from such traditions as survival literature, civic description, or navigational narrative, for

they were to be engaged by the new knowledge-building project of natural history,” works like Adams or Riley’s still engaged in these mixed modes (25). Sailor authors like Adams, Riley, and John Ledyard, who all travelled in the Maghreb, also interwove their navigational skills with their observational capabilities; they drew upon an analogy between the desert and the ocean. Riley describes the desert as a sea in a calm: “The whole surface is as smooth, when viewed on every side as the plain of the ocean unruffled by winds or tempests, stretching out as far as the eye can reach” (294-5); Adams similarly describes his route out of Timbuctoo as “a sandy plain, like a sea” (51). Their tales are filled with the descriptions of how they suffered and survived, and Riley, in particular, looks to give survival advice to future captives. How, then, does an untutored eye help “widen the circle of African geography,” as the African Company promises? This promise requires a balancing act between tracing the movement individual sailors, like Adams, and listing the kind of geographic, natural historical, and ethnographic information that could be recorded, evaluated, and catalogued by authorities at home.

Although *The Narrative of Robert Adams* distilled information from the interrogations of “over 50 gentlemen” (16), the work takes the form of a continuous narrative, in which lists of plants and animals are pegged to the movement of Adams. In describing an early part of Adams’s captivity, his African Company amanuensis writes, “they had travelled eastward about ten days, at the rate of about fifteen to eighteen miles a day In the course of this journey they saw a great number of antelopes, rabbits, foxes, and wolves, and a bird somewhat larger than a fowl, which the Moors called Jize” (50). The information, then, is written as though organic to Adams’s individual

experience. Lists of types of animals, plants, objects, and even people and their practices crop up along the chronological account of Adams's movement, much like what Pratt diagnosis in European travel writing as "leisurely pauses filled with gentlemanly 'naturalizing'" (26). Sparks's article on Riley describes this intersection of personal narrative and pertinent information as one of the requirements of the genre. Speaking of travel writers in general, Sparks makes a request that they provide the provenance of their information, asking that the traveler "take due care to inform us how he gets safely back from such dangerous excursions" (390).

Even as the "matters of fact" covered by the travel writer should be narratable through the individual's perspective, the traveler's information is always potentially extractable. Sparks himself does this when, at one point in his critique of Adams's narrative, he presents a chart comparing the directions and movements described in the Cadiz account to those in the London narrative. Sparks can rearrange and recontextualize Adams's observations, and, indeed, his ability to do is part of the act of verification. This move subordinates the role of the narrative to the larger project of gathering facts: rather than being well-wrought urns, travel narratives are figured here as disposable containers of information. The individual traveler—valorized for his new information and unique experience—is ultimately subject to the norms of his genre, norms that work to showcase and certify the usefulness and validity of his observations. The artistic merits of the composition are not only irrelevant, they can get in the way of the informational value of the account.

Natural history wields a strong influence on these works, and its integration into colloquial or "plain" language similarly invokes a tension between individual experience

and systematic knowledge. Adams and Riley offered information that could fit into natural historical models (described in my introduction). They list the size and varieties of animals and plants encountered in the Maghreb. Like their late-eighteenth century predecessors, “whether or not an expedition was primarily scientific, or the traveler a scientist, natural history played a part in it” as the “the observing and cataloguing of nature itself became narratable” (Pratt 26). Adams’s interrogators were interested in geographic details, manners-and-customs descriptions, and lists of flora and fauna. When a scene in which the inhabitants of Timbuctoo hunt a four-tusked, twenty-foot tall elephant seems exaggerated, even to Adams’s African Company sponsors, his editors work to redeem the scene’s overall credibility (40). In doing so, they invite some ambiguity into their evaluation of his observational skills. Where his editors earlier cited Adams’s untutored frankness as a boon to his credibility, here, a potentially incredible detail is excused by the same lack of training: his editors annotate the description of the elephant by asking audience to loosen their standards. Expecting Adams to “minutely observe” and then, years later, “to correctly describe . . . the details of the plants or animals which he had there an opportunity of seeing” would be “dealing rather unreasonably with a rude sailor cast upon the wilds of Africa” (40 n 18). They go so far as the call such an expectation “unjust” (40 n 18). The *London Quarterly Review* quotes this explanation and says they are “fully inclined to agree” (463). Adams interrogators combed his memory for such details, but his editor reminds us that “the same objects which would be full of interest to a tutored eye, and would be scanned in all their parts with eager and systematic curiosity, might pass almost unobserved before the vague and indifferent glance of an uncultivated individual like Adams” (80 n 19). Adams’s

amanuenses use a similar logic as Sparks does when he asks for “indulgence” for travel writers. The African Company editors admit the difference between a “systematic” description of plants and animals and the descriptions that Adams can provide. At the same time, they promote his work as contributing to discourses of natural history, geography, and ethnography—the “scientific” systems that aim to catalogue the world.

As part of his contribution to natural history, Adams describes animals and plants, made legible to him through comparisons from his own experience, “the river is well stored with fish, chiefly of the sort which Adams took for the red mullet: there is also a large red fish, in shape somewhat like a salmon, and having teeth; he thinks it is the same fish which is known in New York by the name of “sheep’s-head” (38). His editors admit that these designations are not scientific or necessarily precise. Adams “took” a fish to be “red mullet,” but this may simply be a helpful comparison for the species. The similarities between these fish and the ones Adams could find in New York are not a surprise or a sign that he was imagining the story using the knowledge of domestic animals he had at his disposal. Rather, they are a bridge between the scientific work of natural history and the colloquial knowledge Adams is represented as owning.

Adams’s account suggests that the globe is fundamentally knowable and categorizable, and this categorization occurs through an interaction between the individual experience and institutional knowledge. Even totally unfamiliar species are contained with comparisons to familiar animals and plants. In Timbuctoo Adams saw “a most extraordinary animal named *courcoo*” (40). His use of this native designation is quickly domesticated and made familiar: the animal “somewhat resembl[ed] a very large dog, but ha[d] an opening or hollow on its back like a pocket, in which it carries its prey.

It has short pointed ears and a short tail. Its skin is of an uniform reddish-brown on its back, like a fox, but its belly is of a light-grey color” (40). The comparisons to familiar animals makes these species both new and familiar; they are interesting in their novelty, yet containable within the bounds of realistic expectation. The strange courcoo is like a dog or a fox, and a reader can imagine their domestic species as points of comparison. These descriptions, while different from descriptions a naturalist might produce, add texture to the “unknown” spaces of the map, helping readers picture what they might find in these locales.

Adams’s editors digest this information, linking it to systematic catalogues of nature. For example, Adams notes the use of an animal called the “heirie” at Timbuctoo (39). Dupuis and another unnamed editor annotate his description of the heirie, both suggesting that “there can be no doubt” that the animal he refers to is a camel (39 n 17). They add further scaffolding to his description by cross-referencing Leo Africanus’s description of camels (using the Latin translation of his work, perhaps to make Africanus’s pre-Linnaean account look more like Linnaean nomenclature). Adams’s editors then solidify the determination that the heirie is a camel by cross-referencing Thomas Pennants *History of Quadrupeds*, a formal work of natural history (39 n 17). This dynamic reinforces the authority of the metropole, much in the way Pamela Regis describes in her discussion of early American natural history.³⁴ Even the above elephant, whose dimensions “considerably surpass the limits of any previous authorities” is tamed with a reference to natural history. In an extended use of apophasis, his editors say they

³⁴ Regis describes the way early American practitioners of natural history attempted to establish their own scientific authority in a transatlantic context, in which European institutions often saw North Americans as the providers of specimens that they would then process. See *Describing Early America* (1992), especially 2-39.

can credit Adams, “without attempting to maintain the possibility of his accuracy, by quoting the “authorities of Buffon and others” (40 n 18). The writer of the note then goes on to assert these authorities, putting Adams in context of formal works of natural history and asserting the legitimacy of the African Company’s informational project. His editors suggest “that African elephants from the interior of the continent may “greatly exceed[] in size those of the western coast, and even be[] larger than the elephants of the East Indies” (79).

Even though *The Narrative of Robert Adams* in some ways speaks to the value of personal narratives in this period, his individual experience is always in dialogue with the larger systems of knowledge and authority that can contain, correct, and catalogue the data he provides. The early nineteenth century did see a proliferation of personal accounts. However, travel narratives teeter between valuing an individual’s ability to contribute to knowledge while effacing the individual in favor of the public value of the knowledge. These narratives attempt to strike a balance between the scientific and the colloquial. Natural historical information is clearly valued by Adams’s editors and reviewers, but this explicit focus belies the way nineteenth-century travel narratives blur the lines between different subjects. Nature, ethnographic description, and commercial interest weave into one another, and the knowledge contained in narratives like Riley or Adams is wide-ranging.

What Sparks means by “matters of fact” aligns in many ways with Foucault’s description of the work of natural history. As I describe in my introduction, Foucault argues that, in the wake of Linnaeus’s work, natural history became an attempt to “bring language as close as possible to the observing gaze, and the things observed as close as

possible to words” (132). According to Sparks, for example, what Leo Africanus hears secondhand may have “occasionally led into errors,” but “when he speaks from personal observation, we have no reason to doubt his veracity or suspect his honesty” (165). Accurate observation—given by real eyewitnesses—can easily fit into the archives of natural historical information, which itself has been accumulated by travel writers over time.

Archive and Authority in a Transnational Context

Although Sparks and his contemporaries acknowledge the scarcity of sources about the city itself, Sparks describes the Maghreb as part of a global frontier that is predictable in its broad outlines. Dupuis, Cock, and the writers of the appendixes to *The Narrative of Robert Adams* in effect agree, linking the points in Adams’s narrative to their own resources for information. For Sparks, the African Company’s work of cross-referencing involves some interpretive gymnastics, and he accuses them of skipping over the obvious. Sparks argues that, in an effort to credit Adams’s placement of Timbuctoo relative to the Niger River, one of Adams’s editors “collates the various readings of the Italian, Latin, French, and English translations” of Leo Africanus, making them cast Africanus’s conflicting information as “ambiguous,” “unintelligible,” or “contradictory” (176). This, to Sparks, is a deliberate obfuscation, since “there is not a clearer passage in the whole Description of Africa, than the one in question” (176). Even though the members of the African Company are able to stage a show of fitting Adams into the archive, Sparks imagines this as a kind of shadow play. The editorial prefix, notes, and appendixes that buttress *The Narrative of Robert Adams* are familiar

accompaniments to book of travels, but Sparks pokes fun at how, in this case, they dwarf the narrative itself: Adams's account "occupied a small corner" of a "splendid quarto" (163). Sparks strikes a delicate balance: the accoutrements of expertise *can* be used to deceive. However, Sparks assures us that these manipulations are transparent to the honest reader, or, at least, they are visible with the aid of his exegesis.

The *North American Review* recontextualizes Adams's account within a sweeping history of Western contact with Africa. Sparks claims to sum up "the present state of knowledge" on the Maghreb and to show that "Adams's story, "[h]as scarcely a single point of resemblance to any other description which has been given, either ancient or modern" (168). Sparks's story of expertise and certainty serves to subsume the potential errancy of an individual narrative, but it also uses Adams's individual narrative for a larger critique of British cultural and political institutions. At the same time as Sparks performs a historical review of European exploration—imagining it as a coherent narrative—he effaces the contributions of non-European sources. The Maghreb as a contact zone brings together black Africans along with Moorish, Arab, and Berber groups who practiced Islam.³⁵ This move is familiar: civilization is imagined as a monolithic, Western force. Qualities of non-Western peoples that might count as "civilization" to European travelers—especially the use of written language—are ignored or described as somehow different from their European iterations.

Sparks's critique of the African Company's publication performs expertise, positioning Africa as the object of Enlightenment projects of knowledge-building. This requires him to retrace an archive of western knowledge about Timbuctoo and its

³⁵ "Contact zone" is Mary Louise Pratt's term for "the space[s] and time[s] where subjects previously separated by geography and history are co-present" (8).

environs, even if admits the paucity of sources at his disposal: “All here is mysterious and uncertain” (168); in doing so he decides what counts as legitimate knowledge while imagining a telos for the expansion of Western influence. Sparks offers a summary of the ethnographic and geographic information he possesses by retelling of centuries of interaction between European powers and North Africa: “The Romans are said to have crossed the great desert, and penetrated as far as the Niger, but no European in modern times, if we except Leo Africanus, has advanced so far” (164). He notes that Park and Ledyard, however, have made headway in into these “unknown and inhospitable regions” (164).

Invoking a white man’s burden ideology, Sparks conflates the expansion of European knowledge of African geographies with the “civilizing” of its populations. In his account, the lack of European exploration into African territories meant that “this was not a period very auspicious for African improvement” (166). The period after the decline of Rome lead to “[t]he want of enterprize (sic) in Europe, resulting from the decline of ten centuries” (166). Sparks here admits to a period of decline in Western learning, but then shifts the reason to the inherent interestingness of the continent itself.

These dark ages, “left men without motives either of interest or curiosity sufficient for prompting them to extend their researches into a country, which was known only for its deserts, and the piracies, barbarism, and stupidity of its inhabitants” (166). In Sparks’s telling, the qualities of North Africa itself are worked into the logic of exploration and expansion. He continues this line of thinking: “when the mind again recovered its energies in the more civilized parts of the world, it was long occupied with objects less remote and doubtful.” The western “mind” seems to have “recovered,”

picking up where it left off to continue its enlightened dominance of the world: “The revival of letters in Europe—the resuscitation of commerce—the formation of political establishments—the new relations, which were beginning to exist between different nations,—all these afforded sufficient scope for the noblest exertions of intellect, and the grandest schemes of enterprize” (166).

In Sparks’s rehearsal of the history of global trade and planetary consciousness, knowledge from Arabic, Berber, or Moorish sources occupies a suspect space. The fact that Arabic-language knowledge-building projects, like the Abu Bakr al-Razi’s ninth-century science encyclopedia of science, might predate and mirror western projects is not necessarily something Sparks should know, given the real limits of the records he had. But Sparks seems *a priori* disinclined to fit these kinds of texts into his canon of works that, to him, contribute to a Western planetary consciousness.

Sparks finds ways to discount contributions from Arabic sources, throwing skepticism on Riley’s inclusion of a description of Timbuctoo that was written by Sidi Hamet, one of Riley’s captors. Where Riley at times praises the hospitality and literacy of his captors, Sparks refutes this possibility: “We were hardly prepared to find so favourable an account of the literary character of these tenants of the desert, as appears in the following extract” (404). He quotes Riley’s description of scenes of reading and writing: “They all learn to read and write” Riley notes (qtd. in Sparks “Review of ‘An Authentic’” 404). Adams more tepidly summarizes, “they are not altogether without skill in such arts as promote the few conveniences of life, which their condition allows them to enjoy” (405).

Sparks discounts Sidi Hamet’s description of his travels:

We see no reason for putting the least confidence in the tales of this man, whom Capt. Riley in another place calls a ‘thievish Arab,’ and who had by no means approved himself on the desert a very conscientious observer of common principles of honour, honesty, or veracity. The marvellous adventures of Gaudentio di Lucca, in crossing the desert, are quite as interesting, and we imagine little less true. (406)

before comparing him with Robert Adams, and might similarly, without qualification, “convey erroneous impressions to the publick. (406) Sparks turns to a familiar trope for discrediting Muslim sources: he imagines Hamet as “thievish” or intent on diversion. In the civic humanism of the West, knowledge about routes, natural resources, and traded goods counts as a necessary and inevitable contribution to the public. If anything goes wrong, it’s *too* fervent a desire to contribute. Arab Muslims are imagined as holders of secret knowledge: their geographic territories are “uninhabitable” (168). They navigate a desert imagined to be like the ocean—a familiar trope from this period.³⁶ However, their skill in navigating does not seem to garner praise for them from Sparks or his peers. It only contributes to the view of them as Other.

This Othering of the Muslim population in North Africa works to discount, ahead of time, any features of their culture that would be recognized as features of civilization. While Sparks puts the literary culture of the United States in a continuum with the cultures of Europe, he *a priori* excludes Muslim civilization from the narrative. What’s interesting here is that this erasure looks different from Sparks’s treatment of black Africans, who, to him, are potential benefactors of the civilizing process.

³⁶ For just a taste of the widespread use of this trope, we can turn to Kant, who imagines the ocean and the desert as uninhabitable spaces between the dispersed habitable spaces of the planet—the places that can be known and subject to his cosmopolitan concept of rule and natural law (*Political Writings* 106).

In sum, Sparks's review of Adams is a two-pronged attempt to valorize the American public sphere. Inheritors and improvers of European projects of exploration, Americans can be trusted to objectively evaluate information about North Africa. This evaluation paints the occupants of the Maghreb as passive objects of the civilizing process and the descriptive eye.

CHAPTER 2

Monikin Business: Cooper's Satire of Enlightenment

Halfway through Cooper's satirical novel *The Monikins* (1835), its English protagonist and narrator Sir John Goldencalf hires Noah Poke, a sealer from Stonington Connecticut, to helm an expedition to the South Pole. Cooper's earlier sea novels, like *The Pilot* (1823) and *The Red Rover* (1827), focus on naval maneuvers and shipboard antics. Although this is the first of Cooper's novels to depict an overseas journey to uncharted territory, Cooper's decision to describe a polar voyage is not in itself surprising. As I discussed in my introduction, narratives depicting circumoceanic trade and discovery were popular in the decades after the War of 1812: American editions of British and French voyage accounts and narratives by American travelers were frequently reviewed and excerpted in literary magazines.³⁷ Moreover, the idea of the South Pole as a goal of exploration gained traction in the United States in the 1820s and 30s and helped lead to Charles Wilkes's 1838 South Sea expedition. Edgar Allan Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838), the subject of my next chapter, sends his protagonist to the southern end of the Earth.

³⁷ William Lenz documents the popularity of these works in "Narratives of Exploration, Sea Fiction, Mariners' Chronicles, and the Rise of American Nationalism: 'To Cast Anchor on that Point Where All Meridians Terminate'" (1991).

What might come as a surprise for readers of Cooper, however, is the fact he imagines the Antarctic lands inhabited by talking monkeys. More exactly, in Cooper's novel, the South Pole is the homeland of the "monikins," a "civilized" and intelligent species who, according to one school of monikin thought, may be related to monkeys.³⁸ Goldencalf originally encounters a group of four monikins in Paris, in the course of his Grand Tour. At first surprised to hear the monkeys speaking to one another, Goldencalf quickly acclimates to the situation and dedicates himself to learning about the monikins. For Goldencalf, this involves learning about the monikins' understanding of natural history and their systems of political economy. At first discovering what he can from Dr. Reasono, the scholar among the monikin group in Paris, Goldencalf expands on the novel's cultural and political comparisons when he decides to return the monikins to the Antarctic continents. There, the voyagers visit Leaphigh, a country which parallels England, and then sail to Leaplow, which parallels the United States.³⁹ In Cooper's allegory, Leaphigh has an aristocracy, and, indeed Poke gets in trouble for accidentally insulting the queen. Leaplow is a republic, but Cooper's version of this democratic equality is far from ideal. At one point in the novel, for instance, Cooper parodies the United States' party politics by describing a Leaplow election in which the only position each party holds is a decided opposition to the other party. After Goldencalf gets a taste

³⁸ Christina Starobin notes in her article "The Monikins" (1991) that Cooper's selection of the word "monikin" has several resonances: a "manikin" was an eighteenth-century term for a small man or "pygmy" (108). The name also has echoes of "money" and "kin" two important topics in the novel.

³⁹ Cooper identifies Leaphigh's and Leaplow's analogues in a letter To Richard Bentley, March 20th, 1836. "It is my favorite book, and I think it will be better understood hereafter. The first volume bearing so much on England, I told you to suspend your opinion for the second, in order to show that it was honestly written, the last volume bearing equally hard on America" (*Letters* III.206).

of the flawed systems in both of these countries, the journey ends with our protagonist waking up from a fevered sleep, with Noah watching over him. However, Cooper leaves ambiguous whether or not he dreamed the whole adventure or if he, in fact, slept through his return voyage.

Throughout the novel, Cooper brings together fantastic, grotesque, and absurd imagery with the rational languages of science and political economy. Goldencalf presents his narrative as a set of “extraordinary facts,” which help him build comparisons among civilizations and which, in turn, influence his choices at the end of the novel (3). If the reader is meant to think of Goldencalf and Poke’s journey to Leaphigh and Leaplow as a dream, our protagonist still allows his experience to alter his approach to life. At the end of the novel, Goldencalf extracts a long list of “maxims” from his experience (314-318). These changes in his philosophy result in a happy marriage to Anna Etherington (who is the paradigm of virtue in the novel) as well as a concentration of Goldencalf’s interests and wealth on his estate (which has the heavy-handed name “Householder”).

In my last chapter, I discussed how Jared Sparks, in his position as literary editor, was concerned with the authority to manage information, to collect and correct the facts. In *The Monikins*, Cooper takes aim at the systematization of knowledge, especially in Enlightenment accounts of natural history and political economy. In the first half of the novel, Goldencalf devises a system of political economy he dubs, “the social-stake system,” which he believes will help him spread his own benevolence around the globe (43). Goldencalf’s reasoning, however, is really rationalization. His theory allows him to label all of his worldwide investments as extensions of good will. In the second half of

the novel, Goldencalf decides to travel in order to “establish the important facts” about the monikins and “to be let into further details of the monikin polity, morals, and philosophy and all the other great social interests of the part of the world they inhabit” (5, 123). In this part of the narrative, Cooper adds another object to his satire, the work of naturalist George Leclerc, the Comte de Buffon. The monikins have their own history of the Earth, which, like Buffon’s features changes in the Earth’s geography; they partake in their own version of circumoceanic exploration and relay their own set of scientific observations. Dr. Reasono offers a sweeping history of the monikin civilization, which inevitably contradicts human views of the Earth’s history and Western subjects’ place on it (Ch. 11). The monikins’ alternative, totalizing narratives, which designate the monikins as the most advanced and civilized species, parallel Western accounts of human progress. The monikins rank their species as both biologically and culturally superior to all others (describing humans as occupying “a more infant and less improved condition of society” (109)), a move meant to reflect on similar European and American conceptions of superiority.

