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ANXIETIES OF INCORPORATION: U.S. TERRITORIALIZATION AND THE WESTERN
IMAGINARY FROM THE LOUISIANA PURCHASE TO *MOBY-DICK*

by

DIANA MECKLEY

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English
in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

Anxieties of Incorporation: U.S. Territorialization and the Western Imaginary

from the Louisiana Purchase to *Moby-Dick*

by

Diana Meckley

Advisor: Duncan Faherty

Anxieties of Incorporation investigates the impact of territorial expansion on authorial constructions of the continental west during the first half of the nineteenth century. As both a geophysical reality or an imagined space, the west functions as a site in which American writers negotiated their ambivalence over the promises and perils of continental aggrandizement and global imperialism. This project examines representative texts by James Fenimore Cooper, Francis Parkman, Susan Shelby Magoffin, and Herman Melville. In so doing, this dissertation traces how the western imaginaries these Anglo-American authors fashioned register their own and a nation's fears over the actual or potential incorporation of foreign populations into domestic space through annexation or cession, as well as anxieties over the emigration of diverse regional and borderland populations into newly opened western territories. What emerges is a genealogy of U.S. territorial expansion during this period that unsettles conceptions of an east to west trajectory of nation building and the creation of an American west in the national and cultural imaginary. I argue that the western imaginaries these authors construct are shaped by sociocultural and historical forces arcing from a Latinidad south and by local realities of Native sovereignty, both of which disrupt nationalist fantasies of unity and anti-imperialism.

Employing narrative tactics such as stalling, elision, denial, and nostalgia, each of these authors works to forestall the ramifications of expansion, even as their western imaginaries also expose the difficulty of maintaining any singular narrative of U.S. exceptionalism. In my analysis of Cooper's tale *The Prairie*, I locate how both the history and population of the Gulf south, as well as Americans emigrating to western borderlands, ultimately form an unsettling western imaginary that disrupts his and a nation's vision for a transcontinental future. Framing Parkman's western adventure *The Oregon Trail* within its historical context, I argue that his efforts to enclose the indigenous west in a fantasy of an eastern past, only reinforces his and other's anxieties over territorialization, while pointing directly to the intra- and transnational realities in the present that spark those fears. Magoffin's *Travels in Mexico, Commencing June 1846: El Diario de Doña Susanita Magoffin* (more commonly known by editor Stella M. Drumm's 1926 title *Down the Santa Fe Trail and Into Mexico*) enacts and foregrounds the anxieties that will attend the incorporation of Mexican populations into the nation following the Mexican-American War, even as her journal also reveals the cultural permanence of those long-standing communities. Turning to Melville's *Moby-Dick*, I explore the ways in which his engagement with frontier figures and imagery reveals the dichotomous interplay between a nostalgic vision of the continental west as a forge for democratic ideals and the reality that those exceptionalist narratives formed the basis of a recursive and aggressive imperialist agenda playing out in the contemporaneous maritime world.

Taken as case studies, by foregrounding trajectories and histories not normally associated with standard conceptions of the geophysical entity of the American west in U.S. territorial expansion, this study offers a way of reading these or similar Anglo-American texts within the context of scholarship in borderlands, Latinx, and related studies which call for a reorientation away from nation-based frameworks of analysis. At the same time, understanding the reasons why

authors in the nineteenth century fashioned the west in the ways they did, not only illuminates contemporaneous reactions towards expansion, but is also relevant to our own time of marked regional differences and anxieties over borders and ‘foreign’ populations living both within and outside of national space.

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Introduction

In 1835, Caroline Kirkland arrived in Detroit, Michigan from upstate New York along with her husband William. Two years later, William had acquired enough frontier acreage for the couple to begin the process of establishing a small village, descriptions of which form the content of Caroline's first work, *A New Home—Who'll Follow? or, Glimpses of Western Life* (1839). Near the beginning of the text, and poking fun at the romanticized visions of the west narrated by her male counterparts, the cosmopolitan and well-educated Kirkland wryly makes reference to a "Michigan mud-hole" as "one of the characteristic features of the 'West,'" to which she parenthetically adds, "How much does that expression mean to include? I have never been able to discover its limits."¹ In this tellingly ambiguous aside, the reader is left to wonder what limits are referred to—the geophysical parameters of a space, the discursive parameters of the word itself, or both. A century and a half later, the question is still being asked, and though admittedly under very different circumstances, one finds New Western historian Patricia Nelson Limerick mirroring Kirkland's question, commenting in 1996 that, "references to 'the West'" will always cause someone to ask, "What do you mean by *that*?"²

For government-sponsored explorers in the nineteenth-century, the west was defined in large part by its agricultural viability. Major Stephen Long mapped the west in 1820 as the Great American Desert, the U.S.-held territory from Kansas to the Rocky Mountains, the rest of the continent at that time either Spanish Territory or the Oregon Territory, jointly held by the U.S. and Britain. For a nation where the west was still an incomprehensible space, this cartographic myth fueled a number of speculations in the cultural and literary imagination and impacted the paths of settler migration, while for policymakers, the Great American Desert seemed an ideal

location for all indigenous populations living east of the Mississippi to head to. By 1878, American explorer and geologist John Wesley Powell determined that the west began at the 100th meridian, the longitudinal boundary between that arid region and the more humid east, a climatological ‘line’ that is still accepted as valid, but which as Kevin Krajick reports may be shifting farther east every year.³

While determinations of what constitutes a geophysical west continue to be arbitrated, other configurations also attest to the slipperiness of the term. For example, in the hands of critical regionalism scholar Neil Campbell, the contemporary American west is a “simulation reproducing images conforming to some already defined, but possibly non-existent, sense of Westness,” a purposefully convoluted, and yet strangely accurate statement, which points to the difficulty in formulating conceptions of what is meant by the West.⁴ On the one hand, the west is a sprawling environment, blending into the wests of other nation-states and made up of diverse topographies, microclimates, and heterogeneous populations. Yet, it is also a repository for artifacts of the national imagination that still permeate contemporary culture; a mythological west of rugged (and mostly masculine) independence, a west of wide-open spaces, a west that was ‘won,’ and a west where the ideologies of manifest destiny and American exceptionalism reside.

For many, the West is an imagined pastiche of cowboys and Indians, “batwing” saloon doors, keen-eyed gunslingers, virtuous or notorious barroom girls, marauding outlaws, Monument Valley, horses (a lot of horses), dusty main streets, and so on, that is images of the ‘Wild West’ of the late 1900s made popular through Owen Wister’s *The Virginian* (1902) and similar cultural productions. Even as scholars acknowledge and critique some of the more culturally persistent stereotypes within these and similar conceptions, in scholarship within

Americanist, borderlands, and related studies, the West is nonetheless revealed to be a far different space. A geophysical region, the West is also a sociopolitical construct, an ever-evolving, and very often a constricting, marginalizing, and codifying discourse, which has served multiple constituencies, usually dominant cultures, at different times and in different ways. It is temporally and relationally constituted, a fluid network; a provisional, transnational borderland inter-connected to “broader patterns of meaning,” political, cultural, and historical.⁵ It is a region “somehow beyond representation,” while also one in which arguments over what constitutes its “authenticity” have been debated for two hundred years.⁶ Depending on one’s viewpoint, the west is a place, not a process; a process, not a place.

In 1803, Thomas Jefferson acquired millions of acres of the North American west through the Louisiana Purchase. In the following decades, the varied ways in which that western space was perceived and rhetorically and narratively constructed would be paramount to the process of territorial acquisition, or to what Peter J. Kastor refers to in the title of his essay as “inventing expansion.”⁷ The sheer size of the Purchase brought tantalizing areas of the continent into focus for expansionist-minded Anglo-Americans, and defining, advocating for, or for others, contesting the “limits” of the west, its geophysical boundaries as well as its discursive potential as an idea for creating and shaping a national identity, impacted federal agendas and cultural production. From the early observations of Lewis and Clark in 1804-1806 onwards, exploration and survey reports, western travel narratives, pamphlets, newspaper editorials, and novels, all shaped the ways in which Americans came to view the trans-Mississippi west. Whether depicted as edenic paradise or desert wasteland, as conceptions of the ever-evolving west were fashioned and reified, these representations both supported and opposed the “invention” and implementation of territorial expansion.