In what follows, I show how *The Monikins* explores Cooper’s shifting thoughts on overseas commerce, a topic that, for him, also leads to discussions of natural history and ethnography. While political economy and natural history, at first, seem like disparate topics, Cooper’s novel shows an awareness of how other voyage narratives bring these ideas together. Overseas travel narratives describe foreign populations, geographies, trade routes, and potential resources, sometimes in the course of a single paragraph. As Nathaniel Philbrick details, Cooper was well-versed in trade and exploration narratives, like those of Americans Edmund Fanning and Benjamin Morrell (217); Cooper even

wrote an “enthusiastic review” of an 1821 narrative by the British explorer William Parry, who searched for the Northwest Passage (Philbrick 221). The influence of these narratives on *The Monikins* extends beyond the novel’s depiction of a South Sea voyage.

The 1833 narrative of Abby Jane Morrell, who traveled on her husband Captain Benjamin Morrell’s voyages of trade, offers a striking example of the convergence of topics we see in *The Monikins*. Morrell describes the variety of ships from different nations as she looks out at a harbor in Singapore. She writes:

Commerce not only binds nations with a golden chain but it gives philosophy food for perpetual reflection. The origin of these nations—their history, their habits, their pursuits, their disposition, are all different; yet they are all the children of the same great parent, and are all destined to the same immorality. (111)

Morrell, whose narrative also includes arguments for free trade among nations, ascribes to a view of commerce as a benevolent force.⁴⁰ If exploration narratives like Morrell’s depict trade relationships, the gathering of goods, and the collection of information on a global scale, Cooper aims magnify the way these descriptions feed into systematized accounts of knowledge, like Buffon’s natural history and Adam Smith’s treatise on the “nature and causes of wealth.”

Cooper satirizes Enlightenment systems of understanding by describing discord between empirical, observable reality and the abstract systems or rules that are meant to comprehend them. In *The Monikins*, characters espouse different systems of comprehending natural and social worlds. In doing so, Cooper implies, they often predetermine the position of experiences within its system and reshape any inconvenient facts, a dynamic he jokingly refers to as using “reason” both “forwards and backwards”

⁴⁰ We see in the 1830s a logic that Philip Gould identifies in late eighteenth century transatlantic discussions of commerce and anti-slavery; see *Barbaric Traffic* (2003), 1-11.

(49). Using a Swiftian motif in describing imagined civilizations, Cooper confronts Enlightenment positivism by suggesting that, rather than confidently rendering the world predictable, discourses like science and political economy often erase or reshape the data that confront the senses. Instead of suggesting that conflicts, problems, or errors feed the evolution of theories in a dialectical way, with problems propelling new solutions, Cooper's characters stamp out these problems in favor of their theories. Thus, Cooper's satire enacts a deep skepticism towards abstract theories as such.

Cooper's Optimistic Notions

Before explaining how *The Monikins* engages with scientific and economic theories fed by exploration narratives, I want to contextualize this novel within Cooper's career and within the evolution of his political interests. Cooper's earlier willingness to embrace Adam Smith-like conjecture contrasts with *The Monikins*'s skepticism towards totalizing systems. My discussion of Cooper's earlier writing focuses on *Notions of the Americans Picked Up by a Travelling Bachelor*, his 1828 celebration of American democracy and culture. In *Notions*, Cooper intersects conjectures about nature with his thoughts about social order; in *The Monikins* he presents both natural history and social theories as parallel inquiries, which behave in similar, erroneous ways. While the Cooper of *Notions* is confident in his ability to rely on abstract theories and predict trends from the statistical figures (meaning quantitative information about countries) and empirical observations he presents within his work, the Cooper of *The Monikins* makes such abstractions look more like sophistry.

Although literary scholars have largely overlooked it, *The Monikins* speaks to shifts in Cooper's understanding of his country's representative democracy, cultural position, and race relations, shifts which critics have identified.⁴¹ In the 1830s, Cooper's optimism for the American experiment in democracy changes in favor of a tempered view of his country's institutions and a growing investment in local associations.⁴² His travels through Europe, his disillusionment with Jacksonian-era democracy, and the cold reception of his writing by the Whig-oriented press made him less likely to adopt the stout defense of American democracy which appear in his earlier writing.⁴³

⁴¹ Exceptions to this critical omission include Starobin's article (mentioned above) and Scott Michaelsen's "Cooper's Monikins: Contracts, Construction, and Chaos" (1992), which reads the novel as staging scenes of "contractual performance" in order to show how contracts become increasingly less stable as they move further away from one-on-one contracts made between two people (3). For discussions of changes in Cooper's political views in the 1830s, see J. Gerald Kennedy, "Cooper's Europe and His Quarrel with America" (2007); Sandra Gustafson's *Imagining Deliberative Democracy* (2011) describes Cooper's "flattering assessment[]" of congressional debate, which "emphasiz[es] the egalitarian features of the practice; Gustafson goes on to characterize Cooper's "increasingly cosmopolitan frame of reference" as a result of his move to Europe (178). Ezra Tawil's *The Making of Racial Sentiment* (2006) describes the shifts in Cooper's thinking on race (69, 74).

⁴² His later work *The American Democrat* (1838) argues that the "rights and liberties of the citizen, in a great degree, depend on the political institutions of the several states, and not on those of the Union" (50).

⁴³ Cooper's critique of democracy in *The Monikins*, which focuses on the deleterious effects of the Jacksonian era's party politics and the unchecked pursuit of wealth, was, in part, a product of the comparative stance he developed after his travels through Europe between 1826 and 1833. The trip provided materials for five volumes of writing, collected under the title *Gleanings in Europe* and informed his reflections on his own country, evinced in the *American Democrat* (1838) and *A Letter to his Countrymen* (1833). Describing this period of Cooper's career, J. Gerald Kennedy contends that while the author's travels, "began with an earnest desire to know Europe and to correct its misapprehensions about America," his journey in fact led him to "discover[] that the national community hardest to define was his own" ("Cooper's Europe" 93). As Kennedy and other Cooper scholars have observed, the tone of his observations, while never rejecting his preference for a democratic system, gained world-weariness. Robert E. Spiller (1965) observes that *A Letter to His Countrymen* displays Cooper's "dismay at the conditions of society and politics as he found them . . . His disillusionment is extreme in contrast to his mood five years earlier when he wrote the *Notions*" (26). Sandra Gustafson also describes Cooper's investment in legal structures and their role in maintaining democracy; see "Histories of Democracy and Empire," 120.

Cooper himself suggests that this novel represents a change in his oeuvre, declaring it “an entirely new kind” of book (*Letters* 28). Indeed, *The Monikins* looks very different from Cooper’s frontier fiction, which literary scholars in the years after World War II turned to for its themes of individualism and depiction of “virgin land,” and which more recent scholarship has related to the racialized and gendered ideology of western expansion.⁴⁴ *The Monikins*’s satirical tone and almost-contemporary setting (its main action takes place in 1819), contrast with the “celebration of liberal democracy”—to borrow Gretchen Murphy’s description—in Cooper’s frontier novels, which are set before the American Revolution (*Hemispheric* 40).⁴⁵ Nor does *The Monikins* look like *The Pilot* (1823) or *The Red Rover* (1828), Cooper’s early seafaring novels. In these works, literary scholars have suggested, Cooper uses shipboard settings to work through tensions in American democratic culture; his early seafaring novels are far more optimistic about democracy’s ability to resolve these tensions, particularly class conflict, and form communities. Critics have argued that, in Cooper’s hands, demonstrations of maritime labor often come into conflict with his novels’ focus on exceptional

⁴⁴ For examples of the earlier trend in scholarship: Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (1950), 59-70; R.W.B. Lewis, *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (1955), 85-104; Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier 1600-1860* (1973), 466-516; For accounts of Cooper’s work that explore the ways his frontier narratives imagine forms of democracy and imperial expansion, see Jonathan Arac, *The Emergence of American Literary Narrative* (2005); Sandra Gustafson (2011), 167-179; Tawil (2006), 69-90.

⁴⁵ Arguing for the role of literature in “the construction of national identity,” Murphy contends that writers like Cooper, Catherine Sedgwick, and Lydia Maria Child “adapted Sir Walter Scott’s romances to American settings, rewriting Scott’s political quietism (to varying degrees) as a celebration of liberal democracy and justification for national independence” (*Hemispheric* 40).

characters.⁴⁶ Still, Cooper finds strategies to successfully “fuse democracy” with a “hierarchy” based on skill (Cohen, *Novel* 143).

The early Cooper’s vociferous defense of American democracy and culture comes across loudly in *Notions*. Written as a series of letters by a Belgian traveler, *Notions* depicts its imagined author shedding his European pre-conceptions about the United States. For Cooper’s imagined traveler, the liberty extended to citizens of the United States (who are always white and male) is counterbalanced by a high state of culture (in which women can sometimes participate) to produce a well-run society. He notices an absence of uses of force, describing the absence of “bayonets” or “a single liveried agent” of the government (74). Americans are able “to maintain order at so little cost of money

⁴⁶ Nathaniel Philbrick gets credit for being among the first to analyze Cooper’s investment in sea fiction; Philbrick’s 1961 work attributes to Cooper’s “imagination” the creation of an American version of sea fiction that inaugurates a “meeting of maritime nationalism and romanticism” (43). Contemporary scholars have related Cooper’s early sea fiction to themes of American nationalism, often unearthing Cooper’s vexed relationship to class and forms of democratic representation. Critics have drawn attention to Cooper’s sea-faring fictions, noting how his contemporaries often primarily commended him for his innovations in this genre. Hester Blum, for example, observes that Cooper’s early sea novels “established the sea as a legitimate, indeed inevitable, landscape for literary historical exploration,” “expanded the boundaries of what could be considered the material of American literature,” and “extended the moment of American naval confidence that followed the War of 1812” (*The View* 75). Not only have critics explored Cooper’s relevance to American “maritime nationalism,” but Margaret Cohen tasks Cooper with putting “sea fiction back on the map of influential narrative genres” by adopting and adapting earlier, European poetics of sea adventure, “an innovation from what was then the ‘periphery’ of the international literary field” (Cohen, *The Novel* 135). John Berger examines the tension between Cooper’s detailed presentation of collective maritime labor and his tendency to valorize individual, exceptional figures; he argues that this tension parallels Cooper’s ambivalent reaction to class and its role in the American Revolution. Cooper evinces a “disdain for popular revolution, on the one hand, and political support for a Jacksonian ethos, on the other” (*Killing Tom Coffin* 645). In “Those Sounds That Had Obtained Command, Voice, Power, and Submission in Cooper’s Sea Fiction” (2012), Bryan Sinche argues that Cooper’s maritime fictions envision the “absolute command hierarchies” on board ships as “meritocracies” in an attempt to square “his patriotism and reverence for the common citizenry” and his “appreciation for a strong, legally-constituted authority that would guide that citizenry” (133). Myra C. Glen suggests that Cooper’s early sea fiction helped “popularize[]” sailor narratives within “a literary marketplace that was increasingly “democratiz[ed]” and interested in the lives of working-class sailors (“Forging” 27, 29).

and personal freedom” because of their “high civilization...which gives to every member of the community a certain interest in its quiet character” (95). This civilization does not consist of high art, advanced science, or formalized manners, “[b]ut there is a simple dignity in moral truths, that dims the lustre of all the meretricious gloss which art and elegance can confer on life” (95). Cooper’s European bachelor often returns to the existence of personal liberty, concluding from his travels that, “the great desideratum of the social compact would then seem to be, to produce such a state of things as shall call the most individual enterprise into action, while it should secure a proper consideration for the interests of the whole” (96). Cooper’s points here echo Thomas Paine’s *The Rights of Man*, in which Paine states, “The more perfect civilisation is, the less occasion has it for government, because the more does it regulate its own affairs” (73; vol. II, book I).

Cooper’s view of the United States’ maritime commerce further entangles his notions of personal freedom with economic enterprise. In praising the merchant culture of the eastern seaboard, Cooper explains how independence from Britain, far from shrinking their interest in shipping, augmented the former colonies’ investment in overseas trade. He goes so far as to predict, “America is to be the first maritime nation of the earth” (16). The bachelor argues that as a country’s “institutions become more free,” it will “become more commercial, and consequently more maritime” (14). Cooper seemed confident that the pursuit of “individual wealth” unfettered by the hand of government “begets wealth,” which will “be dispersed to effect that vast accumulation of individual prosperity which constitutes the real wealth of nations” (14). In Cooper’s account, the “institutions” of government in the United States give its citizens room to embrace individual pursuits,

and, in turn, augment the prosperity of the nation as a whole. American maritime power will not diminish; it will prosper as it breaks away from the confines of British mercantilism.

To prove his point, Cooper's bachelor proceeds by combining statistical information with conjecture. In a set of what he sums up as, "simple facts" (12), the bachelor explains, "The present population of the United States may be computed at 12,000,000, while the amount of shipping, materially exceeds 1,400,000" (10). This allows the bachelor to calculate "one ton to every eight and a half inhabitants" (10). Shifting his attention to the British Empire, he estimates their tonnage, in "round numbers" at "2,500,000" (10). The question then becomes, do you imagine per capita tonnage using the population of "the British islands alone" then estimated at twenty-three million people (10)? Or do you further shrink the size of that fraction by including "Canada, the West Indies, and all the vast possessions which are tributary to the wealth and power of that great nation"? The bachelor considers, "I know not whether the shipping employed in the East Indies ought to be enumerated." If it is, he surmises, then "the disproportion in favor of America is enormous" (10). He offers "still another point of view" by imagining that, in calculating per capita tonnage for the United States, one should first subtract "the slaves and the inhabitants of the new states, where the establishments are still too infant, to admit of such a development of their resources" (11). This allows him to shrink the population to "7,000,000" and enlarge the per capita tonnage (11). Why does he think this "point of view" which erases slaves and new states from the equation is justified? The bachelor invokes "the nature of things" which means they "cannot turn much, if any, of their attention to navigation" (11). Cooper's creative

accounting here appeals to the objectivity and authority of numbers. At the same time, in order to complete the computation to his satisfaction, the bachelor's shifts his "points of view": this requires an act of conjecture as well as recourse to the vague "nature of things."

Cooper seems comfortable here with turning to census information to predict trends and to create a racialized narrative that erases black subjects from future prosperity. While Cooper cites a slew of information about the tonnage carried by different countries' ships, he also relies on an abstract connection between a "free" system of government and the benefits of international trade. He uses inductive reasoning to characterize the state of U.S. shipping, but he makes predictions deduced from general principles. The freedom that, according to Cooper, is promoted by the political organization of the country, is also an inveterate quality of the Americans' English descent: "The tendency to the sea, which the American has manifested since the earliest of the colonial establishments, is, no doubt, to be ascribed originally to the temper of his ancestors" (9). His allusion to the "temper" of their former British rulers suggests that the desire to trade is an interiorized quality; this suggestion invokes the way, as Laura Doyle argues, "in Atlantic modernity, freedom is a race myth" (3). *Notions* highlights the "affinity of blood" and "the community of language, usages, and opinions" that binds the white former colonists with Great Britain, even after the conflicts of the American Revolution and the War of 1812 (*Notions* 6 n A).

In a move that supports this race myth, Cooper disassociates the free black population from the mercantile culture of the eastern seaboard by using census information to project his desired result. He imagines that the rate of growth of the free

black population will shrink in these regions. Admitting that free black men in Massachusetts have become “traders, ship-masters, and even ship-owners,” Cooper turns to census information to argue that the free black population of the east is on the wane (285). Cooper concludes: “[t]here is no doubt that the free blacks, like the aborigines, gradually disappear before the superior moral and physical influence of the whites” (286), and, he adds, “It must be assumed as a fact for our future reasoning, that the free blacks rather decrease than otherwise” (288). What does it mean to assume a “fact” for “future reasoning”? Keeping in mind that we should not conflate our contemporary use of statistics with nineteenth-century uses of numerical data about populations, Cooper’s extrapolation of future trends from current observations edges up to Hume’s problem of induction, only to assert by fiat that there can be “no doubt” that the trend he detects will continue.⁴⁷ Here, Cooper is not so much advocating for the practice of slavery as projecting a resolution to white Americans’ racialized anxieties about coexisting with free black populations should slavery end in the United States.

In his discussion of the benefits of free trade, Cooper alludes to Adam Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations*. More importantly, he evinces a similar style of thinking that the Scottish philosopher uses in his tome (even if his philosophy operates at more casual and less rigorous level than Smith’s). Mary Poovey, in *A History of the Modern Fact*, describes Smith’s innovative use of numbers in argumentation: “In Smith’s account,

⁴⁷ See David Hume, *An Enquiry into Human Understanding* (1748), for his discussion “Of the Idea of Necessary Connexion (sic)” (39-53; Sec. VII). When Cooper starts to doubt the processes of induction and deduction in *The Monikins*, he does not do this with reference to Hume’s philosophy; on the other hand, his clear references to Adam Smith show a dialogue (albeit, not a rigorous one) with moral sense philosophy. For a discussion of the difference between modern statistics and the use of numbers in eighteenth-century political economy, see Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (1998), 25-38.

abstractions like the market system created a new role for numerical representation, for as descriptors of the products . . . numbers seemed to refer to entities that had been (or could be counted)” (216). Poovey continues, noting how Smith sometimes used conjectured statistics, as Cooper does, to balance a hypothetical account and support his view of market forces, “[a]t the same time... Smith’s numbers also embodied a priori assumptions about what the market system *should be*” (216, emphasis in original). Smith provides “both theoretical and descriptive justifications for liberal governmentality by focusing on particulars that could be observed (and quantified) yet subordinating those particulars to abstractions that could not be seen” (216). These abstractions include terms like “*homo economicus*” and “the market” (xxi). Cooper’s arguments similarly shuttle between abstractions like the “social compact” and particular sets of numbers. Even when using specific data, he surmises different perspectives from which to view given numbers in order to obtain specific narratives. *Notions* is not a philosophical or economic treatise. However, in its aim of correcting European misapprehensions of the United States, *Notion* ascribes specific virtues to different systems of government and moves between deductive and inductive reasoning, as the bachelor’s comments on maritime trade exemplify.

To tell the narrative of a shrinking black population and to exclude black men from participating in the maritime success he outlines, Cooper resorts to another comprehensive system of explanation: natural history. Cooper’s relationship to this eighteenth-century natural history is uneven: Ezra Tawil lays out the case that Cooper’s frontier novels register and affect nineteenth-century American theories of race by imagining race as interiorized and essential. In contrast, eighteenth century natural

history imagines that, all humans being descended from the same ancestors, climate affects the observable differences between groups of people. Tawil's readings of Cooper describe how, as an imagined resolution to the omission of black subjects from the guarantees of natural rights and the social contract, Cooper's frontier novels began to develop, in Tawil's terms, "racial sentiment," the idea that white subjects had "different capacities for feeling" (11).

Notions's argument about the diminishing free black population evinces how Cooper had "one foot in eighteenth-century natural history and the other in the nineteenth-century biology of race" (Tawil 81). Cooper's bachelor makes recourse to climatological theories when he writes, "it is well known that cold is not congenial to the physical temperament of a black" (287). He continues in a note, "all experience proves, that the ages and generations must elapse before the descendants of the African can acquire the habits of endurance which shall enable him effectually to resist frost, if, indeed it can ever be done"; Cooper goes on to describe his belief that "the whites" are more capable of "endur[ing] extreme fatigue of any sort" (287). The narrator of *Notions* imagines that this omniscient "experience" feeds into a theory that flickers between a natural historical account of the changeability of surface features and a nineteenth-century racialized account of interiorized racial qualities. In the case of *Notions*, the "freedom" of free trade is imagined as an interiorized proclivity as well as a result of natural history's climate theories.

Cooper resorts to the evidence of "all experience" to substantiate his use of natural historical theories. While he surmises that "a thousand instances might be adduced to prove [his] position," the bachelor lists two anecdotes, both of which involve

nautical scenes. One example is the story of a sunken whaler whose black mariners were “the first to sink under their abstinence and labour” of trying to reach land in their boats (287). The other is an anecdote from the bachelor’s friend Cadwallader, who witnessed a struck vessel off the coast of Long Island. According to Cadwallader, a black servant to a “young gentleman” nearly died in the effort to help save the mariners from the freezing water (287). While the population tallies Cooper cites are likely taken from official censuses, he not only makes predictions from them to fit his story, but he also uses an account from the fictional Cadwallader to supplement his prediction. The traveling bachelor’s arguments, then, consist of a mix of stereotypes, statistics, and anecdotes that draw from the discourse of natural history. Moreover, he chooses to fabricate examples about maritime activity, a move that reinforces the exclusion of black men from the benefits of maritime trade.

Drawing on the systems of political economy and natural history, the Cooper of *Notions* is willing to project a harmonious picture of life in the United States. The relative lack of government presence, which the white, European bachelor detects, does not lead to chaos because American civilization keeps subjects in line. In the pursuit of maritime trade, individual enterprise will augment the “wealth of nations.” The manumission of former slaves will not lead to racial conflict since the free black population will simply decrease. In 1828, on the eve of Andrew Jackson’s presidency, Cooper surmises a vision of the United States’ future that was optimistic (at least, for white Americans).

The Cooper of *The Monikins*, which offers various critiques of liberal capitalism, sounds very different. In my next section, I will discuss the novel’s interest in the United States’ place in a scheme of global commerce. When Cooper uses the frame of a South

Sea voyage to picture this space and his readers' relationships to it, he becomes much more uneasy with the intersection of abstract system and empirical data. The self-balancing that *Notions* depicts is replaced in favor of a concern for how philosophers of these self-balancing systems use evidence to support their theories. In my next section, I will discuss how Cooper pairs questions about a political economy, conceived on a global scale, with a mediation on natural history, similarly imagined as covering the globe.

Matter on his Mind

If *Notions* imagines commerce and nature balanced together to create a harmonious society, *The Monikins* pushes this society off kilter. In more explicit terms than *Notions*, Cooper's novel engages with both theories of political economy and theories of natural history. In the first part of the novel, Goldencalf explicitly sets out to test his own take on political economy, and his massive inherited wealth allows him to invest in concerns around the globe. Later on, Dr. Socrates Reasono, one of the monikins Goldencalf first meets, and our protagonist argue over the monikins' sweeping accounts of the Earth's history, which mimics the first book of Comte de Buffon's *Histoire Naturelle: Générale et Particulière* and leads Goldencalf to cite Buffon in refutation (105).⁴⁸ Cooper's satire of both systems of knowledge follows the same pattern.

Goldencalf makes the broad claim that "human nature is abroad" (120), an almost direct echo of John Locke's claim, "to study HUMAN NATURE to purpose, a traveller

⁴⁸ This is not the first time that Cooper lampoons Buffon; Cooper took umbrage at Buffon's claim that the American climate resulted in "degeneration" (a claim Buffon would later retract) and imagined comical naturalists in his frontier novels. See Tawil's discussion of Doctor Ergot's laughably misguided natural history in the 1829 novel *The Wept of the Wish-Ton-Wish* (138-142); see also Matthew Wynn Sivils's "Doctor Bat's Ass: Buffon, American Degeneracy and Cooper's *The Prairie*" (2010).

must enlarge his circuit beyond the bounds of Europe” (qtd. in Hulme and Young 4). However, in Goldencalf’s attempt to understand human nature, he discovers that the lines between studies of moral sense, political economy, and natural history are not clear. In turn, Cooper satirizes this ambiguity. Shortly after meeting Goldencalf and Poke, Reasono sets up a makeshift “lyceum” to explain Monikin science. He promises to contain himself, “to such general remarks as may serve to furnish the outlines of our philosophy, natural, moral and political” (99). Although he claims to limit himself to “Nature,” the subject turns out to be quite all-encompassing, including both a “generic and specific term” (99).

[Nature] is moreover subdivided into its physical and moral attributes. . . . Thus, when we say Nature, in the abstract, meaning physically, we would be understood as alluding to those general, uniform, absolute, consistent, and beautiful laws which control and render harmonious, as a great whole, the entire action, affinities, and destinies of the universe. (100)

While the reference to nature’s “generic and specific” meanings is a jab at Buffon’s “general and particular” natural history, the joke can also apply to Adam Smith’s study of the “nature and causes of wealth.” Reasono takes on a grandiose tone and imagines a perspective through which a philosopher can see the entire “the great whole” and even predict future “destinies.” Cooper takes aim, not just at Reasono’s convergence of different discourses, but also at the stance of omniscience implied by inquiries into nature.

Even though the novel satirizes human confidence in Enlightenment-era disciplines that offer systematic, comprehensive accounts of the world, Cooper does not necessarily argue that philosophers or natural historians are completely misguided or that knowledge is impossible. Still, Cooper’s novel slows down the gears of this knowledge-

making and examines its mechanism. In his novel, Cooper obsessively details the way his characters reason, and he makes that reasoning appear circular at best and self-serving at worst. When characters in *The Monikins* incorporate evidence into their theories, they distort evidence to fit their predetermined design. Cooper's critique plays out in slightly different ways when he addresses political economy and when he turns to natural history.

Adam Smith defines the study of "political economy" by its goals: as "a branch of science of a statesman or legislator" its aim is to "enable" the people to "provide a plentiful revenue or subsistence . . . for themselves" and to "supply the state or commonwealth with a revenue sufficient for public services" (Book IV Ch. I; 200). Cooper brings up the phrase several times in the novel (57, 59, 89, &c). Goldencalf's character develops his own theory, and the result is a confluence of political economy and moral sense philosophy. Just as Smith develops his theory in response to mercantilism, Goldencalf develops his theory as a rejection of older values, represented by his father figures. Goldencalf has a set of such father figures, and the first part of the narrative describes how he rejects their values. His mentor, the Reverend Etherington, subscribes to aristocratic values: Goldencalf's lack of aristocratic blood makes him unworthy of the Reverend's daughter Anna, even after Goldencalf purchases a baronetcy. Nor can he turn to the example of his maternal grandfather, who was a merchant of "fancy goods." Goldencalf's ancestor considered his customers' vanity to be his "floating capital" (22). Our protagonist's father, who was a merchant's apprentice and who married the merchant's daughter and heir, is the least-likely model of values. Goldencalf describes his father's investing and insider-trading as "an eloquent example of the truth of that political dogma which teaches the efficacy of the division of labor"; he continues,

“No manufacturer of the head of a pin ever attained greater dexterity in his single-minded vocation than was reached by my father in the one pursuit to which he devoted, so far as human ken could reach, both soul and body” (24). (Cooper’s joking appropriation of Adam Smith’s theory is an early sign that *The Monikins* depicts a shift in Cooper’s attitude.) The elder Goldencalf’s focused devotion to the London Exchange (or the “Change” as he phrases it), enables his heir to become “the richest subject of Europe” (52). However, the younger Goldencalf worries that his father has made a false idol of money: the elder Goldencalf died without obtaining personal happiness and without contributing to the happiness of others. Goldencalf calls his father’s condition “the dark ages” of his family: he identifies “[t]he heatless and estranged existence, the waste of energies, the blunted charities, and the isolated and distrustful habits” that his father developed as he accumulated his millions.

Goldencalf tries to shed light on these dark ages by creating what he calls his “social-stake theory,” a prescriptive theory that draws on the language of “universals.”

His explanation takes the form of deductive reasoning:

By stake in society is meant, agreeably to universal convention, a multiplication of those interests which occupy us in our daily concern—or what is vulgarly called property. This principle works by exciting us to do right through those heavy investments of our own which would inevitably suffer were we to do wrong. The proposition is now clear, nor can the premises readily be mistaken. Happiness is the aim of society; and property, or a vested interest in that society, is the best pledge of our disinterestedness and justice, and the best qualification for its proper control. It follows as a legitimate corollary that a multiplication of those interests will increase the stake, and render us more and more worthy of the trust by elevating us as near as may be to the pure and ethereal condition of the angels. . . . If he who had the heaviest investments was the most likely to love his fellows, there could be no great difficulty for one in my situation to take the lead in philanthropy. (54-55)

Goldencalf takes a rationalist approach in his definition, but he quickly decides that he must test out his theory, hoping to add empirical evidence that his approach to life is sound.

Not only, as we shall see, will the execution of his theory prove problematic, but its definition is also replete with contradictions. Firstly, his father's wealth, obtained from investment, obstructed his ability to make sentimental connections, but Goldencalf's solution is to continue to invest. Secondly, while Goldencalf's definition emulates the form of logical reasoning, with its use of "premises" and "corollaries," it makes the conflicting claim that "interestedness" will lead to more "disinterestedness." Finally, Goldencalf reverts to religious language, not to conjure Christian values, as we might expect, but to draw the contradictory conclusion that the ownership of more and more property—in his case, this will run the gamut from land, to manufacturing plants, to slaves—will lead him to evanesce into a dematerialized angel. The immediate contrast between the "elevating" angels and the "heavy" investments of ownership creates a paradoxical image: his imagined ethereality is loaded down by interest in material wealth.

After setting out this definition, Goldencalf spreads his investments out around the globe, calling his purchases attempts to "stimulate" or "excite" his "sympathies" (56). He sums up his ambitious plan, claiming, "I resolved to expand; to do that which probably no political economist had ever yet thought of doing—in short, to carry out the principle of the social stake in such a way as should cause me to love all things, and consequently to become worthy of being entrusted with the care of all things" (54). Goldencalf's theory is an attempt to reconcile self-interested and sociable feelings, a problem familiar to eighteenth-century moral philosophers. As a piece of satire, the

“social stake” theory most directly aims at Adam Smith. It represents a deliberate misreading of Smith: Cooper smashes together bits of *The Wealth of Nations* and *A Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) to construct Goldencalf’s theory. Rather, than basing his economic theory on an understanding of morality, sentiment, and sociability, as Smith does, Goldencalf hangs his desire to “love all things” on his ability to own money-making concerns around the world.

One result of his “social stake” experiment is that Goldencalf ends up creating a personal version of a mercantile empire. His father was an investor, but, Goldencalf reasons, he “in great measure had concentrated all his investments in national debt!” which Goldencalf diagnoses as “an error of contraction” (55). Although it is not clear how trading on the ‘Change kept his money within the country, Goldencalf explains how his father invested in domestic improvement schemes and often received insider information on what the government had planned. Goldencalf believes he should spread out his investments so that his social stake does not remain within national boundaries: “I made purchases of estates in England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales” but then he extends his ownership to, “to the colonies” where he owns not only raw materials, “a plantation in Jamaica, sheep at the Cape and at New South Wales, an indigo concern at Bengal,” but also the ships that transport them (56). He continues:

From the British Empire, my interests were soon extended into other countries. On the Garonne and at Xeres, I bought vineyards. In Germany, I took some shares in different salt and coal mines; the same in South America in the precious metals; in Russia, I dipped deeply into tallow; in Switzerland, I set up an extensive manufactory of watches, and bought all the horses for a voiturier on a large scale. I had silk-worms in Lombardy, olives and hats in Tuscany, a bath in Lucca, and a macaroni establishment in Naples. To Sicily I sent funds for the purchase of wheat, and at Rome I kept a connoisseur to conduct a general agency in the supply of British articles, such as mustard, pork, pickles, and corned beef, as well as for the

forwarding of pictures and statues to the lovers of the arts and of virtue.
(56)

This unwieldy list links each geographic location with a commodity (not leaving out the distribution of finished goods out of Britain). Goldencalf does not, like his merchant grandfather, simply import the goods to sell, though the finery he imported actually crossed his path as he handled it in his store. With some exceptions, Goldencalf's list specifies that he owns the physical space in which the goods he lists are collected or manufactured. Borrowing from Marx, we can identify Goldencalf as the owner of the means of production.

Cooper is not worried about the alienation of labor, however. Cooper's critique of Goldencalf's theory aims at the distance it creates between Goldencalf and his holdings. Goldencalf's relationship to these spaces is abstract and focused on profit. When Goldencalf describes himself as having his "hands full of business," his choice of idiom draws attention to the abstract relationship he actually has to the goods he owns (56). As specific as Goldencalf is when listing the businesses he owns, his interaction with all of them occurs through the same medium: we see Goldencalf conducting his business by replying to a set of letters (72). In one sitting he deals with a vast variety of transactions, all of which affect other peoples' lives, and all of which he handles with the same glib self-satisfaction.

Far from cultivating fellow-feeling, Goldencalf's attention to business directly pulls him away from it. In the scenes leading up to Goldencalf's evening of letter-writing, he meets the monikins and brings them back to his Paris hotel room. "Half an hour before," Goldencalf narrates, "I had been dying to open more intimate relations with the interesting strangers." The "interesting strangers" he refers to were the monikins, and

Goldencalf claims “the painful sentiments I had entertained touching their welfare and happiness were quite lost in the newly awakened interests that lay before me” (72).

Although Goldencalf thinks that his business ventures are a form of extending sympathy, here, the sentiments that led him to help the monikins are directly replaced by his attention to his far-flung holdings.

Cooper ironizes the abstract nature of Goldencalf’s relationships when, sitting in his Paris hotel, Goldencalf writes a business letter in which he describes the “owners of real estate” as “the bones and sinews of the land” (75). The humor (if we can call it that) of the scene revolves around the fact that Goldencalf takes any and all of his actions as evidence of benevolence. His distance from his business holdings allows him to shape the information he receives about them into evidence for the soundness of his theory.

In the most striking example of Goldencalf molding his business transactions to fit his theories, Cooper associates the purchase of slaves with an extension of good will. After a very brief stint at attending church, Goldencalf claims, “from speculating, I returned to facts” (56). Although “the question of slavery had agitated the benevolent for some years,” Goldencalf found “a singular apathy in my own bosom to this important subject” (56). His solution? He purchases “five hundred of each sex to stimulate [his] sympathies” (56). When he sits down to his correspondence, he learns from his overseer in Louisiana that the plantation experienced an attack of small-pox, and without skipping a beat, Goldencalf reports that “the plantation would immediately require the services of fifteen able-bodied men, with the usual sprinkling of women and children” (75). From there, Goldencalf reads that, since the importation of slaves had been made illegal in the states, “there was a very pretty and profitable internal trade in the article” (75). He then

goes on to list the qualities of different slaves from different states, talking about them as one would talk about crops.

To some extent, Goldencalf's behavior here echoes and distorts one of Adam Smith's points in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. As Julie Ellison points out in her study of the public functions of eighteenth-century sentiment and sensibility, Smith "rejects feeling at a distance in favor of social nearness" even though "the language of human connectedness (terms like 'earth' or 'humanity') is difficult to avoid when discussing benevolence" (11) Ellison explains how, for Smith, the ideal manifestation of moral sentiment involves a dignified upper-class sufferer whose very self-control provokes his friends to vicarious tears" (11). As Ellison summarizes, Smith argues against commiserating with those "out of their direct social or moral reach." Ellison notes that Smith's comparison between those who care about distant suffering and those who would concern themselves with "the world in the moon" uses "spatial metaphors" that "activate social and cultural geographies, including those of colony, market, and empire" (11). While a citizen might take his participation in a system of empire to "be the basis for the sense of implication or responsibility" associated with "the guilty liberal," Smith argues instead that "the productive virtue inherent in the system frees its knowing participants from having to share in everyone else's unhappiness" (Ellison 12).

Goldencalf takes this view to an extreme, however, directly confusing sympathy and cold calculation. He is not simply indifferent to the slaves' suffering, he believes his accounting is the same as sympathy. Goldencalf turns away from extending his sociable feelings to his new acquaintances, and mistakenly believes that he can cultivate sensibility by extending his commercial empire. Hence, Cooper defines a glitch in the

system: Goldencalf's far-flung interests keep him from cultivating his sentiments at home. Consequently, he reduces the overall sympathy of the system, even as he believes he is multiplying it. Cooper's criticism here, it should be noted, is directed at Goldencalf's transactional mindset and not at slavery itself.⁴⁹ Goldencalf is shown replying to several letters of business, and each of them describes a misplaced self-satisfaction. Goldencalf's attempt to spread out his social stakes creates a mercantile empire in miniature, but far from encouraging sociable relationships or philanthropy, he hardly thinks of people at all.

Cooper's Buffoon

Before Goldencalf can abandon his "social stake theory," he is schooled on the nature of evidence by the monikins. Traveling to the monikin's homeland offers to give him a chance to more directly engage with his globally-dispersed "stakes." Like the authors of exploration narratives, Cooper engages with natural history, setting up his readers for descriptive accounts of the monikins and the geography of their home. However, Cooper unfolds most of his discussion of nature and species through dialogues between Goldencalf and Dr. Reasono. Cooper, then, takes aim at natural history through his characters' arguments about the viability of different systems of categorization. While Cooper's turn to a satire of Buffon's natural philosophy seems like an abrupt change in subject, his approaches to satirizing both of these discourses follow the same form.

⁴⁹ Cooper was no abolitionist: his 1838 political work *The American Democrat*, called slavery an evil, but only in a "comparative sense" (176). He predicted its downfall, but suggests that a "war of extermination" might attend the end of slavery if black and white populations lived alongside each other (quite the change in tone from the image in *Notions* of the declining free black population) (175).

Cooper's references to Buffon throughout *The Monikins* suggest that Cooper sees the creation of systems of understanding, not just Smith's political economy, as the object of his satire. Both of these systems make claims on a global scale. When Goldencalf encounters the monikins, Cooper describes a series of inversions in which the monikins mimic the cataloguing and description that connect travel narratives to natural philosophy. Dr. Reasono delivers a series of lectures that take on topics familiar from Buffon's writings. Quoting from the "monikin annals," for instance, Dr. Reasono gives a sweeping account of the Earth's geological changes which parallels the first volume of *Histoire Naturelle*.

In a scene which reverses the vision of Europeans bringing American Indians home for display to royal courts and other metropolitan centers, Goldencalf and his group of visiting humans are put on display for a group of monikin scholars at Leaphigh's *Palais des Arts et des Sciences* (160). At first, the humans think they are there to hear a lecture, but they are actually there as props for Reasono's address to his peers. The scene features another striking reversal of perspective. We first meet the monikins from Goldencalf's perspective; in his account, he describes how he rescued Dr. Reasono and his three traveling companions who had been kidnapped by sealers and then sold to street performers. Dr. Reasono relates a different tale, which suggests that they deliberately travelled to Europe and were not the passive victims of the sealers. Reasono explains, "finding himself, by hazard, brought in contact with another species, and that the means of pushing important discoveries were unexpectedly placed in his power conscious it had long been a desideratum with the savans to obtain a nearer view and more correct notions of human society" (166). In his lecture, Reasono converts an accidental "hazard" into an

opportunity for knowledge: although still “unexpected” his contact with humans can be placed into a purposive study of human society. Through Reasono’s revisionist history, Cooper reminds us of the ambiguity between deliberate exploration and chance encounter that appears in narratives of exploration. He further satirizes Eurocentric narratives or tableaux of scholarly learning, which place the European scholar as observer and describer while foreign lands and populations remain passive and mute objects of display.

Cooper similarly takes aim at the monikin taxonomies which would house these “notions of human society.” When Goldencalf (“genus *homo*, species *Anglicus*” in monikin nomenclature (82)) calls his new acquaintances “quadrupeds,” Reasono quickly bristles at that categorization: his line of reasoning displays the odd interaction between moral or mental qualities and physical ones in the monikin scheme. Reasono explains, “[w]hether we belong to the class of quadrupeds or not is a question that has a good deal embarrassed our own savans ... There is an ambiguity in our physical action that renders the point a little questionable” (82). As a result the monikin “natural philosophers” rather prefer classing the monikin species, “as caudae-jactans, or tail-wavers, adopting the term from the nobler part of the animal formation” (83).

Cooper implies that the naturalist, far from simply describing or classifying nature, makes decisions about which features and appendages to focus on. Cooper further hints that these decisions are not even simply arbitrary; instead they are loaded with judgements about the value of a species. Reasono cites monikin taxonomy and explicitly imagines it as a hierarchy: “[t]he academy of Leaphigh has made an elaborate classification of all the known animals, of which the sponge is at the bottom of the list, and the monikin at the top” (101). Goldencalf has a visceral reaction to humans being

classed in between sponge and monikin; he feels a “disagreeable rising at the throat” (101); this bodily reaction belies the idea that these classifications are a result of reasoned debate.

For the monikins who believe they are “creature[s] more intellectual and more highly civilized than man,” their biological superiority maps onto a cultural superiority (105). Cooper undercuts this sense of superiority, however, since the monikins locate the brain—their “nobler part”—in their tails. In a dig at phrenology, Cooper has Dr. Reasono argue that by measuring their tails with a “yard-stick,” the monikins can “come to a sound, obvious and incontrovertible conclusion as to the extent of the intellect of the specimen” (105). Derived from the work of Viennese physician Franz Joseph Gall (1758-1828), phrenology was a pseudoscience that attempted to delineate personality traits through the detailed comparisons of human head shapes. Cooper’s novel was published four years before Samuel G. Morton’s *Crania Americana* (1839) helped extend the popularity of this pseudoscience in the United States, and Cooper’s critique seems prescient of the way this pseudoscience could seduce someone eager for easy ways to correlate surface to interior, to make others readable. Phrenology, in Sam Otter’s words, “teaches the observer to abstract, delineate, and enumerate features of the head and to read these features as eloquent markers of interior state” (35). Cooper launches an early critique of this by undercutting phrenology’s claims to be a kind of knowledge at all.

The debate that ensues describes Goldencalf and Reasono using the same evidence to make different points. In order to argue that the human brain is superior to the monikin brain, Goldencalf argues by analogy that, “in vegetation, for instance, sap ascend for the purposes of fructification and usefulness” (107). Since human brains are

located at the top of their bodies, Goldencalf reasons, energy flows towards them, and they must be superior. Reasono replies that “fructification” is “a false demonstration of the energies of the plant” (107); in truth, the root of a plant is the “seat of power and authority” and “the tail of vegetation” (107). In his reasoning, an observable event in nature—“fructification”—becomes simply a hypothesized step in a proof by contradiction, which ultimately disproves its own existence. This conversation, which is filled with over-the-top leaps in logic, satirizes natural history and the evidence which supports its account of nature; like Goldencalf’s political economy, Reasono’s natural philosophy will invert, reshape, and otherwise manipulate the data to fit the fantasy of this theory.

A Sentimental Resolution

The ending of *The Monikins* charts Goldencalf’s changed attitude towards liberal capitalism. During Goldencalf’s stay in Leaplow (the analogue for the United States), he visits a port city; at first, Goldencalf’s posits a relationship between freedom and maritime wealth. Brigadier Downright, the most virtuous monikin character, gives evidence against Goldencalf’s naïve claim, “I have always been led to think that trade is especially favorable to liberty” (285), an idea that echoes *Notions*’s earlier political and economic theory. In response, Downright replies:

Your merchants, dwelling in the town and possessing concert, means, and identity of interest, have been able to make themselves remarkable for contending with despotic power, a fact which has obtained for them a cheap reputation for liberality of opinion; but so far as monikin experience goes—men may have proved to be better disposed—no government essentially influenced by commerce has ever been otherwise exclusive or aristocratic. (286)

Do men's dispositions, as Downright surmises, make them more likely to organize a fairer society when they are granted with prosperity? *The Monikins* suggests otherwise. Golden calf's miserly father serves as one proof of this position. In Cooper's description of Leaplow's merchants, "experience" is contrasted with the theory that the metropolitan-dwelling merchants are more disposed to promote equality.⁵⁰ The monikins are guided by self-interest, but this self-interest does not lead to a well-run society of "diffuse" prosperity, as Cooper postulates in *Notions*. In Leaplow hierarchies of wealth exist in place of the aristocratic hierarchy of birth. Wealth becomes a means of taxonomizing the community of Bivouac, the main metropolis of Leaplow. Bivouac was "divided into classes of 'hundred-thousand dollar monikins'—'fifty-thousand-dollar monikins'—'twenty-thousand-dollar monikins'" (285). Instead of asking the "old questions of 'is he honest?' 'is he capable?' 'is he enlightened?' 'is he wise?' 'is he good?'" the Leaplowans size up their fellow citizens with the question "is he rich?" (285). Instead of growing in harmony with liberty, as Cooper portends in *Notions*, merchants contribute to a rigid class hierarchy that depletes Leaplow's (and, by implication, the United States') claims to the equality of its citizens. Far from being free individuals, they end up deferring to a new hierarchy, a taxonomy of wealth.