The geophysical boundaries of the Louisiana Purchase were ambiguous from the outset, both in terms of the agreements of the exchange and the dearth of knowledge about the land acquired. Both figuratively and in reality, this initial and ongoing lack of spatial clarity prefigured the many ambivalent responses to a territorial aggrandizement that would help foster, and as more land was wrested from other nation-states or indigenous populations through purchase, treaty, forced removals, or federal, state, and settler land grabs, further aggravate internal tensions over issues such as sectionalism, slavery, and mercantilism, while exacerbating xenophobic and nativist sentiments. In 1803, Massachusetts senator Fisher Ames, commenting on the speed of expansion and western settlement, famously remarked that, “[w]e rush like a comet into infinite space,” and predicting a dire end to the American experiment, adds, “[i]n our wild career, we may jostle some other world out of its orbit, but we shall, in every event, quench the light of our own.”⁸ Even during the 1840s and 1850s, when territorial acquisition was at its most stridently aggressive, American imperialism, as Daniel Walker Howe notes, “did not represent an American consensus,” but rather “provoked bitter debate within the national polity.”⁹

The sense of “anxious aggrandizement,” to borrow from Thomas Hietala, which undergirds much of the discourse over territorial expansion in the first half of the nineteenth century, was provoked in large part through the actions of Presidents such as James Monroe, Andrew Jackson, and James K. Polk, who together with federal policymakers, kept pressing to add more acreage to the nation’s map.¹⁰ As Richard White succinctly remarks, “The geographical boundaries of the American West were not naturally determined; they were politically determined.”¹¹ Yet, at the same time, the movements of diverse settler populations within the amorphous confines of a geophysical and conceptual national space, added to

concerns over the potential implications of U.S. expansion for the nation's future. As Peter J. Kastor notes, in the 1790s, while both Federalists and Democratic Republicans "endorsed the rapid migration of settlers" into Ohio, Michigan, and the rest of the newly acquired and organized Northwest Territory, they were deeply concerned about a politically uncontrollable and "chaotic West," trepidations that would reverberate for many within the general population.¹² In the decades following the Purchase, concerns over "boisterous frontier residents" who might "create regional chaos, war with Natives peoples, or international conflict," along with concurrent fears of disunion, were still very much at play.¹³

Yet, equally disturbing was the incorporation, or just the threat of integration, of foreign populations living within the shifting contours of contiguous western borderlands. With the involuntary incorporation of the wildly diverse populations of lower Louisiana, the boundary between domestic and foreign became even more porous and unsettling, a reality and a perception that would mark federal and public opinion well into the 1840s. In 1847, for example, Kentucky Senator Henry Clay, a staunch opponent of the Mexican-American War, made clear a sentiment shared by many as the war dragged on and the possibilities of annexation were made more pressing:

Does any considerate man believe it possible that two such immense countries, with territories of nearly equal extent, with populations so incongruous, so different in race, in language, in religion and in laws could be blended together in one harmonious mass, and happily governed by one common authority?¹⁴

This dissertation engages with the question of how the American west as both a geophysical reality or an imagined space functions as a site in which writers during the first half of the nineteenth century negotiated their anxieties over the complexities, inconsistencies, and potential outcomes of territorial expansion and global imperialism. As the nation's acquisition of land increased throughout the northern hemisphere, it brought a corresponding increase in fears among many Anglo-Americans over issues created or exacerbated by successive annexations. For a nation that was not supposed to be engaged in empire building, over time the processes of territorialization revealed an imperialist impulse that was transnational in focus and that would eventually stretch beyond continental peripheries, even if Americans told themselves that a republican empire driven by principles of democratic liberty was of a different character than that of British or European imperial rule.

Debates over the spread of slavery marked each further press into continental space, and Native removals and displacement disrupted any false notions that the "Indian problem" was pacifically resolved. National growth brought new commercial prospects, while adding to concerns over the potential dissolution of the republic, as populations continued to move into far-flung territories well outside the reach of any centralized authority. At the same time, the processes of territorialization gained the nation land and potential resources, yet aggravated fears over newly incorporated foreign populations.

In my examination of representative texts by James Fenimore Cooper, Francis Parkman, Susan Shelby Magoffin, and Herman Melville, I argue that for each of these authors the American West becomes the locus for registering their ambivalence over the nation's continental or maritime aggrandizement, that is, both the opportunities and perils associated with an increase in geophysical size and influence. Both fashioning and re-contextualizing western imaginaries,

these four Anglo-American authors expose cultural and racial anxieties constitutive of the nation's expansion and annexations. As the nation's land acquisitions re-drew borders between nation-states, however amorphous and porous those were in reality, within the U.S., what had been the farthest borderlands of the nation's western periphery eventually became states and, as with Missouri, the launching points for greater numbers of heterogeneous populations to travel into the various "wests," south, due west, and north.

For both Cooper and Parkman, this internal emigration will disrupt notions of white, Anglo-Saxon hegemony in the nation's imperialist agenda. Though their works were penned almost twenty years apart and they were responding to events from different perspectives, both authors nonetheless narrate their fears and those of others over the spread of the nation's regionally diverse populations through the process of western emigration. At the same time, Cooper and Parkman's texts, along with Magoffin's western journal, reflect as well their anxieties over the incorporation of alien populations into the nation's domestic sphere through annexation or cession. From the Louisiana Purchase through the Mexican-American War, the internalization of populations such as Spanish creoles and Mexican mestizos, troubled definitions of race and ethnicity and of what constitutes a national identity, while making clear the unsettled nature of southern and western borderlands.

The idea that the Anglo-American West was essentially formed through a moving, east-to-west frontier "line" of territorial acquisition and settlement, while solidified by historians in the late nineteenth century, took perceptual and ideological shape in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. For Jefferson, and other early writers such as Kentucky explorer, surveyor, and booster, John Filson, territorial expansion fueled what Stephen Frye calls a "mythic trajectory of mind."¹⁵ I argue, however, that for the authors included in this study, the notion of

an east to west trajectory as determining the “west” is problematized, as their narrated wests are informed by geophysical, sociocultural, and historical ‘directionalities’ arcing from other regions and transnational spaces. For Parkman, the imperialist European pre-history of New England is drawn into his west, while for Melville fantasies of an earlier American frontier west press outwardly into a contemporaneous maritime world. The Gulf South and its Spanish inhabitants become mapped onto Cooper’s west, while Magoffin’s west in particular, though Parkman’s as well, are pressured by the histories and presence of Tejano and Mexican populations. These trajectories not only informed their individual responses to territorial expansion and shaped their western imaginaries, but would also impact which “west” would come to predominate in the nation’s cultural imagination.

Anxieties over a loss of national cohesion and an undermining of the ideals of democratic liberty are also constitutive of these authors’ work. From Thomas Jefferson’s vision of an “empire for liberty” up through the presidency of James Polk, in which the acquisition of the Oregon Territory up to the 49th parallel in 1846 and the Treaty of Hidalgo Guadalupe in 1848 following the Mexican-American War, would fill in the nation’s dreams of a continental map, the belief in being able to “balance republicanism and empire” was a precarious concept that would filter down through successive generations of writers who engaged with an American west.¹⁶ That the real and imagined west was (and still is) an expectant repository for independence, freedom, abundance, and adventure, consistently runs up against the reality that this ‘center’ was not only a space of containment for sovereign Native populations, but that any notion that it was ever a neutral space or empty of other populations is rendered a fiction.

Employing narrative tactics such as stalling, elision, denial, and nostalgia, all of the authors in this study work to forestall the ramifications inherent to the processes of

territorialization. For Cooper, finding his imagined prairie west as uncontrollable, uncultivable, and politically unstable ground, he works to carve his way around that space by effectively abandoning it. Through a regionally inflected form of nostalgia, Parkman as well finds ways to press against the realities of expansion that he encounters in a contemporaneous west. Through denial and erasure, Magoffin negotiates conceptions of national identity in the face of war and her relationships with the Mexican people and environment. Melville's efforts to find in the narratives of an archaic frontier west a site in which to stall the processes of global imperialism, is still one that cannot overcome the darker realities undergirding those narratives.

Yet, to varying degrees, all of these authors' texts also resonate with and participate in nationalistic rhetoric and an exceptionalist discourse supportive of expansion. For a number of reasons, this is not surprising. All of the authors are white Anglo-Americans, well educated and cosmopolitan; the three men had travelled globally, and Magoffin enjoyed the first part of her honeymoon travelling in style to New York City. All resided on the east side of the Mississippi; in New York, Massachusetts, and Kentucky. Though from different backgrounds and with different political affiliations, or at the least, ideological leanings, in their varied engagements with the west, these authors reflect the ways in which they are invested in the nation's empire building agendas—conceptually, commercially, and historically—even as the imperialist impulse increased in aggressiveness from Cooper's 1820s to Melville's 1850s.

By foregrounding trajectories and genealogies not normally associated with standard conceptions of the geophysical entity of the American west in U.S. territorial expansion, however, I argue for the continued relevancy of these Anglo-American texts within the context of critical work in borderlands and related studies. As the narratives of these authors also register the presence, histories, and influence of indigenous and Latinidad populations, this study not

only reveals the ways in which these authors negotiate anxieties and ambivalence towards incorporation, broadly conceived, through their configurations of the west, but how those same configurations offer the possibility of reading these or similar works through more than just a nation-driven perspective.