Cooper's critique of this taxonomy is augmented when he explains the system of money the monikins use. Money, rather than being based on any precious metal, is made

⁵⁰ *OED Online* cites usages of "liberality" meaning "political liberalism" as early as 1822; usages indicating "the quality of being open-minded and free from prejudice" being in the 1780s. The oldest usage of the word to mean, "the quality of giving or spending freely; generosity, largess" seems relevant here: Downright usage seems to suggest that a politically liberal, anti-despotic leanings, but he takes to task implied link between having the "means" to be generous and promoting an society of equals.

entirely of promises. Cooper is worried about a system of capital that is so abstract as to be based on nothing but a fiction—he describes, for instance, Goldencalf and Poke booking a hotel room using promises. But not only is there no account of them keeping these promises, it is not clear what keeping such promises would even look like. By grouping the monikins by their monetary holdings, Cooper implies that this hierarchy is based on a substance-free idea. Thus, the resolution to the novel fittingly shows Goldencalf's wealth converted to a tangible estate.

Cooper's satire magnifies the unclear limit between fact and system; his jokes direct our attention to this problem, though the only resolution he offers, at the end of the novel, is a sentimental account. In the happy resolution to the novel (and one familiar from Cooper's frontier tales),⁵¹ Goldencalf marries Anna Etherington, whose father overcomes his objections to Goldencalf's low birth. It is not money or class that brings Goldencalf and Anna together, but her virtue and their mirrored love for one another. When Goldencalf returns to Paris (or, depending on your interpretation, wakes up from his fever dream) he finds Anna waiting for him. Upon their reunion, she "burst into a flood of tears" as she proclaims her love and Goldencalf "kissed her serene and humid eyes and repeated what she had just said, syllable for syllable" (313). This scene of sentiment may feature exaggeration, but it does represent the source of Goldencalf's ultimate happiness. Anna and Goldencalf marry, and Goldencalf sells off all of his far-flung investments. He concentrates his wealth and political attention on his "Householder" estate. Having abandoned his "social stake" theory, Goldencalf reinvests in local affiliation and turn to the bonds of family. Although these bonds are not, in

⁵¹ See Tawil, 129-151.

Goldencalf's case, the subject of a grand, coherent theory, according the novel, they represent the "best investment in society" (311).

Anna's last name, Etherington, hints at the term "ether," connoting something heavenly, but also the connoting something intangible; while the purchase of an estate seems to ground Goldencalf's life and virtue in his local surrounds, Cooper may push back on his tidy happy ending. Cooper's satirical tone, then, may still cloud over this ending, suggesting it to be a fantasy, especially as it represents a vision of a virtuous landed gentry, which cannot be imported to the United States. Although Goldencalf takes shelter as a householder, and Cooper certainly suggests this is a happy ending for Goldencalf, Cooper leaves open the possibility that such a fantasy is not viable in reality, even if it is far more realistic than his trip to the Antarctic and his time with the monikins.

CHAPTER 3

Raiders of the Lost Archive: Poe's Pym and South Sea Exploration

Edgar Allan Poe—more often known for taking his readers into dark tombs, hidden coffins, and underground palaces where secrets and mysteries wait to be ferreted out—immerses us, in an 1836 review for the *Southern Literary Messenger*, in a collective experience of enlightenment. Reviewing the House of Representatives' *Report of the Committee on Naval Affairs*, Poe praises its recommendation that the United States sponsor an exploring expedition to the South Seas and chastises his nation for its dereliction of information-gathering responsibilities:

It is our *duty*, holding as we do a high rank in the scale of nations, to contribute a large share to that aggregate of useful knowledge, which is the common property of all. We have astronomers, mathematicians, geologists, botanists, eminent professors in every branch of physical science . . . we possess, as a people, the mental elasticity which liberal institutions inspire, and a treasury which can afford to remunerate scientific research. Ought we not, therefore, to be foremost in the race of philanthropic discovery, in every department embraced by this comprehensive term? . . . Let it not be said of us, in future ages, that we ingloriously availed ourselves of a stock of scientific knowledge, to which we had not contributed our quota. (*Essays* 1231-1232, emphasis in original)

Poe argues for the expedition by simultaneously ranking his country above others while appealing to the idea that knowledge is the “common property of all.” He balances the notion that the “stock” of knowledge grows through contributions from an array of nations and from an assortment of scholarly disciplines against a conception of knowledge as a single narrative of accumulation. The growth of scientific knowledge

may be brought about by different branches of research, Poe argues, but anyone can “avail” themselves of this store. Weighing in on the debate about the need for this exploratory endeavor, Poe insists that knowledge belongs to the public and that the project of accumulating this knowledge is part of a nation’s dedication to its “liberal institutions.” Poe’s narrative of Enlightenment learning does not consider conflicting findings or the work of dialogue; rather, it invokes the figure of knowledge as a “stock.” While the images of “quotas” and a “stockpile” conjure a commercial discourse, Poe mutes this note, refocusing on the “philanthropic” elements of discovery. He uses the term “avail” but does not specify here any practical or economic uses for this scientific knowledge. In other words, he brings us close to the terms of commercial gain only to assure us that the resource being accumulated is knowledge.

Poe’s review presents us with a conception of knowledge as a collection, an accretion of individual pieces of data. In doing so, he rehearses statements made by those who championed the cause of exploration and by those who justified the importance of their own travel narratives by offering them up as contributions to learning.⁵² His

⁵² The writers of American sea travel narratives from the early nineteenth century often prefaced their writings by offering their findings up to the American public and situating their experience as a contribution to knowledge. Amasa Delano in his 1818 *Narrative of Voyages and Travels in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres* argues that his knowledge of mathematics, astronomy, and navigation gives him some familiarity with the sciences and makes him no different from other men who have offered “their observations and discoveries for the public” (18). In Edmund Fanning’s *Voyages to the South Seas, Indian and Pacific Oceans, China-Sea, North-West Coast, Feejee Islands, South Shetlands, &c. &c.* (1838), Fanning dedicates his writings to the “The American People, in testimony of his high admiration of their character as an enlightened nation” (v), while he promises to provide “much information . . . relative to commercial trade, the whale and seal fishery, navigation, &c. and also the different seas, climates, habits, and customs of the natives, lands and isles of the ocean” (iii, v). Fanning also saw the merit of Antarctic exploration in nationalistic terms. In his 1833 work, *Voyages Round the World*, Fanning claims, “I feel so confident that success must crown such an expedition, . . . that although advanced in years, and by this advised to remain at home, I would rather, without a moment’s hesitation, engage to assist my fellow-citizens in obtaining the credit and honor of so laudable an enterprise, than leave it for future generations so to do, or other nations to snatch it away from our own” (476).

discussion of the value of South Sea exploration most directly emulates arguments made by Jeremiah Reynolds, a lecturer and newspaper editor who had travelled to the Antarctic on a private expedition and who, for over a decade, was the most vocal advocate for a nationally-sanctioned exploration project. Poe lauded Reynolds's *Address on the Subject of a Surveying and Exploring Expedition to the Pacific Ocean and South Seas, Delivered in the Hall of Representatives on the Evening of April 3, 1836* in another article for the *Southern Literary Messenger*.⁵³ In both reviews, the usually acerbic critic Poe seems sweet on this national project, as well as on Reynolds, whom Poe claims would receive the "lion's share" of the "glory" that the project would bring to the United States (1234). Poe would go on to flatter Reynolds with imitation by including passages from the latter's prose in his fictional travel narrative. In fact, even within the article quoted above, Poe's phrases "stock of scientific knowledge" and "aggregate of useful knowledge" echo the conceits Reynolds used in his own writing of an "accumulated stock of knowledge" and "the common stock of geographical and scientific knowledge" (15-16, 186). In his position as a magazine editor, Poe aligns himself with Reynolds in a shared vision of the United States' role in bringing the South Seas, a space the former calls "a wide open field and nearly untouched" (*Essays* 1235), into the realm of knowledge shared by humanity (and especially useful to Americans). Poe and Reynolds suggest that, in bringing the eye of science down to the polar region, they are simply following a logical path laid out by explorers and scientists who have come before. The promotion of U.S. exploring interest brings out a nationalist sentiment that Poe more often explicitly shuns.⁵⁴ Poe's model of

⁵³ Poe's review of Reynolds appeared in the *Southern Literary Messenger* in January 1837 (*Essays* 1234-1247).

knowledge as a useful accumulation, held in common by all, suggests that considerations of what is worthy of display and “philanthropic discovery” must first circuit through public interest. This again is out of step with Poe’s often expressed distaste for the masses and for popular opinion, as well as his purported distrust of Enlightenment progress.⁵⁵ The topic of the South Seas presents a Poe that is willing to sing the praises of the American public as a liberal and enlightened people who are invested in the pursuit of knowledge.⁵⁶

In my last chapter, I described Cooper’s criticism of the way facts are used as evidence in systems of knowledge. According to Cooper, the proponents of such systems reorder and reshape empirical information in order to generate explanations and predictions; his novel *The Monikins* dramatizes this skepticism. Poe’s vision of knowledge as a continuous and collective project seems divorced from such concerns. However, as I argue in this chapter, his review’s picture of the unimpeded progress of “commonly held” knowledge is examined and reimaged in his own novel *The*

⁵⁴ Take, for instance, Poe’s review of Frederick Marryat’s *Joseph Rushbrook, or the Poacher*. Criticizing it as a “popular” work, Poe says works of the sort that appeal to the “mediocrity of ideas on the part of the public” and “claim for themselves *that* which, for want of a more definite expression, has been called by critics *nationality*. Whether this nationality in letters is a fit object for high-minded ambition, we cannot here pause to inquire” (*Essays* 325-6). Poe elsewhere disparages national affiliation as a metric for reviewing writerly endeavors. Discussing the development of American criticism in his 1842 *Exordium to Critical Notices*, Poe laments “But the watchword now was, ‘a national literature!’—as if any true literature *could be* ‘national’—as if the world at large were not the only proper stage for the literary *historio*” (*Essays* 1027). In discussing the South Seas, he finds a way to make the world part of the “stage” for national concern.

⁵⁵ See Elmer *Reading at the Social Limit*, esp. 32-92, for an account of Poe’s complex relationship to mass culture.

⁵⁶ Goddu discusses Poe’s interest in Reynolds as a way to reframe earlier readings of race in *Pym*, which, according to Goddu, focused on Poe’s identity as a Southerner. Goddu contends that “*Pym* records a complex and often contradictory vision of race and sets in motion a national, not just a regional, racial discourse” (*Gothic America* 82-83).

Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym (1838). Like Cooper, Poe sends his characters to the Antarctic region and through the “Great Ice Barrier,” the shelf of ice which surrounds the South Pole. This barrier was a boundary that tantalized and thwarted famous explores like Captain James Cook. As he relates the details of his protagonist’s journey south, Poe enacts a parallel exploration of the archive of European and American South Sea voyage accounts. Poe is aware that, while the appealing to the concepts of the public good and the self-evident value of knowledge would be strong support for projects like the exploration expedition, the written records of maritime exploration contained uncertainty and ambiguity along with evidence of private motives and desires. *Pym* dramatizes the intersections of the rational pursuit of knowledge with the disorderly potential of desire and the destructive potential of accident. His novel, this chapter will argue, plays upon the fictionality Poe detects within the knowledge generated by exploration. Poe’s novel fixates on the imaginative possibilities represented by the natural historical and ethnographic details that buttressed explorers’ claims to the value of their findings and the veracity of their written representations. Indeed, *Pym* converts the narrative of progressive enlightenment into an engine of fiction, which enables the exaggerations and distortions of nature his novel represents. In writing his own individual narrative, Poe shows that the ways of coming to know and think about the ends of the Earth does not follow a simple, straightforward story, in which discrete scientific information is accumulated in the archives of travel. Instead, the accumulation of knowledge incorporates fiction, feeling, and flights of fancy.

After *Pym*’s preface promises a faithful transmission of the facts of his experience, the narrative itself comprises a series of adventures that seem to flout the

very possibility of being read as realistic. Pym, influenced by his friend Augustus and by his extensive reading of popular adventure tales and travel accounts, ignores his family's wishes and stows away on board the *Grampus*, a whaler captained by Augustus's father. What follows is a series of hair-splitting escapes from death as Pym fools bloodthirsty mutineers, barely hangs on during a ship-ravaging storm, drifts for weeks on the wreck of the *Grampus* with almost no food or water, and is miraculously rescued by a British schooner. Pym and the only surviving crew member of the *Grampus*, a mixed-race white and Native American man named Dirk Peters, join the crew of the schooner *Jane Guy* and head towards the unexplored South Pole. On the way, they encounter the island of Tsalal, whose inhabitants set a trap and kill off most of the crew. Peters and Pym escape on a boat, with Nu-Nu, a Tsalal inhabitant whom they hold hostage, and the three men drift farther southward.

The narrative systematically kills off potential eye-witnesses and leaves the burden of proof on Pym, whose whiteness (as opposed to Peters's "half-breed" status (432)) grants him authority.⁵⁷ Once Pym is left alone with Dirk Peters, the narrative cuts off although an editorial note promises that Pym and Peter somehow made it back from the south. Pym survives all of his perambulations—which include encounters with murderous mutineers, birds and sharks with a taste for human flesh, acts of forced cannibalism, and the cataclysmic destruction of the *Jane Guy*—only to die a "sudden and distressing death" at home. An anonymous editor steps in where Pym's own narrative stops to assure us that the circumstances of his death are "well known to the public through the medium of the daily press" (561), but we, the actual readers of *Pym*, never

⁵⁷ In-text citations of Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* are from *The Selected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe* edited by G.R. Thompson (2004).

find out what is “well known” to this imagined public. *Pym* ends, then, referencing a coherent knowing public whose access to the press allows the editor to presume that everyone shares the same information while explicitly leaving *Pym*’s real readers out of this public. Although the narrative is buttressed by appeals to an enlightened readership that shares an interest in *Pym*’s travels, throughout his novel Poe short-circuits the relationship between publically-held knowledge and *Pym*’s individual travel account.

As Toni Morrison observes, before the editor steps in, the final scenes of the narrative (which I will focus on at the end of this chapter) contain explicitly racialized imagery. Poe’s Antarctic features a startling bifurcation of black and white. When *Pym* reaches Tsalal, whose inhabitants are entirely “jet black” and who appear to fear the color white (528), he uses the word “savage” almost fifty times as he describes the people of Tsalal and gives an account of their behavior and living conditions (526-560). The crew of the *Jane Guy* attempt to establish a trading outpost (taking ownership of the islands’ natural resources for themselves and using the natives’ labor), but they are led into a trap: a manufactured avalanche, which kills most of the crew. When *Pym*, Peters, and Nu-Nu leave Tsalal on a stolen canoe, they drift south against an increasingly dark sky. The ocean and all of their surroundings appear to turn white, as the group is “overwhelmed” by a “white ashy shower, “pallidly white birds” circle their boat, and they approach a cataract of white mist (560). To cap off this parade of white imagery, *Pym* and his companions rush towards the “white curtain” of the cascade “where a chasm threw itself open” to them and “there arose in our pathway a shrouded human figure, very far larger in its proportions than any dweller among men. And the hue of the skin of the figure was of the perfect whiteness of the snow” (560). Poe implies that this overwhelming

whiteness caused Nu-Nu's "spirit" to "depart[]" (560). In Morrison's reading, whiteness, in *Pym* and throughout literature written by white Americans, is written as an "impenetrable" cypher that appears with striking regularity alongside representations of powerless or dead black characters (32). In this literature, blackness serves "as both antidote for and meditation on the shadow that is the companion to this whiteness" (32). *Pym* exemplifies this dynamic in its final chapters, where whiteness and blackness are directly contrasted.

Since Morrison's *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992) placed Poe at the center of American literature's figurations of race and positioned the "Africanist presence" at the center of canonized American literature (5), scholarship on *Pym* has focused on its understanding of race. The pivot point for debates over the meanings of novel's racialized imagery is Poe's ultimate attitude towards the racial binary it represents. Does Poe's novel install a racial hierarchy in order to support or criticize it? Analyzing the parallels between Tsalal and the American South, Dana Nelson argues that *Pym* at times looks like a "segregationist parable," which teaches the lesson that "in the state of nature, black doesn't want to mix with white" (*The Word* 92). Scott Peeples argues that the "Tsalalian 'savages'" might be Poe's vision of how the "'black race' would behave if not for the strict paternalistic control provided by slavery" (72).

Other scholars detect more self-awareness in Poe's use of the binaries of black and white. J. Gerald Kennedy contends that the Tsalal episode deconstructs the opposition it sets up ("Trust No Man" 244): he draws attention to the way the novel showcases the exploitive behavior of the white explorers, who, as Pym describes, enter Tsalal having kept "ten savages" on board "as hostages" and having left the *Jane Guy*'s

“guns out” as a contingent of sailors headed towards the shore (Poe, *Selected* 530).

Kennedy contends that Poe’s novel “emphasizes distinctions between the civilized and the primitive in order to erase them” (244). Gesa Mackenthm argues that having set up a “cultural apartheid” in Tsalal, Poe “constantly shatters these binaries, either by inverting them or by overwriting them with a narrative of cultural hybridization” (138). Even if Poe does undermine the racial polarities he sets up, the ultimate effect of this subversion is uncertain: John Carlos Rowe argues, “Poe’s apparently harmless parodies and hoaxes actually allow such popular discourses to recirculate in high culture, often relying on the original’s racial hierarchies” (“Poe’s Imperial Fantasies” 100). If *Pym* describes a disintegration of racial boundaries, this disintegration may be less about questioning racial stereotypes and more about signaling dangers to white Americans, especially in the wake of Nat Turner’s 1831 thwarted slave rebellion. John D. Edwards acknowledges the slipperiness of racial categories in *Pym*, but suggests that Poe finds an “uncanny threat” in the “hybrid bodies” which “threaten[] to disrupt the slave’s socially constructed status” (I.7); Colin Dayan similarly reads the “vicissitudes of white power” represented in the novel as producing fear: given the potential for slave rebellions in the South, Poe’s *Pym* imagines that “the inevitable catastrophe is at hand” (109).

In the last section of this chapter, I address the way the archive of travel interacts with concepts of race in the antebellum period. I consider how Poe thinks about race—and the related concepts of civilization and savagery—in the context of natural history, ethnography, and manners-and-customs descriptions; if Poe’s support for exploration calls up “every branch of physical science,” *Pym*’s representations of scientific

knowledge are limited to “science as generalization and classification” (Limon 72).⁵⁸ In this way, my readings speak to Goddu’s call to “situate [Poe’s] texts within a larger sociocultural field and at the nexus of multiple cultural discourses” (“Rethinking Race” 15).

Although I discuss the implications of natural history for understanding race, my argument examines the multiple ways *Pym* engages with the language of observation and categorization. As I discussed in my introduction, natural history offered a framework for travel narratives to describe their observations as contributions to knowledge. Poe’s novel is invested in representing the limits of natural history’s catalog of nature. As the novel imagines the limits of the globe, it takes the descriptive apparatuses available to sea narratives and stretches them until they narrate their own failure. They cannot provide the certainty they are meant to define.

Disorder in the Archive of Exploration

Pym’s plot, as the above summary suggests, is both unwieldy and outlandish. Aside from Pym’s prefatory statements, the beginning of the novel does not presage its turn towards South Seas exploration narrative. Donald Pease understands the disjointed

⁵⁸ It is important to keep in mind that by the 1830s this model of empirical science as natural history was out of step with the cutting edge in scientific research. John Limon, investigating the relationship between science and American fiction, argues that during Poe’s career, factors such as the development of sciences like chemistry and the establishment of the American Association for the Advancement of Science led to the increased specialization and professionalization of science. As a result, “Amateur review of science lost its force” (5). In addition, “By the end of the 1840s, the American Association for the Advancement of Science was protecting professional science from public scrutiny” (5-6). As science became more professionalized, its findings became less accessible to a wide public audience. At the same time, an older model of scientific knowledge still had a strong influence, especially over a popular audience: Limon contends that “from the end of the War of 1812 until around 1820, American science philosophy advanced the most pedestrian brand of Baconianism” (72).

plot of the novel as an expression of Poe's view of personal identity. Pease argues that Poe mediates on the sea adventurer's formative role in the development of modern subjectivity: "while at sea, [adventurers] opened themselves to adventures and experiences for no other reason than that they were available" (169). Writers of voyage accounts then, "reshaped these wondrous perceptions into reflections, converting adventures in the New World into occasions for the 'education' of the human soul and the 'progress' of culture" (169). These reflections were a type of "compensation" to the traveler's culture for the "exchange of an old self for a new self" (170). For Pease, *Pym* differs from other travel accounts because in it "no reflective consciousness is able to convert an excess of sensational incidents into a subjective experience" (170). In contrast, I argue that Poe stresses the fragmented nature of his tale not as a comment on the incoherence of personal identity, but as a comment on the archive of knowledge. Poe highlights the ways individual explorers defer their relevance and meaning to the imagined coherence of the larger archive of travel writing. In other words, Poe positions his fragmented novel both with and against the vision of an "accumulated stock" of knowledge.⁵⁹ What matters is not so much the disorder of Pym's individual narrative, but

⁵⁹ Pease is far from the only scholar to assert the fundamental disunity of the tale. In an early examination of *Pym*, J.V. Ridgely and Iola S. Haverstick navigate through the details of Poe's biography that would indicate that this work was composed in five distinct sections, which he simply pieced together and sent out in one volume. John Carlos Rowe and Jeffrey DeShell both warn against trying to fit *Pym* into a "criteria of unity and coherence" (Rowe, *Through the Custom-House* 10) or trying to "resolve the paradoxes and discrepancies" of the text (DeShell 70) and these contentions are predicted by the earlier essay "*Arthur Gordon Pym, or the Fallacy of Thematic Interpretation*" by Sidney Moss. Dennis Pahl argues that the narrative subverts a search for the origins of selfhood or greater meaning, but that, ultimately, meaning in this novel must "necessarily prove fruitless, impossible to possess" (49); Poe was invested in the "invented" nature of knowledge (49). Still other critics find ways of suggesting that *Pym* has its own principles of coherence. In "Poe's Sense of an Ending" Paul John Eakin, suggests that the ambiguous ending of the tale is part of a career-long investment in endings as such, particularly when they occur at the edge of life and death (Poe, *Selected Writings* 844-856). In "Novels, Tales,

the disorder and fantasy it invites into the narrative of progressive knowledge. Pym characterizes his account as “a narrative . . . which, in its latter portions, will be found to include incidents of a nature so entirely out of the range of human experience, and for this reason so far beyond the limits of human credulity” that he despairs of being believed (460). He thus suggests that his findings challenge the limits of human knowledge. However, he “confidently trust[s] in time and progressing science to verify some of the most important and improbable of my statements” (460).

Given the context of Poe’s interest in exploration and voyage narratives, we can understand the disjointed nature of *Pym* as a remark on the ways travel writers always describe their work as fragmentary in relation to a larger project of European exploration. As maritime voyage narratives attempt to draw a larger picture of circumoceanic space, they also frequently reference other, earlier travel narratives. When *Pym* includes whole paragraphs from voyagers like the American Captain Benjamin Morrell, this move replicates the work of other explorers who also intertextually linked their descriptions of their own movements through space with information about that location gathered from other texts.⁶⁰ Morrell’s account of his four voyages, published in 1832, cites *A Journal of a Cruise Made to the Pacific Ocean* (1815) by American Commodore David Porter.⁶¹

and Problems of Form in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*” (1992), Bruce Weiner suggests that we read the sections of *Pym* as a series of magazine articles.

⁶⁰ For example, Chapter XV of *Pym*, which describes the *Jane Guy* sailing from Christmas Harbor towards the South Pole borrows heavily from Morrell, according to G.R. Thompson (Poe, *Selected Writings* 516-518, 517 n 1). According to Pollin, Morrell’s narrative was likely written by a ghostwriter Samuel Woodworth (168).

⁶¹ Pollin details Morrell’s use of Porter’s account (165). Lisa Gitelman also links *Pym* to Morrell’s narrative, arguing that Morrell’s scattered and unruly composition inspired *Pym*’s form (350-355).

Even though Morrell's trips were trade voyages that were not aimed at exploration, Morrell frames his accounts as contributions to enlightened learning. Morrell's narratives speak to the flexible understanding of what counted as maritime exploration in antebellum American letters. Poe's novel invokes this flexibility, as Pym legitimizes his accidental journey as a contribution to well-ordered knowledge by connecting his movements to his predecessors' in his narration. As Pym journeys south with the *Jane Guy*, he shares extensive information about the explorers and traders who had traveled near the Antarctic, referencing the voyages of "the Portuguese," "the Dutch in 1643," and "the French in 1767" (516). As Pym navigates the South Seas, he recalls an imagined archive of navigators who have come before him and offers their exploits and achievements as part of the fabric of his own narrative.

In fact, throughout the narrative, Poe emphasize the connections between his protagonist's strange story and the story of "progressing science" by using several strategies to link *Pym* to the launching of the United States Exploring Expedition (nicknamed the "US EX EX") under Charles Wilkes—a realization of the project Poe supported.⁶² Poe sends Pym to the South Pole, noting, in the full title of the narrative, that Pym takes a "brief cruise . . . in the Antarctic ocean," heads to the "eighty-fourth parallel of Southern latitude," and has "adventures . . . still farther South."⁶³ This title—which

⁶² An expedition that Reynolds was not asked to take part in, as he had alienated several influential players in the Navy (Poe, *Selected* 520 n 4).

⁶³ Modeling his fictional narrative on non-fictional accounts, *Pym*'s full title is a series of spoilers that points out some of the remarkable and more salacious events of this narrative, of which there are plenty: *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym. Of Nantucket. Comprising the details of a mutiny and atrocious butchery on board the American brig Grampus, on her way to the South Seas, in the month of June, 1827. With an account of the recapture of the vessel by the survivors; their shipwreck and subsequent horrible sufferings from famine; their deliverance by means of*

satirizes the detailed titles of other travel accounts—highlights the fact that Pym’s voyage stretches beyond his contemporaries’ accomplishments, as Pym crosses a set of imagined boundaries (the lines of latitude his predecessors had reached). The first installment of what would become *Pym* appeared in the same 1837 issue of the *Southern Literary Messenger* as Poe’s review of Reynolds. The completed novel was published in 1838 to coincide with start of the Wilkes Expedition. A fictional note from an anonymous editor caps off *Pym* and gives a nod to the US EX EX saying, “the statements of the author in relation to these regions may shortly be verified or contradicted by means of the governmental expedition now preparing for the Southern Ocean,” and Pym cites Reynold’s advocacy for the project within his narration (561). As the *Jane Guy* heads towards the South Pole, Pym notes that Reynold’s “great exertions and perseverance have at length succeeded in getting set on foot a national expedition” (520). Adding to the connection between Poe’s positive support for exploration and his protagonist’s imagined journey, Pym recycles some of the language from Poe’s pro-exploration articles, when he explains that his experience in these extreme latitudes of the Earth inspired a coterie of gentlemen from Richmond, Virginia to develop a “deep interest in all matters relating to the region I had visited” (432). The interested Virginian men were “constantly urging” Pym to give his “narrative to the public” “as a duty” (432), terms which rehearse Poe’s claim that the nation had an interest in and a duty to participate in exploration. Pym’s authenticating gesture imitated other narratives of exploration by travelers: indeed, Pym’s introduction resonates with the preface to Robert Adams’s narrative, in which a group of

the British schooner Jane Guy; the brief cruise of this latter vessel in the Antarctic ocean; her capture, and the massacre of her crew among a group of islands in the eighty-fourth parallel of Southern latitude; together with the incredible adventures and discoveries still farther South to which that distressing calamity gave rise.

men at the metropole authenticate the value of a traveler's accidental experience. In the preface to his novel, Poe reiterates the notion that information is owed to the public, even though he begins to subvert the edifying language of knowledge in his narrative by implying that these Virginian gentlemen were willing to overlook the "marvelous" elements of his story as they encouraged his contribution to the records of exploration (432).

Although his preface highlights the scientific achievement of his accidental journey, the beginning of the narrative takes a different tone as it stresses the danger, adventure, and even the erotic allure of travel. The teenaged Pym, who originates from the whaling town of New Bedford, becomes the close friend of Augustus Barnard. Barnard has traveled in whalers captained by his father, and his stories of "the natives of the Island of Tinian and the other places he had visited in his travels" grab Pym's attention (434). These stories were told "as they occupied the same bed" and inspired "by degrees . . . the greatest desire to go to sea" (434). Thus, Pym's narrative very quickly moves away from the preface's claims of duty and dedication to public knowledge to an intimate scene, in which Pym is veritably seduced by Augustus's stories. Pym is interested in seeing the foreign lands Augustus describes, an interest that seems in line with the informational project he claims in his preface. But Poe quickly adds other valences to this interest. In the first seaborne incidence of the narrative, Augustus drunkenly calls for a "frolic" in Pym's boat the *Ariel*, and the frolic escalates quickly into a disaster as the boat is destroyed, leaving Pym and Augustus to be rescued by the

Penguin (434-437).⁶⁴ In this vignette, Poe already begins to confuse the language of rational exploration with the language of unruly desire: Pym recollects that when he hears Augustus's proposal for the trip, he "felt a thrill of the greatest excitement and pleasure, and thought his mad idea one of the most delightful and most reasonable things in the world" (434). In his account of his motivation, Pym begins by characterizing the plan by its madness and the sensations it inspires before declaring it "reasonable."

By being captivated by Augustus's stories, Pym engages in what Michael Millner calls "bad reading" (xiv). Millner describes an antebellum American dialogue over the potential detriments of reading "too emotionally, too physically, too absorptivity, too inwardly, unproductively, masturbatorily, in a fever" (xv). This type of reading was contrasted to the types of critical and reflective reading that was "essential to a proper public sphere and good citizenship" (xiv).⁶⁵ When he champions exploration, Poe invokes a sober vision of the public sphere noting the United States' "liberal institutions" and their role in organizing the knowledge about the South Pole. In contrast, his novel describes Pym's fascination with oceanic travel in sensational and irrational terms. I suggest below that Poe's novel explores the difficulty of separating these two discourses: the narrative's elements of adventure and desire embed the disordering potential of imagination and feeling within a narrative offered as a contribution to the progress of knowledge.

⁶⁴ As Thompson notes, Poe may have dramatized the 1836 wreck of a real ship, the *Ariel*, which was documented by several newspapers (Poe, *Selected* 434 n 5).

⁶⁵ Using cognitive science, Millner's study reassesses affect and aims, in part, to recuperate "bad reading" as "essential to modern democracy and the public sphere" (xiv).

Indeed, throughout the narrative, Pym vacillates between the production of certain knowledge (for instance, Pym's narration sometimes takes the form of a logbook as he notes navigational directions and natural historical details) and the language of uncontrollable sensation or supernatural encounters (Pym swoons several times, and one such swoon leads him to dream of "the paws of some huge and real monster," which turns out to be his dog's paws (447)). The narrative's vacillation is summed up by Pym himself who describes the way, under certain conditions, "the reasoning or imaginative faculties flicker, alternately, one above the other" (451). The problem with such alternation is that the reader cannot always discern where one faculty or the other takes over: indeed they bleed into and shape one another (as when the perfectly mundane paws of Pym's puppy are converted in his dream into the paws of a monster). Only a week after the accident in the *Ariel*, Pym was able to "erase from [his] memory the shadows, and bring out in vivid light all the pleasurable exciting points of colour, all the picturesqueness of the late perilous accident" (440). Although, at this point, Pym is describing a scene of nautical adventure, and not, say, detailing the flora and fauna of Tsalal, he still opens up a disorienting possibility within his narration: he describes the potential for the mind to redraw memory. Pym later informs us that, in composing the narrative, "in many instances I have relied altogether upon memory" (526 n 3), a reminder that throws added doubt onto his already incredible narrative.

Poe further tangles Pym's contribution to knowledge with the disordering potential of desire and accident by casting and recasting Pym's motivations for travel. After being rescued by the *Jane Guy*, Pym begins to shape its captain's agenda. When Captain Guy contemplates turning back after they had already "advanced southward

more than eight degrees farther than any previous navigators,” Pym convinces him to press on:

So tempting an opportunity of solving the great problem in regard to an Antarctic continent had never yet been afforded to man . . . While therefore I cannot but lament the most unfortunate and bloody events which immediately arose from my advice, I must still be allowed to feel some degree of gratification at having been instrumental, however remotely, in opening to the eye of science one of the most intensely exciting secrets which has ever engrossed its attention. (526)

At this moment, Pym imagines himself as an “instrument” for a larger power: science is the agent who is “engrossed” and excited by the secret of the South Pole. Pym acknowledges the unexpected and deadly events that occurred because of his pursuit of knowledge—the murder of the entire original crew and the destruction of the ship in Tsalal—but subsumes these considerations to the goals of science. The total annihilation of the crew is a minor storyline—it is not so much an obstacle, as an auxiliary event occurring alongside science’s quest.

Of course, Pym’s personification of science (as well as his own admission of “gratification”) associates it with human sensations. In this way, he subtly undermines concepts of science as a pursuit whose value is self-evident and detached from contingent motivations. Pym’s commitment to scientific knowledge, in fact, recasts his earlier motivations for taking to sea, motivations which were explicitly irrational. Just after Pym and Augustus’s misadventure in the *Ariel*, Pym confesses, “I never experienced a more ardent longing for the wild adventures incident to the life of a navigator” (440). Pym explains that his longing was fed, not by the projected glory of discovery, but by his “desires” fueled by visions of “shipwreck and famine” and of “death and captivity among

barbarian hordes” (440).⁶⁶ The types of story Pym invokes here seem to fit in with the kind of sensationalist accounts collected in books like *The Tragedy of the Seas*, an 1841 compendium of narratives and illustrations collected by Boston bookseller Charles Ellms. Ellms’s book listed “true” accounts like, “The Wreck of the American Whale-Ship Mentor on the Coral Reefs of the Pelew Islands; with the Captivity and Escape of Horace Holden and Benjamin H. Nute, who for two Years were subjected to unheard-of Sufferings among the barbarous Inhabitants of Lord North’s Island” (x). This compendium, which reprinted “true” stories already in circulation, speaks to the reading public’s fascination with tales of destruction and suffering (the “bad reading” Millner discusses) rather than its investment in enlightening narratives of facts. Poe’s experiences both before and after he joins the *Jane Guy* more than pay out Pym’s initial desire for danger, as he suffers a catalogue of high-seas tragedy, from mutiny and shipwreck, to cannibalism and captivity. Even as Pym recasts himself as an explorer and downplays “the unfortunate and bloody events” which occurred on Tsalal, he cannot erase the desire and contingency which lead him to his scientific revelation.

Pym’s convergence of accident with Enlightenment positivism is one way Poe highlights this same convergence within popular exploration accounts. When Captain

⁶⁶ Poe here presages an idea he will develop in “The Imp of the Perverse” (1845). In that story, Poe begins by using the “scientific” language of phrenology and employing the language of reason to explain a phenomenon that is beyond reason: the “spirit of the *Perverse*” which leads us to “perpetuate” an action “merely because we feel we should not” (*Selected Writings* 405). Poe’s narrator claims, “Induction *a posteriori* would have brought Phrenology to admit” the existence of this “*Perverseness*” (403). One of Poe’s examples is of a man, standing at the edge of a cliff, who is led, through the “imp of the perverse” to imagine and desire his fall, “for the very reason that it involves that one most ghastly and loathsome of all the most ghastly and loathsome images of death and suffering” (404). Reason, according to the story, is coupled with its opposite, “because our reason most strenuously deters us from the brink, therefore do we the more unhesitatingly approach it” (404). Poe is fascinated by the collision of the irrational with the rational and by scientific attempts to anatomize this collision.

James Cook approached the Antarctic region he had to abandon his goal of reaching the South Pole. Cook's account (a travelogue which begins with navigational details such as his precise latitude and longitude and the direction of the wind and the time of his observation), explains why he has to turn around to avoid the "ice islands" surrounding the Antarctic glaciers:

[A] quantity of loose Ice which we sailed through...increased so fast upon us that at 6 o'Clock (sic) we were obliged to alter the Course more to the East, having to the South an extensive feild (sic) of loose ice... the going in among this Ice might have been attended with bad consequences (sic), especially as the wind would not permit us to return. One of these mases was very near proving fatal to us, we had not weather[ed] it more than once or twice our length, had we not succeeded this circumstance could never had been related. (323-324)

In this passage, Cook gives a precise account of where, when, and why he reversed course prior to reaching his goal. He narrates a narrow escape, and, in doing so, he contemplates the possibility that the very paragraph he is writing would never have existed. This counterfactual statement serves to justify Cook's choices, but it also articulates the contingency of his survival, even in the face of his maritime skill and technical expertise. Cook's description of his approach to the Great Ice Barrier offers hypothetical erasure of the information in his account. Thus, by linking Pym's desire for danger to the "progress of discovery" (519), Poe does not simply layer fiction onto fact. Poe highlights the role of accident and contingency within narratives by explorers like Cook, and he illuminates the place of contingency within the archive of knowledge fed by travel writing.

In addition to highlighting the contingency of sea travel, Poe revisits some of the superstitions associated with maritime travel. Poe integrates an almost-supernatural encounter into his narrative using the language of navigation and maritime craft. Towards

the middle of the novel, Pym describes brings together the rational and particularizing language of maritime craft with a mysterious nautical ghost story. Taking his cue from the legend of the Flying Dutchman, Poe describes Pym, Augustus, Dirk Peters, and Richard Parker (one of the surviving mutineers) in an encounter with a ship whose origins are explainable by both natural and supernatural causes. Having drifted for weeks on a piece of the wrecked *Grampus*, under the scorching sun, and with minimal provisions, Poe and his three companions spy what they first believe to be their means of salvation, a “large hermaphrodite brig, of Dutch build” (489). They are quickly disabused of this belief when they realize that the brig was floating aimlessly: the person they thought they saw at the helm turns out to be a corpse, and the ship is filled with dead and decaying bodies.

Even though Pym introduces the narrative as being “replete with the extremes first of delight and then of horror” (488), what is striking about this scene is the way Poe focuses on the failure of perception and knowledge that leads to these extremes of feeling. Seeing the ship “two miles off to the windward” (489), Pym begins to enumerate nautical details. From the type of ship they see and from the clothing they can discern on the ship’s occupants, they determine the vessel to be Dutch. Pym quickly notices the damage to the “foretopmast” and the “starboard bulwarks” (damage he attributes to the same storm that took down the *Grampus*). Pym and his mariner companions are “astonished” that, in spite of the breeze, “she had no other sails set than her foresail and mainsail, with a flying jib” (489). These nautical details hardly seem “astonishing” in comparison to the scene they will discover when the ship gets closer. Poe deliberately juxtaposes this initial astonishment over the placement of the sails with the deeper

astonishment of seeing the corpses on the ship in order to examine the language of maritime craft and the rational, predictable exploration it is meant to enable.

Pym's use of these details to identify the ship carries forward the technical precision he used in his discussion of the *Grampus*'s ill-fated journey. Although Pym admits several times that he has no training as a sailor, in the chapters leading up to the shipwreck and the encounter with the Dutch brig, he breaks up his account of the mutiny on the *Grampus* with details about proper stowage on a schooner and an encyclopedic account of a nautical maneuver called "laying to" (467-469, 474-475). His account of this maneuver is thorough and includes the different circumstances in which ships use this operation as well as famous instances of ships "laying to." Having demonstrated his knowledge of the mariner's craft, Pym's account leads us from this display of reason and technical mastery to the encounter with the horror of the Dutch ship, which resists Pym's attempts to identify and understand it. When the brig approaches, Pym's companions smell something "hellish . . . such as the whole world has no name for—no conception of" (490). They hear a bird "so closely resembling the scream of a human voice that the nicest ear might have been startled and deceived" (490). This lack of available names and this confusion between species thus also threaten the work of natural history. Pym and his companions' ability to categorize what they see starts to disintegrate, until they realize that they have miscategorized death as life: the population of the Dutch brig had been completely wiped out and not a living thing remained to steer the boat or save Pym and his friends.

In the Dutch brig incident, Poe stages a scene of dreadful misperception. In a move typical of our narrator when he confronts the highly grotesque and unexpected,

Pym takes us out of the horror of the moment to tell us about his later efforts to “obtain some clew” and ascertain the origin and history of this ship (491). Pym admits that these efforts were ultimately fruitless: “it is utterly useless to form conjectures where all is involved, and will, no doubt, remain forever involved, in the most appalling and unfathomable mystery” (491). This final declaration of uselessness does not, of course, keep him from surmising—from the sallow color of the half-putrefying skin—that the Dutch mariners had suffered from yellow fever, or perhaps had eaten poisonous fish. Into an abyss of knowledge, conjectures proliferate. He buttresses this inexplicable account with terms culled from truthful narratives. As he tells the story, Pym says, “I relate these things and circumstances minutely, and I relate them, it must be understood, precisely as they *appeared* to us” (490 emphasis in original). That Pym still feels the need to use clues from what he saw to “sort out” the mystery of the Dutch brig shows Pym’s impulse to order and explain, to use the surface features of the dead bodies to help identify their origins, even when he is faced with ineffable terror.

When first sections of *Pym*, which abound with high-seas disasters and accounts of extreme privation, give way to the story of Pym on the *Jane Guy*, which is filled with passages of description lifted from Cook, Reynolds, and Morrell, the novel may seem to abruptly turn into an exploration narrative. However, I want to suggest that the narrative continues the pattern I identify in its earlier chapters of mixing of the terms of reason with the terms of irrationality: for Poe, this includes sensation, imagination, and even horror. The second half of the novel seems at first to immerse itself in the descriptive projects of navigation, natural history, and ethnography, but Poe finds the decentering and disordering potential from within these discourses.

Fantasy in Natural History

In addition to highlighting the role of contingency in exploration, Poe uses the descriptive systems available to sea narratives to explore the digressive and imaginative potential within these systems. When Pym and the *Jane Guy* reach Tsalal, Pym urges the captain to continue their voyage south, extending their project of reaching the South Pole (530). Captain Guy, on the other hand, seems much more invested in finding goods “in the hope of making a profitable speculation in his discovery” (530). This might, at first, look like a deliberate contrast between the American Pym’s disinterested desire for knowledge and Guy’s British instinct for commercial and colonial enterprise. However, Pym’s attempt to inform the reader about *biche de mer* (also known as sea cucumber) registers the difficulty of separating out these two motivations. In presenting information in his narrative, Pym shows the ways in which seemingly objective reporting about a particular item contains within it narratives of interest.