Territorialization and the Paths of Western Historiography

In American Studies and related fields, critical scholarship from the late 1960s to now has worked to put pressure on a long-standing genealogy of historicism and literary criticism that encouraged an acceptance of an east-to-west territorial expansion as an inevitable process in the formation of a national identity. While, as noted, the notion of a singular trajectory of movement tied to a continually shifting frontier line is in large part a fabrication of the late nineteenth century, it is in the literary productions of earlier decades in which that perception was fostered. Both a dividing line between civilized and savage, whether a savage wilderness or a wilderness filled with savages, as well as a nebulous space—a neutral ground lying between the place where the last white settlement stands and sovereign Native territories begin—the western frontier took perceptual shape under the hands of many players both state and nonstate alike.

For a good part of the twentieth century, many historians and literary critics found it difficult to decouple the frontier, and the various frontier myths attached to it, from a narrative of American exceptionalism and the various ways Anglo-American's went about "winning the West." To a very large degree, this scholarship grew directly from George Frederick Turner's infamous frontier thesis spelled out in his 1893 address, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," which identified westward expansion as the defining catalyst for shaping a uniquely democratic and individualistic American identity.¹⁷ In penning his thesis, Turner took

up the decades-old rhetoric of the “frontier” as those areas of the west as yet unsettled by whites, that is, an environment that was theorized as unoccupied. As Jeffrey Ostler remarks, “[a]lthough Americans knew at a practical level that Indians controlled a significant proportion of North America, on an ideological level they conceived of the entire continent as empty,” and while he is referring here to the early years of the nineteenth century, it is a conceptualization that proved to be especially resilient for the processes of territorialization.¹⁸

Aligning their scholarly thinking around Turner’s thesis, historians in the 1950s and 1960s, such as Ray Allen Billington, Frederick Merck, and William H. Goetzmann, took it on faith that a frontier “line” not only existed, but that the east-west trajectory was a one-way thoroughfare with no entries or exits from other directions, historical, cultural, or otherwise. This interpretation of western history coincided with an over-arching acceptance of territorial expansion as predestined that was one of the hallmarks of expansionist discourse in the 1840s and 1850s.¹⁹ As Thomas R. Hietala suggests, these interpretations were in large part determined by the Cold War era in which these historians wrote, and the similar “self-assurance” among leaders of the mid-twentieth century to those of Polk and other expansionists, that in foreign policy—in making the world ‘safe’ for democracy—“their motives and methods were beyond reproach.”²⁰

Yet, the work of Billington and others nonetheless impacted western historiography well outside that political setting and well beyond their time, even as more corrective scholarship became available. While historians such as Herbert Eugene Bolton, whose prescient work on the Spanish borderlands in the 1920s pressed against the singular directionality of western expansion, the reverberant message for a good part of the twentieth century was of a west

conquered not only through the ideology of manifest destiny, but through a juggernaut of Anglo-Americans planting themselves in step-wise fashion across the face of the continent.²¹

At this juncture, American Anglo-centric blinders have long since been removed, in part through the rise in multicultural studies and the restorative scholarship of the so-named New Western historians in the late 1980s and 1990s, though even here, critics were tapping into earlier corrective works such as Dee Brown's *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West* (1970). Since the publication of works such as Patricia Nelson Limerick's *Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (1987) and Richard White's *It's My Misfortune and None of Your Own: A New History of the American West* (1991), texts which worked to re-populate the place of the west with its historical inhabitants and alternate histories, scholarship in borderlands and Latinx studies, critical regionalism, and transnational studies, has continued to press on conceptualizations of the west as a dynamic geophysical and conceptual space and to re-frame American empire-building within the context of multiple trajectories.

At the same time, the work of scholars such as Brian DeLay, Jeffrey Ostler, and Rodrigo Lazo call for a recognition that Native sovereignties and non-Anglo-American populations who occupied trans-Mississippi territories, were not merely acted upon, but were significant agents in American processes of territorialization. Apart from the important work of recovering voice and presence, one goal, as Lazo makes clear, in attending to alternate "geographical and historical trajectories" particularly across contiguous borderlands is to "alter a nation-based approach to defining important historical moments."²² The "frontier" as well, has not necessarily disappeared, but has undergone a number of transitions, as Amy Kaplan notes, from a "vacant space of wilderness to a bloody battlefield of conflict and conquest, and more recently to a site of

contacts, encounters, and collisions that produce new hybrid cultures.”²³ Having gone through a vigorous, and still ongoing ‘vetting’ process for five decades, the “west,” historically a placeholder for “nation,” and a site which has long embodied the triumphalist narratives of U.S. territorialization has, at this point in time, been rightfully exposed.

Western narratives written in the first half of the nineteenth century reflect the complexities of territorialization that this scholarship recognizes, and the fact that many of these texts convey ambivalence over the nation’s growth, whether inadvertent or not, has been noted by a number of critics in recent decades. In the work of scholars such as Shelley Streeby, Stephanie LeMenager, Andy Doolen and others, not only have western spaces been shown to be complex, heterogeneous, borderland environments, but that in many western narratives—fiction, exploration reports, journals, and other literary productions—the author’s responses to those spaces reveal conflicted attitudes towards the nation’s territorialist agendas. To a large degree, authorial ambivalence is due to the fact that, whether imagined or directly experienced, these environments trouble, as Stephanie LeMenager notes, “accepted national histories,” while “forcing a reevaluation of what kind of future might develop from the nation’s past,” and I would add, for the authors included in this study, from the present as well.²⁴

LeMenager’s and similar critical work attests to the shifts in scholarly focus away from a historicism that has granted undue focus on the ideology of manifest destiny as the overarching impetus for the nation’s territorial acquisition and towards a deeper recognition that there was never a hegemonic acceptance of the nation’s federally mandated imperialist policies, nor an equivalent acceptance on the part of Americans towards settler populations who ignored all that and just kept moving. The “transnational turn” of the 1990s, along with scholarship in borderlands studies and western criticism, has allowed for viewing exceptionalist narratives of

U.S. expansion in a new light by focusing on alternative histories and populations as constitutive, not separate from, the processes of U.S. territorial expansion, while reading texts against a nation-based perspective. Yet, this reorientation need not lead to dismissing the impact of national processes of territorialization and ideologies on cultural production. That is, understanding the reasons why authors in the nineteenth century fashioned the west in the ways they did, not only illuminates contemporaneous reactions towards expansion, but is also relevant to our own time of marked regional differences and anxieties over borders and ‘foreign’ populations living both within and outside of national space.

In this project, by *territorialization*, I refer to those courses of action or processes, singly or in the aggregate, which serve to press forward territorial expansion and acquisition. A spatially oriented term that comes out of the work of theorists in political and human geography and related fields, here I draw primarily on the way in which Americanist Andy Doolen employs the term. Doolen, who explores iterations of U.S. empire-building in the early republic, defines territorialization, in part, as the processes of “relentlessly acquiring territory, making and unmaking boundaries, expelling Native Americans and importing slaves, and constantly mapping and re-mapping the coordinates of (white) personhood.”²⁵ These and other processes of empire building are, importantly, not only the purview of government actions and policies, but also an “enterprise,” as Doolen notes, “divided among many state and nonstate shareholders.”²⁶ At the same time, U.S. territorialization is understood to be one in which, routed through the avenues of transnational, borderland, and related studies, cannot be divorced from a recognition of the dynamic interplay between the U.S. and other nation-states and Native sovereignties.

Doolen uses the term in relation to U.S. empire building in the early decades of the nineteenth century, a period marked by a “seemingly quiet process of territorialization,” such as

the emigration of settlers into trans-Appalachian territory, to distinguish this period as separate from, rather than a precursor to, the more federally-driven aggrandizement of the 1840s and the ideology of manifest destiny which marked that period.²⁷ While I applaud Doolen's important work on decoupling these periods, I find it useful to employ the term for the 1840s and early 1850s as well, in part to distinguish between empire-building as series of events and processes, precisely *from* ideological constructs such as manifest destiny, which inform or are informed by those processes. I acknowledge, however, that there is a certain amount of dovetailing between these terms, formulations of "whiteness," for example, existing as both ideology and action.

Pertinent as well to this project is Doolen's definition of what he terms the "territory effect." Adapted from the work of political and spatial theorists Stuart Elden and Neil Brenner, a "territory effect," marks the "representational practices that obscure the actions of an expansionist nation-state" and the "idealistic stories told about the territory itself," for example, the belief in a "God-given national territory," that "strengthened the Anglo-American conviction that their modern republic was not repeating the violent colonialism in North America" which marked European imperialist practice.²⁸ For the authors discussed in this project, this "effect" is located in a variety of manifestations, including denial, erasure and nostalgia, evocations of empty territories, and white 'accommodation' of non-Anglo populations. While these and other obfuscating narratives Doolen also gestures towards have been exposed and critiqued through works such as Richard Slotkin's *Regeneration Through Violence* and Annette Kolodny's *The Lay of the Land*, these "representational practices" as articulated through a discourse of borderlands and transnational scholarship proves particularly germane to an examination of the ways in which nineteenth century cultural production both produced those "effects" and reflected ambivalence towards them.²⁹

In my use of the term *imaginary*, I draw in part on definitions outlined in recent work in transnational studies. A theoretically complex term adapted from anthropology, sociology and related fields, in its most simple iteration, an *imaginary* can be thought to designate shared cultural expressions and ideologies that within a given social group foster a sense of community and national identification. In the past several decades, scholars such as Paula M. L. Moya and Ramón Saldívar have worked to rethink the imaginary as a “trans-American” one, a “contact zone” imaginary, one that is “both historical and geographical and that is populated by transnational persons whose lives form an experiential region within which singularly delineated notions of political, social, and cultural identity do not suffice.”³⁰ For Moya, Saldívar, and others, a trans-American or transnational imaginary offers a means to provide a less exclusive “interpretive framework” for the study of American literature, one that “yokes together North and South America instead of New England and England.”³¹

While I am attentive to this use of the term *imaginary* as a means to inform critical approaches to American literary historiography, as well as to the fact that Moya and Saldívar’s “trans-American imaginary” is discussed in relation to modern American fiction, I find their conceptions pertinent to nineteenth-century cultural productions as well, and more specifically to the western narratives discussed in this project. Broadening their definition to include the transregional, suggests another way to think about how varied sociopolitical and cultural ‘borderland’ geographies impacted the ways in which the authors in this study fashioned their western imaginaries.

At the same time, my use of the term *imaginary* conforms to those “representational practices” and “idealistic stories told about the territory itself” that Doolen articulates as integral

to the practices of territorial conquest.³² In the same way that “the invention of a continental imaginary was an essential element in the process of territorialization,” that is, a collective authorship, which outlined the “spatial logic of an enlarged republic,” western imaginaries necessarily served a dominant function in that process.³³ In the western imaginaries of Cooper, Parkman, Magoffin, and Melville, the aggregate of images, assumptions, legends, beliefs, and racial and cultural constructs, not only contributed to a sense of what came to mind for nineteenth-century Anglo-Americans when thinking about the “West,” but also in relation to the project of territorial expansion. Yet, importantly, these same imaginaries pull in the opposite direction, exposing the rifts in the ability to fashion or maintain any singular, expansionist narrative.

I begin by examining James Fenimore Cooper’s 1827 borderland romance *The Prairie*, a narrative set in an imagined and, in his time, barely understood “Great American Desert” (eastern Nebraska) shortly after the 1803 Louisiana Purchase. I argue that even as Cooper advocates for territorialization within the context of what was for many a nation-building vision for a transcontinental future, he works to hold at bay problematic issues concomitant to the appropriation of the vast and already occupied territory in the continental interior. Through various forms of rhetorical containment, Cooper registers his unease over the rapidity with which regionally and socially diverse populations of Anglo-Americans were spreading into trans-Mississippi states and territories, a trepidation which extends to the incorporation of Spanish and French white Creoles, free blacks, mestizos, and other foreign populations into the nation through the Purchase and subsequent Spanish cessions in Florida and western Louisiana.

While in hindsight, it is possible to trace the impact of the Louisiana Purchase on both racialist and class-based fears and concerns over national cohesion up to the 1820 Missouri

Compromise, I argue that Cooper narrates that impact as early as *The Prairie*. In the wake of Jefferson's enormous acquisition, anxieties over the implications of territorial expansion spill over into Cooper's western tale, forcing a narrative retreat from the unsettling borderlands and withdrawal of the various borderer populations, who, for the author, threaten national unity and sociocultural norms. At the same time, Cooper works to elide or delay the realities of Native displacement and federal removal policies, actions exacerbated through territorial acquisition. Yet, while Cooper's fictional desert "West" is a tenuous and troubled environment, one shaped as much by political and sociocultural reverberations from the South, as from local populations and topography, he nonetheless narrates a positive outcome for territorialist agendas around that center.

My point of departure for Chapter 2 is Francis Parkman's *The Oregon Trail* (1849). Long accepted within a canon of "classic" tales of high western adventure by white, Anglo-American men, with few exceptions, Parkman's narrative has rarely been read within its historical context. Instead *The Oregon Trail* has been positioned as the work of a Boston Brahmin whose racist and class-based prejudices and single-minded focus on locating Natives in their "primitive state," shielded him from narratively responding to transitional events playing out in the summer of 1846, events which included western emigration and migration to Oregon and California; the nation's quest for territorial aggrandizement through the Mexican-American War; and the increasing pressures both on and from Native populations throughout the contiguous Great Plains.

Framing *The Oregon Trail*, in part, within the context of debates over emigration to the Oregon Country, I argue that far from being unaware of, or inured from, contemporaneous events, Parkman's narrative registers instead his own Anglo-centric anxieties towards the

territorial expansion playing out in front of him and in particular towards the make-up of the emigrants themselves. While Parkman's narrative employs many of the conventions of other western travel narratives, such as the disingenuous rhetoric of nostalgia for the vanishing Native, as well as sharing many of the same adventure-seeking motives for traveling west, his own nostalgic moves are also deeply informed by his commitment to the history of pre-Revolutionary British imperialism in North America, a history that inflects his Bostonian and Federalist-Whig background. While Parkman works to enclose the west within the parameters of a romantic western narrative, however, his efforts at deflection are undercut by the realities of the west in 1846. I argue that *The Oregon Trail* not only reflects Parkman's attempts to resist the forces of emigration, but that the narrative also reveals points of intra- and transnational tension.

Chapter 3 takes as its primary text Susan Shelby Magoffin's *Travels in Mexico, Commencing June 1846: El Diario de Doña Susanita Magoffin* (more commonly known by editor Stella M. Drumm's 1926 title *Down the Santa Fe Trail and Into Mexico*). Traveling with her husband, Magoffin chronicles her experience within the contexts of the Santa Fé trade and the U.S. invasion of *Nuevo Mexico* and Mexican states farther south. As a wealthy, educated woman, Magoffin's journal registers an exceptionalist and pro-expansionist viewpoint, while also participating in a kind of domestic imperialism through which her own and other narratives of 'westering' women have been read. While acknowledging the importance of this latter critical work, I draw instead on recent borderlands and related scholarship that calls for a reorientation in how we read Anglo-centric narratives of territorial expansion. Rather than accepting a historiographic model that adheres to a single-gaze approach with firm temporal endpoints, the critical work of Eliot H. Gould, Kirstin Silvia Gruez, and others, asks for recognition of how the "entangle[d] histories" of nation-states and Native sovereignties enact

instead a process of continually shifting accommodations and resistance, even in the face of domination or conquest.³⁴

Situating *Travels in Mexico* in part within this scholarship, I argue that while Magoffin's journal conveys what will emerge as her own and a nation's ambivalence concerning the Mexican-American War, as well as foregrounding anxieties over the potential incorporation of Mexican populations into the nation, it also registers anxieties and resistance towards that potentiality on the part of Mexicans and Native sovereignties as well. While her interactions with the people of Mexico register the limits of her own willingness towards accommodation and acceptance, the ways in which local populations enact those same moves towards accommodation, further problematizes a purely expansionist-oriented reading. At the same time, I argue that the geophysically contiguous west that Magoffin narrates—what will become a southwest not 'created' by Anglo-Americans, but by the incorporation of the same Latinidad south which troubled Cooper—will effect which western imaginary Americans will (and continue to) hold on to, and the ramifications of that on the involuntarily incorporated populations of the Southwest.

In Chapter 4, I explore the ways in which Melville's engagement with earlier conceptions of an American "frontier" in *Moby-Dick* reveals the dichotomous interplay between a nostalgic vision of the continental west as a forge for democratic ideals, and the reality that the normalization of exceptionalist narratives wrought through the mythologies of the west form the basis of a recursive and aggressive imperialist agenda playing out in the contemporaneous maritime world. Even as he exposes the dangers of, and disingenuous rhetoric adhering to the processes of territorialization, however, Melville also registers his ambivalence towards

expansion, reflecting his own and the nation's optimism towards the potential opportunities made available through a larger and deeper presence in the global sphere.