In a move typical of sea voyage accounts, Pym interrupts action with description, taking time to classify and describe *biche de mer*, an item that was highly valuable in circumoceanic trade. Having first noticed the item in “the hands of one of the savages, who was greedily devouring it in its natural state” (530), Pym describes the *biche de mer* in detail, as though he were taking it out of its “natural state” by wrapping it in varieties of discourse. Poe sets up a contrast between the “greedy devouring” and his refined, knowledgeable relationship to the item—although Captain Guy’s obsession with collecting the item for trade belies the idea that there is no “greed” in the Western travelers’ relationship to *biche de mer*. Pym then quotes Benjamin Morrell’s long description of this “luxury,” which includes its designation in binominal nomenclature

(*gastropeda pulmonifera*), as specified in the works of the “celebrated Cuvier,” the etymological origins of its common name, an explanation of mollusk reproduction, and a detailed description of its physical features: “They are nearly round, a little flattish on one side . . . they have no shells, no legs, nor any prominent part” (536), and they are “oblong, and of different sizes, from three to eighteen inches in length” (535).⁶⁷ Pym is writing like a naturalist, and Rowe links Pym and Cuvier, arguing that “What appeals to Poe is Baron Cuvier’s pseudo-evolutionary classification of human types in the manner of animal species” (“Poe’s Imperial Fantasy” 98). However, the description Poe cites undercuts the clarity of classification by recasting the identity of the mollusk as an item of consumption. His selection from Morrell describes how *biche de mer* is collected, how to prepare them, and where to trade them (“The Chinese” he notes, “consider *biche de mer* a very great luxury” 536).⁶⁸ This description reorders the mollusk by the different prices it might fetch: “The first quality commands a high price in Canton, being worth

⁶⁷ A later episode in Poe’s career shows his familiarity with the science of natural history. In 1839 he put his name on a work of natural history, *The Conchologist’s First Book*. Helping his friend Thomas Wyatt avoid publisher Harper’s copyright ownership of Wyatt’s original, longer *The Conchologist’s First Book*, Poe loaned his name and editing skills to a primer on the classification of mollusks according to the system of French naturalist Georges Cuvier. Stephen Jay Gould argues in “Poe’s Greatest Hit” that Poe made significant contributions and reordering to Wyatt’s work, but the primer was accused of being a plagiarism the work of Thomas Browne’s (171-186). This episode in Poe’s life replays many of the themes of authorship and scientific knowledge that occur in *Pym* and in Poe’s larger engagement with South Sea exploration. *The Conchologist’s First Book*, intended as work for school children, is part of the liberal institution of educating future students of natural history. Responding to accusations of plagiarism, Poe argues that the composition of all works of this kind are a collective effort of scientists and researchers. Poe here plays a role in the accumulation of knowledge and gets caught up in questions of authorship that are similar to those he narrates in the preface to *Pym*.

⁶⁸ Within a year after the publication of Poe’s *Pym*, Great Britain and China were fighting the First Opium War; the search for products which would sell in China, then, is more politically loaded than it may at first seem, given Britain’s concern over the imbalance of trade between the two countries. In other words, not only is Captain Guy pursuing his own personal profit, his decision is entangled in his mercantile nation’s political problems.

ninety dollars a picul; the second quality seventy-five dollars; the third fifty dollars; the fourth thirty dollars; the fifth twenty dollars; the sixth twelve dollars . . .” (537). The sea cucumber is removed from the natural historical context and placed in the context of the market with remarkable ease, as both discourses involve the work of distinction and classification.

The description of *biche de mer*, like many other moments in *Pym* and in the narratives he emulates, represents a cross-section of temporalities and potential narratives. It also puts Tsalal into a larger narrative of an ever-expanding commercial and informational empire; this description, after all, is just part of the overarching narrative of information-collection and centralization. In addition, by quoting Morrell, Pym suggests that his personal experience is shot through with the explorations and studies of others. Within a narrative of order-making classifications, then, there lies a narrative of classification’s dispersion. Poe shows that even in the most mundane moments of natural historical cataloguing, narrative breaks in and breaks up the stability of understanding that the cataloguing of species is supposed to impress onto the globe as it brings back a clear picture of the world to the public at home.

Not only does Poe inject fantasies of commerce into his narrative of observation, he also uses the language of natural history to imagine new, fantastic species. In other words, Poe explores the creative potential within language meant to describe and record the world as it is. Indeed, the animals he imagines get more and more bizarre as he approaches the South Pole. He starts by exaggerating the familiar. Pym offers detailed information about the Galapagos tortoises, after he and his fellow shipwrecked sailors find and eat one for sustenance. While he has claimed to see “several which would weigh

from twelve to fifteen hundred pounds,” he also notes, “I do not remember that any navigator speaks of having seen them weighing more than eight hundred” (501). He links his observation to other navigators’ records, but then describes how the animals he encounters extend the limits of the familiar. Pym next encounters, “a gigantic creature of the race of the Arctic bear, but far exceeding in size the largest of these animals” measuring “full fifteen feet,” which Dirk Peters kills and Captain Guy preserves as a “trophy” for display (525). As they approach Tsalal, Pym’s descriptions move from exaggerations to horrible amalgamations. The crew of the *Jane Guy* discern

[T]he carcass of a singular-looking land-animal. It was three feet in length, but six inches in height, with four very short legs, the feet armed with long claws of a brilliant scarlet, and resembling coral in substance. . . . The tail was peaked like that of a rat . . . The head resembled a cat’s, with the exception of the ears—these were flapped like the ears of a dog. The teeth were of the same brilliant scarlet as the claws. (527)

Pym imagines a new species by recombining the some of the most familiar animals (a dog, a cat, a rat) in order to fashion a “singular” creature. The Arctic bear, although extraordinary in size, is conquered, stuffed, and ready for display in metropole museums. Using the language of detached observation to depict the strangeness of the South Pole, Poe experiments here by creating the bizarre out of the mundane and making the mundane out of the bizarre.

Poe’s vision of the South Pole as a place of fantastic creatures and supernatural occurrences reverses the contemporary discussion of it, which considered the exploration of the South Pole a direct rebuke of such superstitious and irrational thinking. Morrell, in fact, offered an assessment of the inevitable success of a polar expedition which is helpful for understanding Poe’s revision of that space. Morrell’s discussion posits science’s ability to triumph over superstition and fear. Human ingenuity, to him, opposes

belief in supernatural forces: although some “have been deterred by a superstitious notion that an attempt to reach the South Pole was a presumptuous intrusion on the awful confines of nature,” Morrell retorts, that even if “nothing less than a miracle could open the passage through this formidable barrier, I contend that genius, science, and energy combined can work miracles, and even remove mountains” (29). Morrell rewrites the miraculous into a triumph of science and ingenuity. Morrell’s confident assessment here belies the doubt that attended the publication of his own account. Burton R. Pollin describes the “serious doubts” which “arose in scientific circles and among nautical experts about the validity of his whole narrative and the details of his observation” (157). Pollin surmises that Poe’s numerous inclusions of passages from Morrell (with whom *Pym* shared the publisher Harper and Brothers) may have wanted to capture some of this “spirit of the fraudulent” (169). Whatever Poe’s evaluation of Morrell’s honesty may have been, his adaptations of Morrell in *Pym* push back on the language of scientific certainty which Morrell and his contemporary voyagers invoked.

With these reversals between the miraculous and the explicable, we might see Poe as addressing a problem Denis Diderot identifies as resulting from the increase in exploration writing during the eighteenth century. In Anthony Pagden’s account of the complex reception of seventeenth-century European exploration, he explains Diderot’s worry that, although the voyager and explorer “revealed to the general gaze an increasing number of unknown and neglected corners of the world” this had the effect of blunting Europeans’ capacity for “wonder” (*European Encounters* 164-5). Wonder and fantasy, in Diderot’s account, is an essential part of “civilized society” (164). While navigation and voyaging “had the effect of familiarizing people who once believed that their cultures

were the only possible measure of all things with a diversity of human types” the result “had not been tolerance or the erosion of superstition, but rather a decrease in the capacity for imaginative response” (164). If by the nineteenth-century, this diversity had become familiar and the methods of recording it had become calcified, Poe turns the tables on this scientific certainty. *Pym*’s explorations of Enlightenment positivism describes its proximity to imagination, one that jumps ahead of observed reality to project a fantasized world.

To build fantasy from Enlightenment positivism, Pym turns Morrell’s formula on its head: if Morrell felt that more information meant nature would seem less “awful,” *Pym* constructs the terror of its endings from the logic within hierarchizing forms of science. The “vast chain of apparent miracles” that greets the crew in Tsalal is built from the logic within natural history. As I describe in the introduction to this dissertation, natural history envisions the world as ready to be portioned into its classifications and offers the possibility that the project of describing the world had definite limits. Jeremiah Reynolds, in fact invokes this logic: for Reynolds, the catalogue of Earth’s species can fit between “the minute madrapore to the huge spermaceti” (72). When Pym enters Tsalal, he describes the space with the confidence of someone familiar with the archive of travel. The land of in the south or Tsalal is distinguished in being hitherto unexplored and seemingly separate from every known land: “At every step we took inland the conviction forced itself upon us that we were in a country differing essentially from any hitherto visited by civilized men” (530). Pym’s statement, made very soon after he lands on the island, suggests that what is “essential” is what is superficial: without being able to

communicate with the natives, all it takes is “steps”—forward movement through a small part of the land—to distill the “essence” of Tsalal and to oppose it exactly to civilization.

Poe experiments with the hierarchizing logic of natural history by creating a world of visible extremes. Tsalal, as a land that is completely devoid of the color white seems to guard against mixture or ambiguity. Not only are readers confronted with the “jet black” Tsalal natives who apparently fear the color white, most of their features are described in superlatives and extremes: “the chief evinced symptoms of extreme surprise and delight” (528); when they visit the interior of the ship “their amazement exceeded all bounds” and “their astonishment” was “far too deep for words” (529); they approach the ship’s guns with “the profoundest reverence and awe” (529); “their dwellings were of the most miserable description imaginable, and unlike those of even the lowest of the savage races with which mankind are acquainted” (532). Having reached the edges of the space with which Western travel writing was “acquainted” Poe associates this latitudinal extreme with the extremes of natural history; by calling the Tsalalians the “most barbarous” Pym reveals the hierarchical thinking within scientific classifications of nature (538). As if to highlight this consideration of extremes, he ends the novel with an image of “perfect” whiteness (and superlative proportions): “And now we rushed into the embraces of the cataract, where a chasm threw itself open to receive us. But there arose in our pathway a shrouded human figure, very far larger in its proportions than any dweller among men. And the hue of the skin of the figure was of the perfect whiteness of the snow” (560). Unlike the inhabitants of Tsalal, the figure is not subject to any more description, categorization or discussion and Pym’s narrative ends. If the blackness of the Tsalal generates chapters and chapters of discourse, the whiteness of the shrouded figure

is sublime: it overwhelms Pym's senses and is not subject to particularization or quantification.

Pym excavates fantasy from within the language of natural history. Understanding the imaginative work involved in cataloguing nature, Poe stretches out the limits of the natural historical catalogue and exposes the way it can run ahead of experience and observation. In other words, Poe suggests that rather than recording the visual world, natural history can be used to imagine the world. Even though Poe does undercut the certainty of natural history and its claim to observe reality, this subversion of certainty does not mean, as some have suggested, that Poe undoes the racial differences expressed in such exaggerated terms at the end of his novel. If anything, Poe's turn away from science mystifies race, imagining race as something that is comprehended beyond the bounds of the naturalist's gaze. After all, Poe consistently probed the meanings and power of irrational and "perverse" forces, even when telling the story of Pym's dutiful contribution to the "aggregate of useful knowledge."

CHAPTER 4

Violent Ends: Melville's *White-Jacket* and the Man-of-War's Powerful Fictions

While Poe's *Pym* takes its protagonist to the ends of the earth, Herman Melville's novel *White-Jacket, or The World in a Man-of-War* (1850) documents the constricted space of a naval frigate and promises to fix its gaze inward. Both narratives, however, investigate the conventions of representing the maritime spaces their protagonists inhabit; in both, the limits of the spaces being represented become occasions to test the boundaries of these representations. While *Pym* explores the artificial systems used to catalogue nature, Melville's fictional nautical memoir describes a space that is, according to his narrator, an artificial world housing an artificial community. White-Jacket, the nickname of the novel's narrator and implied author, promises to give an exhaustive account of the naval frigate *Neversink*, to "let nothing slip, however small" (283). White-Jacket balances this exhaustiveness with restrictions on the scope of his descriptive gaze, restrictions which he imposes on himself and which he seems obsessed with maintaining. The narrative, *White-Jacket* reminds us, is confined to the space of the ship and the chronology of its return journey as we follow the *Neversink* from the port of Callao, Peru to the shore of Norfolk, Virginia. Melville had, in fact, spent a year in naval service on the USS *United States*, and, in preface to the first American edition of *White-Jacket*, Melville briefly references his experience in the navy as forming the basis of the depictions in the book. Scholars have long since established that, like Melville's earlier, ostensibly truthful travel narratives *Typee* (1846) and *Omoo* (1847), *White-Jacket*

deviates significantly from the events Melville experienced. Just as *Typee* and *Omoo* reference other South Sea travel narratives, *White-Jacket* borrows heavily from popular naval memoirs written by his contemporaries.⁶⁹ As I will discuss in this chapter, regardless of the reader's familiarity with the actual events of Melville's biography, *White-Jacket* reveals its own fictionality to its audience by short-circuiting the relationships between experience and its representation in narrative. Put another way, while *White-Jacket* insists on making the accurate and full description of the man-of-war the goal of his narrative, Melville undercuts the possibility of *White-Jacket*'s success in this endeavor.

While *Typee* and *Omoo* are also concerned with how narratives construct and represent experience, *White-Jacket* considers another layer of the problem of representation in the travel narrative by depicting and cataloguing the spaces of the ship. Chad Luck describes Melville's resistance to the descriptive apparatuses which, as I lay out in the introduction to this dissertation, are part of the DNA of travel narratives. According to Luck, "Melville was against the simplifications, reductions and isolations of Enlightenment science, particularly the classificatory schematics of Linnaean natural history assumed a static, one-to-one correlation between object and representation that Melville distrusted" (5). The frigate complicates Melville's critique of the "one-to-one" correlations of natural history because the naval ship comes with its own pre-ordered categories, with which the sailors are then forced to correlate. While *Typee* and *Omoo* were concerned with the artificial rendering of "natural" worlds in narrative, *White-*

⁶⁹ Howard P. Vincent analyzes *White-Jacket*'s many borrowings from other nautical memoirs (including works by whalers and merchant men along with sailors in the navy) in *The Tailoring of Melville's White-Jacket* (1970). Charles Anderson investigated the logs of the ships on which Melville served, and his findings are included in *Melville in the South-Seas* (1939).

Jacket characterizes the naval frigate itself a kind of fictional space. Evert Duyckinck picks up on this characterization in an early review of Melville's book for the *Literary World*, which he begins by proclaiming, "Life in a man-of-war is necessarily artificial."⁷⁰ Throughout his narrative, *White-Jacket* stresses the ways that different pieces of writing, like the Articles of War and the muster roll, govern the space and time of the man-of-war through their detailed rules and regulations. If *White-Jacket*'s writing is meant to represent the ship, the ship is, in many ways, pre-written, an expression of the rules set forth in these written codes. *White-Jacket* brings up these codes throughout the narrative, even calling for them to be rewritten as Melville relates his narrator's representations to the frigate's artificial world in complex ways.

Melville's novel foregoes plot in favor of emphasizing description. *White-Jacket* follows the voyage of the flagship *Neversink*, a naval frigate carrying a commodore, the highest ranking officer in the United States Navy at the time. The novel's title refers to the narrator's distinctive garment, which also gives him his nickname (as in many of Melville's novels, we never learn the protagonist's real name). *White-Jacket*, the implied author of the narrative, explains that the ship's purser had run out of the standard-issue blue coats, so he was forced to fashion his "outlandish" outerwear from a duck-shirt. *White-Jacket*'s subtitle, "The World in a Man-of-War," refers to the novel's descriptive scope. Melville characterizes the naval frigate as a harsh, prison-like atmosphere, in which superiors abuse their near-total power over the common sailors. One of *White-Jacket*'s obsessions is describing the abuses which the sailors suffer, especially through

⁷⁰ This review appeared in *The Literary World* on March 23, 1850. See Higgins and Parker, *Herman Melville: The Contemporary Reviews* (1995), 315.

the officers' use of flogging as a punishment. Naval flogging was then a subject debated by reformers and Congress (the practice would be banned by Congress in 1851). The novel stages three separate flogging scenes and includes essayistic chapters titled "Some of the Evil Effects of Flogging," "Flogging not Lawful," and "Flogging not Necessary" (139, 143, 147). *White-Jacket* documents Captain Claret's use of this punishment, and our narrator's fear of being subject to the lash is a defining feature of his character.

The novel's subtitle also hints at Melville's influences from popular nautical memoirs, defined by Hester Blum as, "the narratives of actual working sailors," whose authors "invite lands people to inhabit the working lives of seaman" (*The View* 71). John Samson observes that the nautical narratives Melville adapted in his own novels "demanded an unartistic, even amateurish relation of experience" (1-2). Works like Samuel Leech's *Thirty Years from Home, or A Voice from the Main Deck* (1843), Richard Henry Dana's *Two Years before the Mast* (1840), Nathaniel Ames's *A Mariner's Sketches* (1831), and the anonymous British account *Life on Board a Man-of-War* (1829) document shipboard life on naval, merchant, and whaling ships.⁷¹ Melville most consistently relies on Henry James Mercier and William Gallop's 1841 *Life in a Man-of-War, or Scenes in "Old Ironsides" During Her Cruise in the Pacific by a Fore-Top-Man*,

⁷¹ According to Myra C. Glenn, "Autobiographies and memoirs written by retired seamen became a staple of the literary marketplace, especially after the War of 1812 ended" and almost sixty works of maritime autobiography appeared between 1815 and 1860 (28). Glenn's survey of this literature—part of the "democratization" of print—focuses on their nationalistic themes and their delineation of manhood (28). See "Forging Manhood and Nationhood Together: American Sailor's Accounts of their Exploits, Sufferings, and Resistance in the Antebellum United States" (2007). Leech's and Dana's narratives were also considered part of naval reform literature, which Glenn also surveys in "The Naval Reform Campaign against Flogging: A Case Study in Changing Attitudes toward Corporal Punishment, 1830-1850." Glenn considers the anti-flogging campaign (to which *White-Jacket* alludes) to be "part of a broad spectrum of transatlantic reform which sought to limit, if not abolish, a range of violent punitive practices" (409).

which Howard P. Vincent calls “almost a chart” for *White-Jacket* (9).⁷² Melville not only adapts scenes from these popular accounts, his narrator’s self-referential musings on the order and limits of his narrative play off the temporal and spatial borders implied by these works’ titles and enacted within their chapters. Paul A. Gilje suggests that nautical memoirs like Dana’s were heavily influenced by logbooks:

The logbook itself was a written record of a voyage, but it also reflected a certain view of time and place that gave shape to a narrative form. Like the memory palace constructed in the mind of Matteo Ricci where fragments of information were lodged in each room . . . [A] sailor remembered every ocean journey in relationship to specific times and places” (66).

Nautical memoirs relied on certain conceptions of the way space and time are organized and presented in writing. Beyond echoing their subtitles with the title of his own narrative, Melville converts the nautical memoir’s conventions of representation into objects of contemplation themselves by persistently drawing attention to his narrator’s compositional decisions.

For scholars of *White-Jacket*, the novel’s subtitle signals Melville’s commitment to drawing analogies between the abusive “world” of the ship and the political problems of the United States. Critics have unpacked *White-Jacket*’s dialogue with antebellum reform movements and paid particular attention to the parallels White-Jacket draws between naval reform and abolitionist discourse. Adopting a trope that appears in other contemporary naval memoirs, White-Jacket, forced to witness three of his fellow sailors suffer floggings, declares, “You see a human being, stripped like a slave” (136). Samuel

⁷²As Vincent notes, *Life in a Man-of-War* has no listed author and its title page attributes it to “a Fore-top-man,” the same position which White-Jacket holds in Melville’s novel. Mercier and Gallop were the copyright holders for the book, which was published in Philadelphia by Lydia R. Bailey (9).

Otter considers how, through *White-Jacket*'s use of this analogy, "resemblances between white sailor and black slave become too intimate and unruly" (51). In other words, Melville deliberately overburdens this analogy in order to critique its viability. Also analyzing *White-Jacket*'s comparison between sailor and slave, Carolyn Karcher examines Melville's "technique of condemning slavery by analogy," judging it "so elaborate as to be ineffectual" (46). According to Karcher, Melville may wish to censure antebellum racism, but *White-Jacket* obscures this censure by presenting it obliquely. Similarly, Jeannine DeLombard argues that *White-Jacket* offers analogies in order to unravel them: "the novel ultimately rejects the structure of analogy in favor of what the narrator himself comes to perceive as a 'scale' of conditions, where one finds not analogs, but gradations" (30). By examining the various comparisons Melville advances in his novel, critics have unpacked the complex ways he critiques the antebellum United States through his rendering of the ship.

In this chapter, I shift attention away from the allegorical or analogical elements of the novel, in order to closely examine *White-Jacket*'s frequent comments on the mimetic status of his narrative. While I do not dispute the value or relevance of reading *White-Jacket* allegorically for its consideration of slavery and other antebellum political problems, there are important ways in which the naval frigate is a specific kind of space. The *Neversink* poses particular problems of representation for Melville. To that end, *White-Jacket*'s function as the implied author is not to serve as an avatar for Melville; instead, *White-Jacket*'s fantasies and failures dramatize a struggle between authorial representation and the representations imposed by the space of the ship and violence of its officers. Our narrator at times grants writing the power to reshape the man-of-war—to

recast the ship's own artificial world, or, at least, to contain its menace. By examining White-Jacket's attention to the boundaries of his narrative, I ultimately argue that, for Melville, what it means to know the ship is to understand how individuals can be shaped by the U.S. Navy's fictions. These fictions are more powerful than White-Jacket's capacity to manage or mold them, even as he, at times, imagines his narrative to have this power.

After I explain the struggle between White-Jacket's depictions and the ship's artificial society, the second section of this chapter looks at one of the consequences of White-Jacket's ultimately failed promise to keep his account contained to the ship. White-Jacket vows to control the parameters of his representations, but this is an oath he cannot keep. When he breaks the oath by leaving the deck of the ship in his narration, White-Jacket ends up representing the frigate's power to shape circumoceanic space as an agent of empire. Not only does the naval frigate have the power to shape the sailors who inhabit it, but the frigate can also draw and redraw the lines of national territory. Melville sets *White-Jacket* in 1843 to coincide with the year he spent on the USS *United States*, and White-Jacket promises to only narrate this homeward-bound journey. Although this chronological limit sets the novel in peacetime, the Mexican-American war was fought in the years between Melville's tenure as a sailor and the summer of 1849, when he wrote the novel. In this section, I discuss the ways Melville uses this gap in time to think about the war, Manifest Destiny, and the frigate's role in building the American empire. Melville contemplates the limits and expansion of the United States not through analogies with the ship but through reminders of the ship's role in creating and enforcing the boundaries of the nation.

Artificial History

Throughout his account, White-Jacket insists on identifying and recalling the rules of his narrative. In one such instance, White-Jacket declares, “in this book I have nothing to do with the shore further than to glance at it, now and then, from the water; my man-of-war world alone must supply me with the staple of my matter; I have taken an oath to keep afloat to the last letter of my narrative” (226). Cesare Casarino summarizes White-Jacket’s claim, proposing that Melville “articulates the world of the ship as a self-sufficient narrative ecosystem” (28).⁷³ White-Jacket promises to write as though he were still on the frigate and confines his description to what he can see on or from the *Neversink*. As White-Jacket repeatedly invokes this claim, Melville explores its meanings and ambiguities. Is it possible that description could coincide with the boundaries of the ship and that the sequence of his narration could match his experiences on board? What does White-Jacket accomplish with this promise? When White-Jacket argues that the “staple of [his] matter” will come from the “man-of-war world alone,” Melville plays on the meaning of “matter” as a chosen topic and “matter” as material substance. White-Jacket’s “oath” presents the possibility of a slippage between reality and its written representation. At this moment, White-Jacket contends that the ship and its representation have the same ontological status, and that they can be easily substituted one for the other. White-Jacket’s implication that the “matter” of the ship and the “matter” of his novel are

⁷³ In Casarino’s interpretation, this “hermetic enclosure” allows Melville to multiply the comparisons he makes between the ship and other spaces (29). The variety of *White-Jacket*’s comparisons—the “narrator’s unrelenting compulsion to represent the ship as always something else . . . a market, a metropolis, a factory, a machine” (30, 32)—expresses the novel’s central concern with “the violent impact of the old and the new” (35), a concern which marks the novel’s “modernity” (35). I would argue, however, that White-Jacket’s ability to maintain this “hermetic enclosure” is belied throughout the novel.

interchangeable opens up the possibility that White-Jacket has creative power over the ship (a possibility that, I argue, Melville thwarts).

While White-Jacket's oath may seem like a simple claim for verisimilitude and fidelity to reality—a claim familiar from the other works I have discussed—Melville complicates this as White-Jacket reflects on his own acts of composition. Throughout the novel, Melville suggests that White-Jacket sees description as an act of creative control. Indeed, when he tells us about his position as impartial narrator, White-Jacket grants a striking amount of power to this role. According to White-Jacket, the men's stations on the ship affect their dispositions and perceptions, but, when he describes his own station on the foretop, he advances the paradoxical idea that his position erases his positionality. Because our narrator was posted "in the loftiest yard of the frigate, the main-royal-yard," he is better able to account for the ship (47). He explains,

I am now enabled to give such a free, broad, off-hand, bird's eye, and, more than all, impartial account of our man-of-war world; withholding nothing; inventing nothing, nor flattering, nor scandalizing any, but meting out to all—commodore and messenger-boy alike—their precise descriptions and deserts. (47)

White-Jacket here reveals one of his fears through his fantasy. From his lofty perch, he temporarily abstracts himself from the particulars of the ship. White-Jacket idealizes his position, imagining that his mandated station on the main-royal-yard sets him free from the constrictions that, as I discuss below, bend the sailor to the reality of the frigate.

From his position above the fray, White-Jacket conceives of writing as means to deliver justice. Since White-Jacket characterizes the man-of-war world as a space almost devoid of fairness, he envisions the possibility that his written description of the frigate can redistribute justice and give each man his due. What is striking in White-Jacket's acts

of fairness, however, is the way he confers them on different stations on the ship and not on individual people. If White-Jacket dislikes the way the man-of-war world dissolves individuality in favor of fitting men into their place in the ship's taxonomy, it is notable that White-Jacket's vision of his own authorial work reinstates this taxonomy, even if he thinks he can deal more justly with it. We get the impression that his concern is not so much with fairness itself as with the power to "mete" it out. White-Jacket is far less critical of taxonomy if he is the one putting people in their place.

Melville's narrator is often less interested in representing the ship than in replacing the ship with his representations. White-Jacket's vision of authorial power allows him the fantasy that, by capturing the ship in his prose, he can annihilate the *Neversink* or even all men-of-war. Immediately after White-Jacket is arraigned at the mast and nearly flogged—in a scene that threatens the narrator with the "prospect of indelible, invidious marking" (Otter 79)—White-Jacket stages his own narrative as a destructive rewriting of the ship: "Who knows that this humble narrative may not hereafter prove the history of an obsolete barbarism? Who knows that, when men-of-war shall be no more, 'White-Jacket' may not be quoted to show to people in the Millennium what a man-of-war was? God hasten the time!" (282). He imagines a world in which his book has the authority to speak for the naval frigate and, within this same book, he asks "God" to "hasten" the time when this effacement of the real man-of-war can be realized. It is worth noting that White-Jacket does not ask for the end of war or the end of the *need* for such ships. Nor does he even call for the end of all varieties of naval ships. Instead, he posits an exchange: his "humble narrative" about the man-of-war for the real thing. With

the man-of-war no longer able to take sailors into its world, *White-Jacket* has control over representations of the ship and its inhabitants.

In the moments when White-Jacket fantasizes about authorial power and its ability to shape the man-of-war world (a fantasy Melville will consistently undermine), White-Jacket recalls a conception of authorship that scholars often attribute to Melville himself. Wai-Chee Dimock relates Melville's writing to antebellum ideologies of Jacksonian individualism and Manifest Destiny and argues that Melville was a writer committed to his "textual governance," to prioritizing his freedom of expression and creation over his representations (5). In Dimock's view, Melville attempts to make authorship "exclusively an exercise in freedom, an attempt to proclaim the self's sovereignty over and against the world's" (7).⁷⁴ Similarly, John Samson contends that White-Jacket's frequent use of literary allusions is a means of exerting this authority, of shaping the man-of-war world he so disdains:

White-Jacket wishes to divide his world not only to understand but to conquer: he often manipulates events through the order in which he places his descriptions, tales, and narratives of the events, thus subtly coloring them to fit his ideology. By setting events in juxtaposition to events more obviously fictional, he blurs the distinction—never clear anywhere in the book—between fact and fiction. (169)

Indeed, by claiming that the ship and his narrative can be coterminous, White-Jacket holds out the tantalizing possibility that a writer could reshape reality through the operations Samson describes. In White-Jacket's paradoxical view, the more his narration is able to reflect the space of the ship, the more he gains creative control to "manipulate"

⁷⁴ Dimock's *Empire for Liberty* includes a reading of *White-Jacket*, in which she argues that in the novel (as well as *Redburn*, the novel that immediately precedes it), Melville aims to coopt the "powerlessness" facing slaves and displaced Native Americans for his own artistic purposes (77).

this space. This is an enticing prospect for a narrator who hates the thing he tasks himself with describing.

White-Jacket may dream of this paradoxical power to represent and to change, but Melville reminds us that this is merely a dream. Although Dimock acknowledges that “the usual relation between author and characters in Melville’s writings” is “a relation of complementarity rather than of equality” (24), her interpretation aligns Melville’s goals with his narrator’s and overlooks the various ways Melville undermines White-Jacket’s view of himself as capable of exerting his will over the man-of-war. White-Jacket’s claim for impartiality, for example, is very quickly undermined as Melville seems to satirize his narrator’s pretensions. Referencing the “Troglodytes,” his pejorative name for the “holders” who work in the deepest recesses of the ship, White-Jacket claims, “No one ever knows the names of these fellows; after a three years’ voyage, they still remain strangers to you” (11). It would seem that his alleged impartiality precludes certain species of knowledge; far from “withholding nothing” he withholds the holders. White-Jacket does not acknowledge this as a limitation to his objectivity, nor does he surmise that these below-deck workers might know each other’s names to the exclusion of the maintop-men. This is a pattern that occurs throughout the novel: White-Jacket stakes out representational territory he cannot cover. Able to give the “principal divisions, into which a man-of-war’s crew is divided,” White-Jacket admits, “We say nothing here of Boatswains mates, Gunner’s mates, Carpenter’s mates, Sail-maker’s mates, Armorer’s mates . . . and numberless others” (11). Although White-Jacket’s use of apophasis here means that he is “saying something” about these divisions in the act of denying it, his list is a kind of grasping at straws, which devolves into his admission that there are

“numberless” others he has not been able to name, even in passing. The ship’s muster roll, in a sense, is more thorough than White-Jacket’s chronicle—however “numberless” White-Jacket considers the list to be, the officers hold a record of each position and the sailor who fills it. Otter, acknowledging the tension between White-Jacket and his narrators, argues:

White-Jacket’s claim for authorial power—the power to deliver to commodores and messenger-boys alike their just descriptions and deserts—will be superseded by Melville’s authority to mete out punishment. At the end of the book, White-Jacket loses his lofty perch. His insistence on impartiality shown again and again to be the mark and mystification of his status as a maintop man, White-Jacket is pushed by Melville from the yardarm. (53)

Indeed, we might even see White-Jacket’s climactic fall as a comment on his promise to “let nothing slip”: White-Jacket lets himself slip and falls off the very ship whose boundaries were to be traced by his narration.

Even as he claims that he can collapse the difference between the reality of the ship and his representation of it, Melville’s narrator frequently draws attention to the friction between the two. Melville represents the interactions between reality of the ship and the substance of White-Jacket’s descriptions as struggles, often placing his narrator in a position of capitulating his power. A scene near the end of the novel, in which White-Jacket regrets the need to relay an incident that occurred on board the *Neversink*, features one of these sequences of struggle and capitulation. After introducing the shipboard barbers, a branch “of the numerous artists and professors of polite trades in the Navy” (350), White-Jacket proceeds in the next chapter to describe the “Great Massacre of the Beards,” his title for one of the anecdotes he must tell, however painful the telling may be:

The preceding chapter fitly paves the way for the present, wherein it sadly befalls White-Jacket to chronicle a calamitous event, which filled the Neversink with long lamentations, that echoed through all her decks and tops. After dwelling upon our redundant locks and thrice-noble beards, fain would I cease, and let the sequel remain undisclosed, but truth and fidelity forbid. (355)

White-Jacket then reinforces his hesitance by turning to a fraught spatial metaphor and by reminding us of his eventual freedom from naval service:

As I now deviously hover and lingeringly skirmish about the frontiers of this melancholy recital, a feeling of sadness comes over me that I can not (sic) withstand. . . . With intuitive sympathy I feel of my own brown beard while I write, and thank my kind stars that each precious hair is forever beyond the reach of the ruthless barbers of a man-of-war. (355)

Before describing the main events—the captain orders the sailors to shave off their beards and then flogs the “majestic old man” Ushant, who defies the order (354)—White-Jacket both delays and points out this act of delaying. He takes his reader out of the forward progress of the narrative and into the scene of writing before returning us to the event. White-Jacket briefly reminds himself and us of his freedom from the “reach” of the ship’s rule before the ship enacts its control again, and he must continue with his description. In White-Jacket’s dilatory prelude to the “Great Massacre of the Beards,” an event is conflated with its chronicle, a sequence of occurrences becomes the “sequel” of a story, and one chapter “paves the way” to the frontier of another chapter. This scene is an attempt to execute White-Jacket’s earlier claim that the “matter” of his story is the “matter” of the ship, allowing him the power to reshape the man-of-war experience. However, in spite of this attention to composition, in White-Jacket, the author’s control over representation is far from clear: he cannot “withstand” representing a scene that itself is example of the captain’s control over the sailors’ bodies. The novel asks the question: if the ship and its voyage so strongly guide the narrative, what is the role of the

author? Melville suggests that limits of experience on the ship structure the limitations of his narrative, with his authorial power only briefly surfacing for air.

In this way, White-Jacket's oath to stay within the bounds of the *Neversink* lessens his creative control and makes the ship the guide for the narrative. White-Jacket describes his narration as an obligation and a constraint. In the example of the "Massacre of the Beards," White-Jacket pauses to explain the motivation for his story, and, in doing so, he implicitly asks if commitment to truth, adherence to the rules of genre, or the will of the writer requires his "melancholy recital." Melville's answer to these questions takes the form of a struggle: White-Jacket may prefer not to chronicle this "calamitous event," but he is "forbidden." The source of this interdiction is not entirely clear. On the one hand, White-Jacket points to his promise to chronicle the man-of-war's return voyage with "truth and fidelity" and suggests that the task of description "befalls" him, as if he were the passive recipient of this fate. On the other hand, he points to the compositional detail of his having "dwelled" on the topic of the beards as the motive for reciting the massacre. Having introduced the barbers as a type of shipboard profession, the story in which they play the villainous captain's henchmen is, according to the narrator's logic, imminent. White-Jacket may claim he is compelled to relate the incident, but in another light, we might view our narrator as compelling himself by choosing to introduce the barbers in the first place.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Adding to this ambiguity is the fact that Melville never witnessed any scene of forced hair removal. Vincent P. Howard traces the inspiration for the "Great Massacre" episode (as well as many other incidents) to Henry James Mercier and William Gallop's *Life in a Man-of-War* (180-181). While Melville's contemporary readers could not know if the so-called massacre really occurred or not, White-Jacket still cannot relinquish responsibility for bringing up the topic, and, in fact, he reminds us that he "dwelled on the redundant locks and thrice-noble beards."

White-Jacket's narration, in fact, vacillates between collapsing the difference between reality and book and reinstating this difference. At the beginning of a far less dramatic episode than the massacre, White-Jacket extends the fantasy that he can render the world of the ship so clearly the reader and the author can travel together on it. He begins a chapter claiming, "While now running rapidly away from the bitter coast of Patagonia . . . come under the lee of my white jacket, reader, while I tell of the less painful sights to be seen in a frigate" (104). The "now" of his claim indexes the movement of the ship to the moment of reading. In fact, White-Jacket's address to the "reader" echoes similar addresses in Mercier and Gallop's *Life in a Man-of-War*. In one example, from a chapter titled, "The Literary Tars," our anonymous fore-top-man narrator exclaims, "Reader! Don't spoil your pretty countenance with a sneer, nor turn up your nose with disgust, at the title of this sketch—Methinks I hear you with a pish exclaim, "Literary Tars . . . upon my word the Belle Lettres (sic) are becoming fearfully defiled" (105). The fore-top-man imagines the reader at home rather than next to him on the masthead; hence, this moment describes a gulf between the reader and the experience of the sailor and adumbrates the audience's expectations. In *White-Jacket*, our narrator attempts the reverse of this operation: he speculates that he can bring the reader onto the maintop with him. White-Jacket here expresses a fantasy that the sailor's and the reader's experiences can align, and that narrating a story can be like bringing his reader (with an almost sexual intimacy) under his coat. Melville momentarily tries to collapse this difference, but, by identifying his addressee as a "reader" he actually reinstates a gulf he meant, initially to overcome.

By suggesting that the illusion he creates with his writing is so strong that we can travel with him and occupy almost the exact same space, White-Jacket defeats his own purpose. He breaks the surface of the illusion, drawing our attention to the constructedness of the narrative and its claims to truth. By using the distance between White-Jacket and himself and between White-Jacket and the reader, Melville, to use Mikhail Bakhtin's term, "novelizes" the naval memoir.⁷⁶ According to Bakhtin, "the novel parodies other genres (precisely in their role as genres); it exposes the conventionality of their forms and their language" (5). In doing so, these genres are "permeated with laughter, irony, humor, elements of self-parody," and "the novel inserts into these other genres an indeterminacy" (7). Indeed, when White-Jacket points out the "rules" of his own narrative, it is also a comment on the "rules" of the naval memoir and the claims for verisimilitude it invokes. If White-Jacket believes he is in one kind of narrative, Melville's attention to the narrator's struggles with representation lets the reader know White-Jacket is actually in a novel.

In addition to novelizing the nautical memoir, Melville expresses a specific kind of awareness of the incongruities between experience and its written representation. Writing in the early twentieth century, Bakhtin is attuned to the ways different literary genres relate space and time. He gives this phenomenon the name "chronotope"; Bakhtin explains, "In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into

⁷⁶ John Samson also turns to Bakhtin in his discussion of Melville's work. However, he does not discuss the role of the chronotope, as I do below. Samson focuses on Bakhtin's concepts of "dialogism" and "heteroglossia"—the capacities novels have to contain multiple perspectives without subsuming them to the author's ideology. Samson reads Melville's novels for the way they dialogue with his sources and present multiple voices. His analysis of *White-Jacket* considers Melville's dialogue with the language and ideas of Whig reform movements. See *White Lies: Melville's Narrative of Facts* (1989), 13-18 and chapter 5.

one carefully thought-out, concrete whole” (84). Accordingly, “A literary work’s artistic unity in relationship to an actual reality is defined by its chronotope” (243). For example, “the road” is a chronotope that organizes space and time such that “people who are normally kept separate by social and spatial distance can accidentally meet” (243). This organization of time and space enables certain possibilities: “any contrast may crop up, the most various fates may collide and interweave with one another” (243). Melville, writing well before Bakhtin and the twentieth-century conceptions of time-space which inform the latter’s work, can be seen as examining the chronotopes of truthful nautical memoirs; his novel addresses the way the time and space of *White-Jacket*’s narrative is meant to (but ultimately cannot) mirror the time and space of reality. Melville, indeed, details how the space of the ship and the time of the voyage bring together characters in specific configurations and enable limited kinds of interactions. My point in bringing up Bakhtin, however, is not to categorize *White-Jacket*’s chronotopic qualities in order to fit the book into a specific genre. Instead, I want to suggest that Melville’s awareness of the representational limits of the nautical narrative indicates a growing self-consciousness in mid-nineteenth century literature of the constructedness of all claims to represent reality in writing.

Melville’s awareness of the fictions which undergird the presentation of fact, however, does not result in *White-Jacket*’s triumph as a creative force. Michael Davitt Bell identifies the way Melville’s writing challenges the relationship between phenomenal experience and noumenal truths, arguing that, for Melville, “It is not that romance is real; ‘reality,’ rather, is a species of romance” (145). *White-Jacket* does suggest that the “reality” of the ship is a kind of fiction. However, this fiction is not one

that White-Jacket can manipulate or reshape with any success. Although Melville's ability to point to the conventions of representation may seem like an act of creativity or an excavation of a deeper truth, in *White-Jacket*, the writer's artifice is contrasted with the officers' artifice, and it suffers in the comparison. In *White-Jacket*'s logic, recognizing the fictions that shape the frigate's world does not so much offer a perception of deeper truth as it outlines the writer's own limited creative power.

White-Jacket's professed concerns for the limits of his representation and the choices he makes as he writes are signs of Melville's investigation of the genre of the nautical memoir and its claims for verisimilitude. Some of Melville's contemporary reviewers seem to embrace White-Jacket's conceit, adopting the assertion that written representation reproduces the shipboard experience. A positive review from the British periodical *John Bull* praises the novel's verisimilitude:

White-Jacket contains a picture of the American Naval service, so minutely graphic, that he who has spent a few hours as a reader in this 'World in a Man-of-War' is as much at home in the ways and manners of the Yankee Navy, as if he had himself served his time under Commodore Bougee and Captain Claret. Every arrangement of an American man-of-war, every feature of the American service is brought under notice.⁷⁷

Because of its level of "minute" detail, Melville's reviewer contends, the novel replicates the experience of going to sea. Indeed, White-Jacket's promise to bring "every feature" of the ship "under notice" seems, according to this reviewer, to have been successful (although the reviewer's claim to have "spent a few hours" with the book pushes back against the idea that the reader could have "served his time"). As *John Bull*'s reviewer describes the success of White-Jacket's mimetic project, he reveals the terms by which

⁷⁷ This review was published on February 2, 1850 in London's *John Bull*; see Higgins and Parker, 298.

nautical memoirs were often evaluated. White-Jacket's stated commitment to detailed, thorough representation nods to these readerly expectations. However, I argue that Melville actually embeds resistances to his narrator's attempt to capture experience in prose. While White-Jacket desires to make description capable of reproducing, containing, and even remaking experience, Melville does not allow this wish to be satisfied.

Melville makes sure that White-Jacket's narrative can never match up to the powerful fictions the frigate enacts using very real violence. As the novel shows, the community of sailors White-Jacket attempts to memorialize is held together by the strict rules of the American navy. Their relationships to each other are determined by their positions on the ship, which become the artificial identities the sailors must adopt. The man-of-war's fictions can bend and mold individuals into the forms the frigate proscribes. Some of the ship's resistances to White-Jacket's desire for omnipotence hinge on a problem that is implied by the reviewer from *John Bull*. The review claims that the novel is "minutely graphic" and the reader can thus feel as though he "served time" on the specific ship which White-Jacket depicts. On the other hand, the reviewer suggests that Melville has brought us a type of experience: the "Yankee Navy, the "American man-of-war," and the "American service." The novel encourages this view. Although we do learn White-Jacket's frigate sails from Peru to Virginia (a route which does not align with Melville's actual trip from Hawaii to Massachusetts), the context of peacetime keeps the *Neversink* from participating in any distinguishing battles or receiving any particularizing scars. Instead, life on the *Neversink* is governed by a routine that, according to our narrator, is widely applicable to American naval frigates.

White-Jacket's ability to claim that his representation of the "world in a man-of-war" is, in fact, representative directly results from the man-of-war's own use of types. Indeed, White-Jacket makes several claims that extend his description of the *Neversink* to all men-of-war—even, potentially, all naval ships. White-Jacket states, "It is certain that what has here been said of the domestic interior of a man-of-war will, in a greater or less degree, apply to most vessels in the Navy" (375). This is in part because on-deck practices are "subject to the discipline of the vessel" and "conducted with a severe, unyielding method and regularity, making no allowances for exceptions to the rules" (329). Because there is no bending of the rules—at least for the common sailors—the ships that are governed by such rules will be "in greater or lesser degree" uniform. In the man-of-war, life is already categorized and ordered through the regimes written in the Articles of War and the ship's muster roll. If one problem of natural history, as Poe and Cooper contemplate it, is the way it filters experience into categories and types, the man-of-war's catalogues literally make the world in a man-of-war as the officers forcefully filter each sailor into his place. Because of the man-of-war's proscriptions, White-Jacket's descriptions are valid for this class of ship. The artificiality of the world of the ship—an artificiality that White-Jacket criticizes—is, in fact, one of the conditions of possibility that enable White-Jacket to describe the ship.