The western frontier that Melville resurrects, particularly in the cetology chapters is, in part, an endless, tenantless space, where mobility allows for opportunity and the spread of democratic freedoms which, when recontextualized, carries a hope of global connectivity and heterogeneous amity aboard his whale-ship. Yet, while Melville projects the west and the sea as avenues of potential liberty from the forces of expansion, those spaces are not empty, but already sites of both settlement and resistance, as well as ones affected by previous colonization and imperialist agendas. A quarter of a decade after Cooper worked to narratively stall the forces of territorial expansion into the Great Plains, Melville also attempts to effect a pause in the nation's press towards a more global imperialism through his evocations of an archaic west. While this proves untenable, in tapping into landscapes and legends of the continental west, such as those surrounding Daniel Boone, Melville makes clear the strong pull of a romantic west on his own and the nation's cultural imagination.

Notes

¹ Caroline M. Kirkland, *A New Home, Who'll Follow? or Glimpses of Western Life*, ed. Sandra A. Zagarell (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 11.

² Patrician Nelson Limerick, "Region and Reason," in *All Over the Map: Rethinking Americas Regions*, ed. Edward L. Ayers, Patricia Nelson Limerick, Stephen Nissenbaum, and Peter S. Onuf (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 99 (emphasis in original). For many of North America's indigenous populations, of course, the West is a centuries old space of settlement and spiritual home. For others such as certain bands of the Sioux Nation, the west was the direction of their own territorial expansion into the Great Plains. For innumerable tribes such as the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Seminole and Creeks, the west was the direction of forced removal following the Native Removal Act of 1830. Following Mexican independence in 1821, Nuevo Mexico and Alta California, were the farthest northern outposts from Mexico City.

³ John Wesley Powell, *Report on the Lands of the Arid Region of the United States with a more detailed account of the Lands of Utah* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1879), 3; Kevin Krajick, “The 100th Meridian, Where the Great Plains Begin, May Be Shifting,” *State of the Planet* press release, Earth Institute, Columbia University, <https://blogs.ei.columbia.edu/2018/04/11/the-100th-meridian-where-the-great-plains-used-to-begin-now-moving-east/>.

⁴ Neil Campbell, *The Cultures of the American New West* (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 2000), 130.

⁵ Douglas Reichert Powell, *Critical Regionalism: Connecting Politics and Culture in the American Landscape* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 4.

⁶ Nathaniel Lewis, *Unsettling the Literary West: Authenticity and Authorship* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 8.

⁷ Peter J. Kastor, “What are the Advantages of Acquisition?”: Inventing Expansion in the Early American Republic,” *American Quarterly* 60, no. 4 (December 2008): 1003-1035.

⁸ Fisher Ames quoted in Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 358.

⁹ Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 705.

¹⁰ Thomas R. Hietala, *Manifest Design: Anxious Aggrandizement in Late Jacksonian America* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1985), revised and with a new preface as *Manifest Design: American Exceptionalism & Empire* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

¹¹ Richard White, *It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own: A New History of the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 4.

¹² Kastor, “What are the Advantages,” 1013, 1011.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 1005.

¹⁴ Henry Clay quoted in Amy S. Greenberg, *A Wicked War: Polk, Clay, Lincoln, and the 1846 U.S. Invasion of Mexico* (New York: Knopf, 2012), 233.

¹⁵ Stephen Frye, “Introduction,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the American West*, ed. Stephen Frye (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 2. See John Filson, *The Discovery, Settlement and Present State of Kentucke* (Wilmington, DE: James Adams, 1784).

¹⁶ Hietala, *Manifest Design* [2003], xiii.

¹⁷ See Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” [1893], in *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner*, ed. John Mack Faragher (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1994), 31-60.

¹⁸ Jeffrey Ostler, *The Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism from Lewis and Clark to Wounded Knee* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 17.

¹⁹ See Ray Allen Billington, *The Far Western Frontier, 1830-1860* (New York: Harper, 1956); Frederick Merck, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History: A Reinterpretation* (New York: Knopf, 1963); and William H. Goetzmann, *Exploration and Empire: The Explorer and the Scientist in the Winning of the American West* (New York: Knopf, 1996).

²⁰ Hietala, *Manifest Design*, 133.

²¹ For Herbert Eugene Bolton, see especially *The Spanish Borderlands: A Chronicle of Old Florida and the Southwest* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1921); “The Mission as a Frontier Institution in the Spanish American Colonies,” *The American Historical Review* 38

(1932-33): 448-74; and “Defensive Spanish Expansion and the Significance of the Borderlands,” in *Wider Horizons of American History*, ed. Herbert Eugene (Notre Dame, 1939) 55-106.

²² Rodrigo Lazo, “Introduction: Historical Latinidades and Archival Encounters,” in *The Latino Nineteenth Century*, ed. Rodrigo Lazo and Jesse Alemán (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 16.

²³ Amy Kaplan, “Left Alone with America’: The Absence of Empire in the Study of American Culture,” in *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 16.

²⁴ Stephanie LeMenager, *Manifest and Other Destinies: Territorial Fictions of the Nineteenth-Century United States*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004, 7. See also, Shelly Streeby, *American Sensations: Class, Empire, and the Production of Popular Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) and Andy Doolen, *Territories of Empire: U.S. Writing from the Louisiana Purchase to Mexican Independence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014)

²⁵ Doolen, *Territories*, 8.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 180, 11.

²⁹ See Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier* (Middleton: Wesleyan UP, 1975); Annette Kolodny, *The Land Before Her* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

³⁰ Paula M. L. Moya and Ramón Saldívar, “Fictions of the Trans-American Imaginary,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 49, no.1 (Spring 2003): 2; see also, *The Imaginary and it’s Worlds: American Studies after the Transnational Turn*, ed. Laura Bieger, Ramón Saldívar, and Johannes Voelz (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2013).

³¹ Moya and Saldívar, “Fictions,” 2.

³² Doolen, *Territories*, 180, 11.

³³ Doolen, 10, 11.

³⁴ Eliga H. Gould, “Entangled Worlds: The English-Speaking Atlantic as a Spanish Periphery,” *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 3 (Jun. 2007): 766.

Chapter One

A Periphery Without a Center: The Spaces of Territorialization in James Fenimore Cooper's *The Prairie*

The Great American Desert

James Fenimore Cooper's romance *The Prairie: A Tale* opens with a brief history lesson and commentary on the aftermath of the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. Cooper informs his 1827 audience that, while the purchase initially engendered controversy, the "wisdom of the measure began to be generally conceded" and, in assured and imperialistic tones, describes the benefits of the acquisition for the Union: "[it] gave us *sole command* of the great thoroughfare of the interior"; "opened *a thousand avenues* to the inland trade, and to the waters of the Pacific"; and placed the Native Americans who "lay along our borders, *entirely within our control*."¹ Cooper acknowledges that the inland "barrier of desert" which made up a large part of the purchase is an impediment to Anglo-American expansion—a "desert" at that time essentially referring to any environment devoid of timber forests or that seemingly lacked the climate, soil or water requirements necessary for sustained agriculture (*P* 9).

Nonetheless, he famously asserts that the purchase "made us masters of a belt of fertile country" and that, at the least, those living on either side of the presumed no man's land will "possess our language, our religion, our institutions, and it is also to be hoped, our sense of political justice" (*P* 9). Though qualified, Cooper's vision of cultural homogeneity, even in a potentially divided continent, is clear.² By the 1832 and 1849 prefaces to *The Prairie*, Cooper more confidently affirms that his desert setting, "appearing to interpose a barrier to the progress of the American people westward," has not prevented settlers from establishing themselves on

the “shores” of the Pacific.³ By most accounts, Cooper’s opening statement in *The Prairie* and later comments suggest that he is someone who also “conceded” the value of the purchase.

In reality, however, Cooper’s opinions concerning annexation were conflicted ones and his tale ultimately evokes a vision of the nation as a periphery without a center. Even as Cooper projects an expansionist vision and the prospects of trans-continental unity as soluble, he also presents trans-regional migration into western territories as of uncertain outcome. Within Cooper scholarship, the fact that critics still debate whether he was a proponent or harsh critic of national aggrandizement, mirrors Cooper’s own ambivalence over the nation’s progress. In the press between a national imaginary and a western one, Cooper expresses apprehension as to who will populate the continental interior, both within and outside of the nebulous borderlines. In part, through both literal and emblematic concealment and exposure, these expressions are constitutive of wider concerns about the ramifications of regional diversity as part of the nation’s territorialist agenda.