If White-Jacket is able to claim, as he does, that his narrative can stand in for men-of-war generally, this is due to the men-of-war's ability to stamp a forced conformity onto all iterations of its world. One of the dominant impressions White-Jacket gives of the naval frigate is the meticulous order by which the men on board live, the "endless subdivisions of duties in a man-of-war" (11). Upon entering into the "tumult of

a man-of-war” (11), each sailor is given “number after number to recollect” (12): the initial chaos of the ship in harbor is replaced by order once the men are assigned their stations and duties. Duties, messes, ranks, and positions are indexed to the sailors on a document called the station bill. Seen one way, White-Jacket is claiming to reproduce a world that itself reproduces the orders of the station bill and the Articles of War. Having been assigned to specific stations, the sailors are physically shaped by their mandated experiences. Indeed, the infamous man-of-war barbers serve as an example of this.

White-Jacket begins his introduction of the barbers by detailing the “rate of pay” that they receive for their “professional services” (350). The days on which they are employed are “regular . . . set down on the ship’s calendar twice a week” (351). While the barbers are, in this way, accountable to the officers, White-Jacket reminds us that they, in fact, hold the bodies of the sailors to account. They help reinforce a rule that White-Jacket describes—using the language of measurement— as “a then recent ordinance at Washington” that “the beards of both officers and seamen were to be accurately laid out and surveyed, and on no account must come lower than the mouth. So as to correspond with the Army standard” (356). The barbers, then, are agents of conformity and standardization.

Upon entering the boat, the sailor’s world fundamentally changes. After observing that sailors are each assigned a mess number and are only messmates with sailors of the same rank, White-Jacket explains, “Not only is the dinner-table a criterion of rank on board a man-of-war, but also the dinner hour. He who dines latest is the greatest man; and he who dines earliest is accounted the least” (28). A sailor’s sleeping hours are determined by his watch assignment, however unnatural these hours may be. The ship’s

station bill, in effect, governs the sailor's time in addition to governing the spaces he is allowed to occupy. In this way, the ship offers its own chronotopes to structure the sailor's experience. White-Jacket notes that these configurations of experience are unnatural and even impractical; the point of these rules is not to encourage efficiency, but to ordain order and exercise full control over the sailors' lives from the moment they board the ship.

White-Jacket's complaints about the dining times and the sleeping hours extend far beyond the fact that they take away the sailors' rights to arrange their own agendas: he explains that these rules have consequences on the sailor's health. The common sailors have all of their meals crammed into an eight-hour period, which, White-Jacket notes, "looks very nice and superfine on paper" but is "plainly detrimental to health" and leads to his feeling "actually faint of a tempestuous morning watch" (30). The sailors are not allowed to take naps on deck while their hammocks are stowed below because this "would mar the uniformity of daily events in a man-of-war" and because hammocks would disturb the "picturesque effect of the spar deck" (84). In other words, the physical well-being of the sailors is traded away to maintain the aesthetic surface of the ship. The resultant sleep deprivation is "one reason why the men-of-war's-men are, generally, short-lived" (82). White-Jacket makes clear that adherence to convention and commitment to the neat appearance of the ship are the reasons the sailors are forced to follow these schedules; the maintenance of order overrules considerations for the health of the crew. He lambasts the Captain's use of staged battles as practice for war, an exercise known as "general training" (65). Calling this training a "violent exercise," White-Jacket asks, "Are our officers of the Navy utterly unacquainted with the laws of

good health?" (67). Of course, the practice of flogging keeps the sailors from breaking convention or permanently mars them if they do.

For the officers, using violence to uphold the routines of the ship—even for the benefit of a fake battle—is simply their mandated job. White-Jacket reminds us that the Articles of War can go so far as to decree the execution of sailors, an act which White-Jacket describes as a permanent mutilation and mutation. White-Jacket makes an oblique reference to the 1842 execution of three young sailors accused of plotting a mutiny on the USS *Somers*. While White-Jacket's reference to this event, which made headlines in the United States, is vague, Melville had a specific connection to it. Guert Gansevoort, Melville's cousin, served as first lieutenant on the ship.⁷⁸

What happened to those three Americans, White-Jacket—those three sailors, even as you, who once were alive, but now are dead? "Shall suffer death!" those were the three words that hung those three sailors. Have a care, then, have a care, lest you come to a sad end, even the end of a rope; lest, with a black-and-blue throat, you turn a dumb diver after pearl-shells; put to bed for ever (sic), and tucked in, in your own hammock, at the bottom of the sea. (294)

White-Jacket describes death by hanging as a changing of position and station, a change that leaves "black-and-blue" marks on the sailor. White-Jacket also emphasizes the role of the Articles of War, saying that "three words" hanged the sailors: he does not

⁷⁸ The sailors—all very young men—were accused of plotting a mutiny and hanged from the yardarm. The *Somers* returned to the United States less than two weeks after the hangings, a fact which caused many to wonder why the captain did not wait for an official trial before condemning the sailors to their fate. In 1844, James Fenimore Cooper wrote a review of the naval court martial that exonerated the Captain, Alexander Slidell Mackenzie; Cooper fervently disagreed with Mackenzie's decision to hang the sailors instead of bringing them to port for a trial. Cooper's take on the execution lays the blame on Mackenzie; in contrast, White-Jacket focuses on the Articles of War and considers this violence a systemic problem of the navy. For more on the *Somers* affair see Rogin's *Subversive Genealogy*, 79-85, and Cooper's "Review of the *Somers* Mutiny Court Martial."

mention the captain's decision. Indeed, White-Jacket frequently imagines that the problems of the man-of-war emanate from the written rules that shape its routine and not the individual men who fill the role of captain or commodore.

If all common sailors can have their health and even the length of their lives shaped by the rules of the frigate, the sailors are further molded by their specific duties on board the ship. In a chapter whose title connects the "The Good or Bad Temper of Men-of-war's men" to "their particular Stations and Duties aboard Ship" (44), Melville goes so far as to suggest that the divisions enforced on the ship will mold the characters and physical features of the men who fill them. In one example, he describes the "gunner's gangs" who handle the cannons: their work with the gunpowder meant they all had the "same brown complexion" and their "consciences" were almost "powder-singed" (44). They were a "most unpleasant set of men" who were "continually grumbling and growling about the batteries" (44). The men were shaped both inside and out, White-Jacket suggests, by the circumstances of their work and the space they inhabit on the ship. The identity of the individuals who fill these positions does not really matter for the most part. They are each replaceable—a fact White-Jacket dramatizes when the ship's cooper dies, and his position is immediately filled with someone else. A Peter Bellis maintains, "Their variety of backgrounds and skills does not work to individuate or empower the seamen; it actually does the reverse, making any one among them easily replaceable" (34). The spaces of the *Neversink* condition character, enabling some possibilities while limiting others; moreover, far from confining this phenomenon to the *Neversink*, White-Jacket claims that the "gunner's gang of every man-of-war are invariably ill-tempered, ugly featured, and quarrelsome" (44). White-Jacket here argues

that his descriptions reproduce the experience on “every man-of-war” because the man-of-war’s rules and regulations reproduce the same kind of experience over and over. The personality and experiences of individual characters, thus, emanate from their position on board. Indeed, perhaps this is why characters in the novel do not really change or develop. One exception to this lack of evolution is the master-at-arms, who, stripped of his position as the frigate’s flogger-in-chief, changes personalities: “From being an implacable police-man, vigilant, cruel, and remorseless in his office, . . . he had now become a disinterested, sauntering man of leisure” (188). We do not learn, of course, if this is a deep, permanent change in character or a temporary, even superficial change in behavior; but this does not matter in the context of the novel. While the men are on the ship their actions, their feelings, and their relationships are governed by their station. The shift the master-at-arms undergoes further suggests that, not only do the officers shape the men’s existences, they are shaped too by being the enforcers of violence.

Having established the way the ship molds and shapes its inhabitants, White-Jacket dramatizes his own entry into the world. Late in the novel, he tells us that as soon as he boarded the ship he headed to the assistant surgeon to be “accurately laid out and surveyed” (328). Instead of being described and measured, the surgeon “proceeded to manipulate” White-Jacket: “He punched me in the ribs, smote me across the chest, commanded me to stand on one leg and hold out the other horizontally” (328). The reversal between describing sailors and reshaping them similarly unfolds in a scene of medical examination featuring “Cadwallader Cuticle, M.D.,” the surgeon of the fleet. Always on the look-out for the most interesting cases, the surgeon collects “specimens of morbid anatomy,” and in his stateroom he keeps an “unsightly” exhibit of casts

“representing all imaginable malformations of the human members,” like those found in “the Anatomical Museums of Europe” (238). He is thus a mutated version of the naturalist, collecting specimens for his cabinet of curiosities. Instead of collecting examples that illustrate types of species, he collects specimens of aberration. Cuticle’s collection both partakes in and resists the logic of types and catalogues. By displaying “abnormalities” Cuticle helps define the “normal” by deviations from it. At the same time, these deviations threaten to unravel the defining lines of taxonomy.

Cuticle further stands in as a boon and a threat to order in the ways he reshapes the shipboard specimens which fall in his path. Not unlike Cooper, when he depicts Dr. Reasono and his colleagues, Melville stages a version of a scientific gathering when Cuticle holds a customary “ceremonious consultation” with the surgeons of nearby fleets. Cuticle is eager to perform an amputation on a sailor who had been accidentally shot while the *Neversink* was anchored off the coast of Rio. He is so eager, in fact, that he ignores the many votes against the procedure voiced by the other surgeons present. Instead, he focuses on one of his own underlings, who held a “profound reverence for the science of Cuticle” (238). The *Neversink*’s surgeon admonishes the lack of bodies to study during peacetime, a lack which makes the “cause of science” “languish” (241). Melville references the progress that science is supposed to afford when Cuticle, who is about to perform an unnecessary and fatal surgery on a sailor, says he should be thankful that this operation “has been postponed to the period of this enlightened age” rather than occurring in the past, when the operation was torturous. The irony of this statement is apparent as the fainting sailor soon dies on his table, a fact of which Cuticle takes little note. Instead, he takes the opportunity to discourse on the details of the operation,

pointing out the path of the bullet and the arc of his knife using a model skeleton he always keeps handy. Melville emphasizes the spectacular elements of this science, which values the collection and description rather than attention to the individual sailor, whom he was meant to heal, and who now lies dead on the table.

Melville highlights the visual elements of Cuticle's work in order, I think, to imply a comparison between the doctor and White-Jacket's anatomy and description of the ship. White-Jacket too points to the parts of the ship that are "remarkable" and the naval abuses that he describes are like specimens of grotesquery. Even though there are similarities between the project of the exposé and the operations of the dissection, Melville's attention to the physicality of Cuticle's authority gives the physician the advantage: he literally shapes the sailor according to his imagination.

As if to pit the two in direct opposition, Melville stages a confrontation between the regime of the ship and literary representation. In several scenes the physical violence allowed by the code is enacted against written texts that would offer subversive accounts of the ship. One of the sailors on board keeps a journal which his fellow sailors deemed "a miracle of art" and which included "various colored illustrations" alongside "small crayon sketches" (43). This artistic achievement is undermined by the master-at-arms who, following an order from the Captain, confiscates the book. The work, titled "The Cruise of the Neversink, or a Paixhan Shot into Naval Abuses" (echoing the form of Melville's title), contained criticisms of the navy and the Articles of War, and for this, "a large nail was driven straight through the two covers, and clinched on the other side, and, thus everlastingly sealed, the book was committed to the deep" (43).

The violent end to “The Cruise of the Neversink” is paralleled in a later scene when the ever-persecuted shipboard poet Lemsford attempts to hide his poetry manuscript from a quarter-gunner who vowed its destruction only to bring about this destruction by accident: the cannon was fired in salute and the manuscript exploded into pieces (190). Lemsford is reminded that before he shipped he had published some poetry “very aggressive on the world” which did nothing to enhance his popularity. In *White-Jacket*, Melville dramatizes the destruction of a text deemed potentially offensive. The *Neversink* wins in these scenes—texts which seek to reform the ship and texts which romanticize maritime life are destroyed. Although *White-Jacket*’s narrative does serve, to some extent, as an exception, these scenes of the violent destruction serve as a threat to *White-Jacket*’s own creation, a threat that is only neutralized by the fact that, as *White-Jacket* reminds us, he is writing from land.

The Frigate’s Frontier

White-Jacket’s promise to limit the jurisdiction of his descriptions to the ship is a false flag. In fact, when *White-Jacket*’s narration spills over the bounds of the ship, so too do the man-of-war’s violent fictions. *White-Jacket* is set during peacetime, a fact which, makes the abuses of the sailors even more profound to our narrator. As I noted at the beginning of this chapter, Melville wrote *White-Jacket* after the Mexican-American War. However, this conflict and the ideologies it stood for find their way into *White-Jacket*’s hermetically sealed ship. Supported by President Polk and the Democratic Party, the war resulted in a large land grab that extended the United States’ territorial possessions to the Pacific. As Michael Paul Rogin reminds us, Melville’s cousin, Guert Gansevoort

commanded the ship *John Adams* during the war, a fact which Rogin links to Melville's use of father and brother figures on the *Neversink* (101). Melville had other reasons to connect the *Neversink* to the war. In tracing the USS *United States*'s travels and exploits in the Pacific, Charles Anderson explains how, in 1842, the ship's Commodore, Thomas Catesby Jones, chased a British squadron out of Callou and up the coast of California because of his concern that the British would intervene in the potential conflicts between the United States and Mexico (50). The *United States* then proceeded to Hawaii—where Melville boarded the frigate—on a similar mission of enforcing the Monroe Doctrine and warding off British influence in Hawaii.⁷⁹ Although Melville does not bring up the war directly, he displays his critique of this imperialistic project by using the terms of Manifest Destiny, referencing border disputes, and using the British navy as a foil for American forces. Indeed, the metaphorical “skirmishing” about the “frontier,” which White-Jacket describes in his run up to the “Massacre of the Beards,” may be more politically freighted than it may at first appear.

About halfway through his narrative, White-Jacket references the “rumors of a war” over the “long-vexed Northeastern Boundary Question”—a conflict over the border between British North America and the United States (207). In this chapter, White-Jacket quickly moves to translate this border dispute into an interior problem for the sailors of

⁷⁹ Gretchen Murphy uses the Monroe Doctrine as a cornerstone for her readings of American literature's “hemispheric imaginings.” Monroe's 1823 Congressional message featured the foreign policy points that later came to be known as the Monroe Doctrine and was a statement against European imperial intervention in the Western Hemisphere. According to Murphy, “the Monroe Doctrine's geographic construction of a Western Hemisphere and its relative locations of Europe and North and South America were crucial to the formation of an ideology of American exceptionalism that both claimed a radical separation from European colonialism and enabled cultural, military, and economic dominance” (6). We can see some of this ideology at work in Melville's statements about the inevitable reach of the United States across the North American continent.

the *Neversink*. The rumors of the war led the *Neversink*'s commodore to "authorize proceedings that closely brought home to every man on board the *Neversink* his liability at any time to be killed at his gun" (207). Although they do not go into battle, White-Jacket uses this rumor as an opportunity to describe how the threat of war sharpens the internal divisions within the frigate. On the topic of waging war, there is a "contrast between the forecastle and the quarterdeck" because, while the officers can gain glory from war exploits, the sailors are only seen as cannon fodder (208). White-Jacket asks, "Can the brotherhood of the race of mankind ever hope to prevail in a man-of-war, where one man's bane is almost another's blessing?" (208). His thinking in this sequence is chiasmatic: he suggests that international conflicts shape the interior of the ship; but he then goes on to assert that the ship shapes international conflict. Towards the end of the chapter, White-Jacket comes to the conclusion, "The very object of a man-of-war, as its name implies, is to fight the very battles so naturally averse to the seamen. . . . Standing navies, as well as standing armies, serve to keep alive the spirit of war even in the meek heart of peace" (208-209). While our narrator at first seems to contain his concerns about the potential war within the interior of the frigate—and thus within the rules for his narrative—he then suggests that the ship itself is a spur to conflict: its very existence can spark a conflagration. The "spirit of war" carried by the ship itself threatens to disrupt the time of peace during which the *Neversink* sails. Not only, then, does the man-of-war shape the men on board it, its presence in the ocean threatens to shape history and territory. Its menace cannot be contained to the decks of the ship.

White-Jacket breaks his own the chronological and spatial rules in another moment that links the role of the frigate to the practices of empire. When White-Jacket

describes the ship's dangerous crossing around Cape Horn as the *Neversink* moves from the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic, he uses this moment as an opportunity to subtly skip ahead in time and reimagine the path of the frigate:

Years hence, when a ship-canal shall have penetrated the Isthmus of Darien, and the traveler be taking his seat in the cars at Cape Cod for Astoria, it will be held a thing almost incredible that, for so long a period, vessels bound to the Nor'-west Coast from New York should, by going round Cape Horn, have lengthened their voyages some thousands of mile. 'In those unenlightened days' (I quote, in advance, the language of some future philosopher), 'entire years were frequently consumed in making the voyage to and from the Spice Islands, the present fashionable watering place of the beau-monde of Oregon.' Such must be our national progress.

Why, sir, that boy of yours will, one of these days, be sending your grandson to the salubrious city of Jeddo to spend his summer vacation.
(122)

This remarkable passage fast-forwards through time in order to look back and imagine his contemporaries as relics of a bygone era. Melville references the transcontinental reach of the United States by linking the Northwest Territories to the East Coast. He implicitly predicts the technological feats of a transcontinental railway and a canal dividing North and South America. White-Jacket's image traces out the space of the continent, setting up the easy passage across it in a way that links coast to coast and homogenizes the nation. White-Jacket imagines that Americans in the future will rewrite the past: the shortened route will be considered natural while the Americans of yore artificially "lengthened" the trip due, not simply to their lack of technical advancement, but to their pre-enlightened status. Just as White-Jacket wishes for a future where the man-of-war is seen as a vestige of "barbarism" (287), he imagines the long route the ship steers around Cape Horn as one day becoming vestigial.

Melville's choice of Oregon as his destination point complicates the chronology of White-Jacket's narrative. Oregon had not yet become a state, but a territorial dispute

between the United States and England ended in the 1846 Treaty of Oregon and established a boundary between the United States' and British interests in the region. Concerns over the breakout of the Mexican-American War influenced the United States' decision to broker a treaty rather than break out in war.⁸⁰ White-Jacket's blasé characterization of Oregon as a future territory for his nation echoes Reginald Horsman's characterization of Congress's decision: "Most members of Congress were content neither to lambast the British government, nor analyze the possibilities of war, but simply to view the American advance to Oregon, for whatever commercial or agrarian reasons, as simply part of America's inevitable westward expansionist destiny" (224). Like these members of Congress, White-Jacket does not "analyze the possibilities" of war. In this scene, White-Jacket imagines a transcontinental reach that is the result of the war; he imagines this as "progress," but elides the violence and imperialism that helps bring it about. Even though the United States did not go to war with Britain over this particular geographic territory, Melville's own USS *United States* helped police the Pacific against British intervention. Although the dispute in Oregon ended in a treaty, it was part of a larger process of western expansion White-Jacket here describes as "progress."

In the novel's picture of "national progress," a colonized space becomes a "watering-hole" for the fashionable set. Melville is not, however, using the term "progress" without irony. The image he uses to fill out this picture contains the "beau-monde" making leisurely trips to the "Spice Islands," the Maluku archipelago in Indonesia, then under control by the Dutch East India Company, or summer jaunts to Jeddo, an Anglicization of "Edo." Written a year before Commodore Perry's "gunboat

⁸⁰ Horsman observes that the dispute over the Oregon Territory featured a triangulation among American, British, and Mexican interests (223-5).

diplomacy” forced Japan to open trading ports to the United States, *White-Jacket* predicts the spread of the nation’s influence not just overland, but overseas, in a testament to what John Carlos Rowe describes as the “shifting boundaries between internal and external forms of imperialism” (*Literary* 20). *White-Jacket*, in one sense, paves over any violence that might be involved in his vision of leisurely trips across the ocean. He even associates “national progress” with enlightenment, as the earlier limits of the nation, he imagines, will be called “unenlightened.”

However, the comparison in this scene brings together the path of the *Neversink*—“lengthened” by an entire continent—with the coast-to-coast path of western expansion and the potentially unbounded movement of American influence overseas. While *White-Jacket* offers a tale of leisurely tourism to countries in the Pacific, this is a future carved from the present movement and might of the man-of-war. Melville here suggests that *White-Jacket*’s attempts to bind his narration to the ship and to divorce the frigate from its interaction with land fail. Instead, we get a glimpse at the role the military ship can play in writing the fictions of civilization and the story of national progress. In *White-Jacket*, what it means to know the ship is what it means to know the violence of imperialism.

Melville pairs his questioning of the forms of Enlightenment knowledge with his critique of American imperialism. The limits and form of this imperialism were not fixed: *White-Jacket*’s reference to Manifest Destiny bleeds into the ocean as he imagines Americans across the Pacific. *White-Jacket*, like the other narratives I have examined in this dissertation, considers the United States’ place in a circumoceanic theater. Melville, Poe, Cooper, and Sparks each imagine the ways knowledge figures in different visions of

military, commercial, and political influence. In their novelizations of maritime travel writing, Cooper, Poe, and Melville demonstrate a self-consciousness of the fictionality within forms of knowledge as well as a consciousness of travel narratives' imbrication in projects of imperialism. The increasing role of violence we can detect in Poe's *Pym* and Melville's *White-Jacket* suggests that, however much antebellum Americans tried to distance themselves from European versions of imperialism, their own engagements with the globe could not be limited to the detached pursuit of facts. The taxonomizing work of Enlightenment knowledge travels with empire, and the added layer of awareness about this process that nineteenth-century American writers seem to possess cannot inoculate their nation against the violence that accompanies the pursuit of global power.

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