At the same time, Cooper’s descriptions of the geo-physical environment itself illustrate what Hsuan L. Hsu refers to as a “geographical unease” and Anne Baker as an “anxiety about national form.”⁴ Hsu explores how the Gothic fictions of Charles Brockden Brown, specifically *Wieland* (1798) and *Memoirs of Carwin* (1803-1805) negotiate the “anxious and contradictory relations between domestic boundaries and unsettling foreign spaces” particularly in light of the Louisiana Purchase, which beckoned Jefferson and others to think beyond even those new, yet amorphous, borders.⁵ For her part, Anne Baker, who briefly discusses *The Prairie* in relation to how the characters’ real or perceived body sizes act as metaphors for the body politic, nonetheless situates the 1850s as “precisely the time when American literature reveals a pervasive uneasiness about boundlessness and geographical disorder.”⁶

Between these temporal poles resides Cooper's *Prairie*. Setting his narrative one year after Jefferson's massive land deal, yet written during a decade when foreign policy such as the Monroe Doctrine turned the nations' attention outward towards its role in the hemispheric Americas, while the slavery-driven legislation of the Missouri Compromise and debates over, and implementation of, Indian removal plans turned the focus inward towards the vast reaches of the trans-Mississippi west, Cooper's romance of the Great Plains registers "geographical unease" and deep apprehensions in its own right. Cooper's prairie is an imagined environment—though through his sources, an instructed one—an environment that was, at least in terms of the physical terrain, as incomprehensible to him as to many of his contemporaries.⁷ Yet, as much as in what he chooses not to describe in terms of his western setting, as in what he does, Cooper's "changeable and moving country" becomes a site not only for negotiating the impact of territorialization on an ideological and sociopolitical level, but on a geo-regional one as well—that is, a site to explore the notion of what region itself might have meant in the early republic (*P* 13).

Cooper's tale takes place in roughly what is now southeastern Nebraska, or the "American desert, as we find it convenient, sometimes to call this region" (*P* 107). As Cooper's daughter Susan relates, her father "resolved to cross the Mississippi, to wander with his fictitious characters over the desolate wastes of the remote western prairies."⁸ To justify his choice of this barren setting to the literary world, Cooper affirms in his 1827 preface that he must follow his hero, the "Scout of the Mohicans" and the "Leatherstocking of the Pioneers" wherever he would go (*P* 2). Claiming that Natty Bumppo, "seek[s] a final refuge" from the "increasing and unparalleled advance of population," Cooper's far western setting furnishes a way for him to connect his hero with his 'own' literary history—in *The Pioneers* (1823) and *The Last of the*

Mohicans (1826)—and to play out his final days far from the noise of “choppers and loggers” (*P* 2, 188).

Never having traveled into trans-Mississippi territory, Cooper was reliant on available sources such as the Paul Allen/Nicolas Biddle edition of Meriwether Lewis’s *History of the Expedition under the command of Captains Lewis and Clark* (1814), Dr. Edwin James’s account of Major Stephen H. Long’s 1819-20 expedition to the Rocky Mountains (1823), and Zebulon Montgomery Pike’s *An Account of Expeditions to the Sources of the Mississippi River and through the Western Parts of Louisiana Territory* (1810), to help visualize his setting—sources that would have provided ample, albeit subjectively colored and quite often erroneous, descriptions of the western grasslands.⁹ According to Susan, her father also allegedly relied on conversations with military officers and with interpreters for Native delegations who travelled to Washington, D.C. and other eastern cities to fill in his conceptualization of the western territories and Native populations.¹⁰

Echoing his sources, Cooper’s fictive setting, his “comparative desert,” is a relational space, situated between the more cultivatable grasslands west of, but closer to, the Mississippi, and to the similarly “arable” prairies “between the Rocky Mountains and the Pacific.”¹¹ Far from being a promotional tract for the farther reaches of the annexed land, Cooper repeatedly defines the regional landscape in large part by what it lacks. It is a “vast country, incapable of sustaining a dense population”—a virtually treeless, “bleak and solitary” place, that “offered so little that was tempting to the cupidity of speculation and, if possible, still less that was flattering to the hopes of an ordinary settler of new lands” (*P* 4, 11).

Cooper transports a number of heterogeneous (and by now, critically familiar) characters into his imagined west. The Bush’s are a rapacious family of Kentucky squatters led by the

authoritative patriarch Ishmael and his wife Esther—a family that from the beginning embodies the environmental barbarism that Natty has tried to escape, chopping a stand of cottonwoods with abandon shortly after their arrival. Proud that he and those of his background are “of a slow breed...but slow is sure,” the illiterate Ishmael is nonetheless described as sub-human, running on instinct alone; having “a mind...incapable of maturing any connected system of forethought, beyond that which related to the interests of the present moment” (*P* 63,14). Esther is a pious, literate, but hard-bitten frontier woman, ready to defend her “idle and drowsy” brood with a vengeance (*P* 21). Esther’s brother, the slave-trader and human trafficker Abirim White, who has kidnapped the Spanish creole, Inez de Certavallos, “the richest heiress on the banks of the Mississippi” for ransom or sale, accompanies the Bush family (*P* 158).

Convincing Ishmael to abet him in his crime, they have been transporting Inez under cover for five hundred miles, with only Abirim, Ishmael, Esther, and Ishmael’s ward, Ellen Wade, aware of the true nature of their “secret burthen” (*P* 81). Once Inez’s presence is revealed, the Bush’s son, Asa, dares to expose the villainy of her capture and is silenced for it by Abirim’s hand, who in turn meets his own self-inflicted death through Ishmael’s brand of frontier justice. Having tracked the Bushes into the prairie is Captain Duncan Uncas Middleton, the grandson of Major Duncan Heyward, who is further endowed with the name of Uncas, the last of the Mohegan tribe and son of Chingachgook (all from *Mohicans*). Middleton is determined to reclaim his bride, Inez, having learned her fate and the identities of her captors from a dying, alcoholic, “humanity-hunter” (*P* 165).

Ellen Wade, Esther’s orphaned niece, is a reasonably strong, witty Tennessean, who struggles with her moral compass and, as Ishmael and Esther rightly conclude, longs for the “settlements” (*P* 144). Her suitor, the impetuous bee-hunter, Paul Hover, has followed the

Bushes, secretly meeting with Ellen when possible, while he gathers honey to sell in the settlements. Rounding out the Bush party is Obed Bat, “or as he was fond of hearing himself called, Battius,” a pedantic naturalist and ‘physician’ to the Bush family (*P* 67). To account for this unlikely pairing, Cooper notes that due to his lack of learning, Ishmael deferred to “the application of a medical man, whose thirst for natural history had led him to the desire of profiting by the migratory propensities of the squatter,” though it stretches credulity that Bush, who has spent fifty years living on the “skirts of society” dodging the law, would be approached by a “fellow of several cis-atlantic learned societies” (*P* 66, 67). Cooper’s “worthy naturalist” has rightly been read by many as comedic relief—he famously mistakes his mule for a new and terrifying species, “*Vespertilio; Horribilis, Americanus*”—as well as a foil for Natty’s nature-over-reason philosophy towards life, and as Cooper’s critique of blind devotion to a Linnaean system of taxonomic classification (*P* 346, 71).¹² Bat is accompanied by his “ancient and faithful servant,” the mule Asinus, whose periodic loud braying both protects Bat and others from harm or threatens to put them in danger (*P* 234).

Cooper divides the resident Plains Indians into the Pawnee and the Teton Sioux. The Pawnee are led by the brave and Anglo-sympathetic chief, Hard-Heart, who shares Natty’s moral rectitude and who Natty symbolically adopts as his son near the close of the tale. Cooper’s Hard-Heart exudes “loftiness of spirit,” “savage heroism,” and physical beauty, all “finer points of savage life” that distinguish his far western, or for Cooper, any of his noble frontier Natives.¹³ The semi-nomadic Teton Sioux, are led by the equally courageous but Anglo-hating chief, Mahtoree, whose “frequent communication with the traders and troops of the Canadas,” has erased some of his Native superstitions, but with no further “civilizing” gain; his morals just as “accommodating” and his motives just as “selfish” as theirs (*P* 288).¹⁴ In these two “savage”

figures, Cooper maintains the noble/ignoble binary found in his previous two frontier tales—a binary not new with Cooper, having found traction in the first encounters of Europeans with the indigenous populations of the Americas—but made more indelible for a nineteenth-century audience through his popular works; a racialized binary which in many ways projects on to and effaces the burgeoning political and social divisions within Anglo-America itself.¹⁵

As Cooper scholars have exhaustively shown, his readers would have found similarities, often striking, between the characters in *The Prairie* and those found in *The Pioneers* and particularly *The Last of the Mohicans*—the noble Delawares transform into the Pawnees, with Uncas becoming Hard-Heart; the brutal Mingoes become the Sioux, with Magua becoming Mahtoree; Middleton mirrors his chivalrous grandfather, Heyward; the genteel Alice Munro has been seen in the equally patrician Inez *or* in *Ellen Wade*, with Cora becoming Inez; David Gamut finds new life in Obed Bat, and so on. It seems reasonable to assume that Cooper chose to re-cast earlier characters and scenes in order to maintain the level of success he had achieved with those earlier works, his newest tale one he hoped would be “somewhere between *Pioneers* and *Mohicans*—More sprightly than the former and less intense than the latter.”¹⁶

At the same time, thinking it the last of his tales featuring Bumppo, Natty’s reminiscences continually reference the first two novels, creating what Cooper biographer Wayne Franklin calls “the summative mood that shapes so many of Natty’s speeches;” a “texture of memories [that] binds the third novel to the first and second.”¹⁷ Sandra M. Gustafson acknowledges “past and present” critical appraisals of *The Prairie* that have “attacked Cooper for reprising characters and scenes” from the earlier tales even while “they were right to notice the parallels and repetitions, which are substantial.”¹⁸ Gustafson, however, usefully reads Cooper’s recursive tendency not as a lack of imagination, or sign of authorial failure, but rather

as a deliberate move on his part to continue to work through “the meaning and implications of Jacksonian democracy.”¹⁹ Even with his ongoing preoccupation with certain issues such as law, patriarchy, the environment, and racial and ethnic identities, however, Cooper’s prairie setting nonetheless forces a different kind of negotiation, not only with these concerns but also with contemporaneous issues resonating in and through that western environment.

As both guide and translator, a primary role for the philosophizing Natty and his old dog, Hector, is to shepherd Ellen, Paul, Duncan, Inez, and Obed (in various configurations) through escapes and captures from and by the Bush family and the Teton Sioux, as well as protecting them from a buffalo stampede, a prairie fire, and a battle between the Sioux and the Pawnee. That is, Cooper’s tale, to use his words, is liberally supplied with scenes of “action and strong excitement.”²⁰ Having lived “ten weary years” on the “naked plains,” Natty has intimate knowledge of the local geography; knows the tricks for survival in the environment; acts as interpreter for engagements with both the Pawnee and Sioux; and can anticipate martial and other moves taken by these tribes (*P* 79, 74).

Yet, the elderly Natty is often lost in reveries of nostalgia or beset with temporary memory loss, causing him to misread his familiar local environment. In one scene, after he has filled his spectators with grateful “wonder” for his ability to literally fight fire with fire, he forgets where he is (*P* 249). With Paul urging Natty to leave the area of the prairie fire, Natty admits to being lost in memory of “times long past” (*P* 251). Shortly thereafter he mistakes the singed buffalo hide that Hard-Heart is protecting himself under for the “carcass of a horse” (*P* 255). Aware of his error, Natty reminds the party (and Cooper’s readers) that there was a time when he could “tell you the name of a beast as far as the eye could reach, and that too with most of the particulars of colour, age, and sex” (*P* 255).

For many critics, it is Bat who usually draws attention for how, as Andy Doolen notes, he “constantly misreads the American environment,” as he does when assuming that a painted and camouflaged Hard-Heart must be a “basilisk” (*P* 182).²¹ Confronted with the unknown, Bat can only grasp onto farcical theoretical interpretations. While they are both “lover[s] of nature,” Natty’s misreading of the environment erupts from a very different place (*P* 68). Cooper portrays Natty as the aged trapper he is, his nostalgia sparked by all the newcomers to the prairie, his occasional inability to interpret the environment symptomatic of an elderly mind. Whether intentionally or not, however, Cooper draws a cautionary message out of Natty’s failures to read the local environment. Certainly, his misunderstandings can compromise the life-sustaining need to understand and adapt to one’s surroundings, a skill which is particularly essential if acting as guide through an environment alien to others. Yet, Cooper also gestures towards the uneasy implications of not being able to read the sociopolitical landscape of a domestic, though foreign territory—that is, of the inability to recognize who the local players are and to distinguish what boundaries, or not, exist between them.

Draining the “empty empire” and the Rhetoric of Containment

By the end of the novel, with the exception of Bat’s trusty ass, all of the characters that travelled into the “barren belt of prairie” have returned to the Mississippi border settlements and the “lower provinces” of Louisiana—that is, back to or behind Cooper’s demarcation line of “the usual limits of civilized habitations” (*P* 24,10,11). With the two pairs of lovers reunited and eager to return home; the Bush family deprived of their captive, their livestock and horses, while also having served fatal justice on the killer of their buried son; and Obed anxious to return with his specimens, Cooper seemingly exhausts any plausible reason for his characters to remain. Cooper’s prairie largely ends up a space drained of anyone but the Pawnee and the old trapper, a

landscape recalling the opening pages of the novel where he terms the territory acquired in the Louisiana transfer as the “empty empire” (*P* 11). Natty’s prescient fear of axe-wielding emigrants creating a “peopled desert from the shores of the Maine sea to the foot of the Rocky Mountains” is temporally and narratively forestalled by the swift movement of the novel’s characters back east to the “abodes of civilization” (*P* 188, 14).

This turning back reverses Cooper’s opening descriptions of Anglo-Americans already living on the fringes of the nation’s borders who rush headlong into the newly opened territories with breathless speed; the “swarms of restless people” who “plunged into the thickets that fringed the right bank of the Mississippi” (*P* 9). The majority of these emigrants stop short of plunging, as Ishmael and clan do, farther into the “haunts of the barbarous and savage occupants of the country,” forming instead communities closer to the larger rivers with “magical rapidity” (*P* 14,10). Returning east, the Bush family’s wagon is quickly absorbed on reaching the settlements, being “blended among a thousand others,” a re-enactment of how their train initially “disappeared, like hundreds of others, in pursuit of the hidden wealth of the interior” (*P* 364, 167).

These expressions echo the way in which Cooper describes the less numerous and “humble” populations—that is, those French and Spanish creoles residing in smaller towns farther up the Mississippi from New Orleans—as “almost immediately swallowed in the vortex which attended the tide of instant emigration” following the Purchase (*P* 10). The rapidity with which the enormous tract of land changed hands from the Spanish to the French to the United States is also reflected in one conversation between Hard-Heart and Natty: “The runners from the people on the Big-river tell us, that your nation have traded with the Tawney-faces who live beyond the salt lake, and that the Prairies are now the hunting grounds of the Big-knives”; “It is

true as I hear, also from the hunters and trappers on La Platte. Though it is the Frenchers and not with the men who claim to own the Mexicos, that my people have bargained” (*PT* 187).²²

Cooper’s rhetoric of impetuosity, submersion, and speed epitomizes what many literary critics have acknowledged as his ambivalence towards western expansion. Whether villainous or virtuous, his characters enact a pulling back from some kind of brink, and one is left with a sense that Cooper feels a need to re-group, as it were—to re-assess the whole process of and potential consequences of annexation. Given Cooper’s assertions up front that the western interior is unsuited for settlement and speculation, one could read his draining of the prairie setting as in keeping with that scenario. Yet, whether as Andy Doolen suggests, “Cooper depicted the increasing pace of territorialization as a looming catastrophe,” *The Prairie* shows him clearly ill at ease with the ramifications of rapid and uncontrolled movement into a still little known territory.²³

In the opening exposition to *The Prairie* and at certain points in his *Notions of the Americans Picked Up by a Travelling Bachelor* (1828), Cooper conveys a more receptive stance towards an expanding republic. A year after the appearance of *The Prairie* and *The Red Rover* (1827), Cooper published his *Notions*. The title having been provided by his publisher, Cooper’s *Notions* was written to debunk European conceptualizations of his young nation.²⁴ Writing to his friend Charles Wilkes from Paris, Cooper describes the project as his response to finding “so much ignorance here concerning America, so much insolence in their manner of thinking of us, which however natural is not the less false, that every line I am tempted to decorate rather than to describe.”²⁵ Adopting the travel genre so popular with European visitors to America, Cooper fashions a European Count as his narrator, a bachelor who travels along with a gentleman named Cadwallader, an American who is able to provide the Count with firsthand knowledge of the

republic. In the same manner that Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* was in part a rebuttal of French naturalist George-Louis Leclerc, the Comte de Buffon's portrayal of America as a diminished and unhealthy continent on many levels, Cooper's *Notions* was also written to act as a corrective to European ignorance and chauvinism. Underneath, both projects served to advance a republican democratic agenda and emergent exceptionalist viewpoint, Cooper making it clear that his will be "a book for America...the first of a series written especially for my own Countrymen."²⁶

In *Notions*, Cooper's bachelor acknowledges that the "Prairies, and the deserts of the west, present natural obstacles to the further progress of the population in that quarter," though he goes on to assert "that these regions will, in time, come to have a population of their own, is certain; but, in a country where there is still so much room for the employment of men, that day is necessarily distant" (*N 2*: 289). Though a different kind of temporal halting than that which Cooper enacts within the historical framework of *The Prairie*, the bachelor's future projection of a population condensed into towns and cities for "employment," is for Cooper an inevitable forward progress. But even in *Notions*, Cooper seems to envision a kind of regional separateness; vast geopolitical spaces that will be part of the union, but "with a population of their own" (*N 2*: 289).

In emptying the landscape of all but a dying Natty and Hard-Heart's Pawnee tribe, Cooper's historicized prairie also ends up foregrounding the "Great Prairies" as the "final gathering place of the red man"—one wrought by the systematic and successive removals of southeastern tribes to (eventually) Oklahoma and Nebraska following the Native Removal Act of 1830, though numerous displacements of native populations had taken place prior to this act of Congress.²⁷ In 1827, the idea of holding the region west of the Mississippi as "Indian Territory,"

one which would allow indigenous populations the dubious opportunity to be “slowly nurtured towards civilization” while avoiding the “corrupting elements” of that same civilization, such as alcohol, effected both policy and public perceptions.²⁸ Forced, encouraged, or coerced with disingenuous incentives, the professed reasons for removal, as Jeffrey Ostler remarks, “comforted the consciences of humanitarians.”²⁹ Following on this rhetoric, Cooper’s narrator in *Notions* presents the Indian removal “plan” as primarily “a great, humane, and, I think, rational” way for tribes such as the Chickasaw, Cherokee, and Choctaws to increase dwindling populations and maintain their state of civilization, that is their “houses, fences, stock, etc.” (*N* 2: 285, 286). Cooper’s bachelor envisions that the presence of these more advanced, less migratory, tribes will have a meliorating effect on the Plains Indians; that “all of the savages of the west” will be drawn to want to emulate the civilized ways of the displaced tribes (*N* 2:287).

The Count further relates that: “there is little reluctance to mingle the white and red blood, (for the physical difference is far less than in the case of the blacks, and the Indians have never been menial slaves,) I think an amalgamation of the two races would in time occur” (*N* 2: 287). Cooper’s views were not unique. As Ezra Tawil points out, in the early 1800s, official policy “rested not only on the goal of the Indian’s cultural assimilation into the American social body, but also on the assumption of white-Indian ‘amalgamation.’”³⁰ Any merging is necessarily qualified, however: the white blood would be Anglo-Saxon, rather than French or Spanish—a given that Cooper’s bachelor highlights in the pride shown by upper class Anglo-Americans “who are thought to have any of the Indian blood” (*N* 2:287). The natives, as well, would have already been brought “within the pale of civilization” (*N* 2:285). In the late 1820s, however, ideas of assimilation were increasingly being replaced by more racially divisive rhetoric, and while the “plan” is to eventually locate, under federal control, Native populations as far from

whites as possible, Cooper's contradictory rendering of Natives also living with and marrying whites, is emblematic of the conflicted debates throughout the 1820s and 1830s surrounding the "Indian problem" and their status within the Union.³¹

Cooper's "final gathering place" is, of course, also Natty's final resting place and in the closing pages of *The Prairie*, he temporarily arrests the problems inherent in those debates, even while pointing squarely at them. A year after their departure, Middleton and Hover return to the Pawnee village during a break in their military duties. Finding a dying Natty, their well-timed, Anglo-American presence ensures that they can grant his last wishes and bear witness to his passing. No longer a scene predominated by "gloomy wastes" and violence, Cooper's prairie has been transformed (*P* 118). Amid the "luxuriant bottom[s]," "herds of horses and mules were grazing peacefully in the vast natural pasture" and a "sheet of golden light was spread over the placid plain" (*P* 377). Acclimated to his new surroundings, Asinus is found to be "sleek, fat and luxuriating in the fullness of content" (*P* 377). The dying trapper is seated so as to face the "glorious tints of an American sunset" (*P* 385).

These are not the "denuded plains that stretch to the Rocky Mountains" where "by a species of desperate resignation" Natty had been forced to flee.³² The Pawnee seem secure and thriving in their village, a thousand strong, not yet reduced to the "condition of fugitives and wanderers" through white encroachment, a fate Cooper foresees for them earlier in the tale (*PT* 214). The defiant Sioux have since vanished from the narrative, posing no threat to the conquering Pawnee or to the duo and their party—Mahtorees' plea to Hard-Heart to band together against the "Pale-face" having long since been rebuffed by the Anglo-accommodating Hard-Heart (*P* 335).

Clearly Cooper paints this idyllic setting as one in keeping with the trapper's deep connection to an Indianized natural world and to provide a calming frame around Natty's equally peaceful death. But in his historically framed vision of the western prairie environment as both a lush, pastoral home for the Natives and as a site of regional stability, Cooper pushes against the realities of native dispossession and the inherent instability of the region in his own time. While it is easy to imagine Cooper's serene prairie as a re-gained space "into which the nonwhite races can disappear," as Jared Gardner suggests, in projecting the region held in a nostalgic stasis for both the Plains Indians and the rest of the "gathering" tribes, Cooper instead instigates, as Anna Brickhouse suggests, a more "imperialist vision of history."³³

From their arrival into the village, Hard-Heart essentially acquiesces to the empire-building, military presence of Middleton and Hover. On learning that Natty has no intention of following the Native tradition for his burial and commemoration, Hard-Heart "a little disappointed," steps "modestly back making way for the recent comers to approach," a brief instant, but a telling one (*P* 381). Granted, Middleton moves aside to allow Natty to address Hard-Heart, and both Middleton and Hard-Heart "involuntarily extended a hand" to support the old trapper as he dies, creating through their mutual fondness for Natty a moment of inter-racial equality and mutual amity (*P* 385). Similarly Middleton provides the headstone, while the Pawnee act as caretakers of Natty's grave pointing out to "the traveller and the trader" the spot where a "just white-man sleeps (*P* 386). The last words of the tale, however, are Middleton's, an inscription he adds to the trapper's headstone: "*May no wanton hand ever disturb his remains*" (*P* 386, emphasis in original). Though these final acts are meant to remind the reader of Natty's moral and literary legacy, as Cooper knew and his readers would undoubtedly have grasped, it is clear who will be the ascendant party, and any fantasy of "amalgamation," whether through

blood or otherwise, has been pushed aside. Cooper's representation of a Pawnee paradise, another form of rhetorical containment, of stalling, ultimately cannot, as Cooper's Natives themselves, resist what in *Notions* he makes explicit as "the superior moral and physical influence of the white." (*N* 2:227).

Cooper's National Imaginary and the Prospects for Bi-coastal Unity

In a republic grappling with the integration of a vast, diverse, and nebulous west, Cooper drains his prairie of his own diverse characters as a form of narrative control. Yet, while Cooper's setting comes to represent anxieties associated with Anglo-American movement into western territories, he concurrently projects a nation reaching to the edges of the continent. Perhaps one of the most curious declarations Natty utters in *The Prairie* is sparked by Ishmael's question as to whether there are better prospects for settlement (or escaping the law) even farther west: "There is; and I have seen it all...I have seen the waters of the two seas" (*P* 75).

Though Natty references both coasts in his emphatic prophecy of "Yankee choppers" who will "cut their path from the eastern to the western waters," the more direct expression is striking (*P* 77). Uttered while he leans on his rifle "like one who recalled the scenes he had witnessed with melancholy pleasure," Natty immediately begins reminiscing about his younger days in "York" until the "blows of choppers" force his departure (*P* 75). What the old trapper may or may not have witnessed on his trek from the east to the west coast and back to the vast and "naked fields" is reduced to the nostalgic statement that "America has grown, my man, since the days of my youth, to be a country larger than I once thought the world itself to be" (*P* 78,75).

Natty's brief revelation, however, necessarily begs the question: why does he return?

Following critics who have found Natty's return from the west coast, on the one hand, and his willingness to lead the Bush family farther into "the ancestral land of the Pawnee nation" on the other, as further evidence of Cooper's conflicted feelings towards an empire-building republic, Andy Doolen suggests that the trapper's return to the prairie is all part of nature's way. That is, in keeping with Natty's belief in an organically based "cycle of life," the trapper returns to find "solace" in playing "[his] small part...in cultivating his nation's growth," even if that means acting as guide and translator for the "Kentuckians."³⁴

The question of Natty's return to the "dreary fields," however, might be better reconsidered as to why Cooper includes this particular reference to the Pacific at all (*P* 34). Given the timeframe of the novel, the fanciful notion that Cooper's hero trekked to the west coast and back, through Spanish possessions or the unclaimed Northwest territories prior to Lewis and Clark's expedition, nonetheless lends narrative credence to Natty's knowledge that, yes, there is more arable land "towards the other Ocean" (*P* 75). Natty's feat also positions him as a larger-than-life figure, evoking the Bush family's first encounter with his mirage-as-colossus persona. Similarly, the trappers' nostalgic memories, such as those of days spent in the "hills and woods of York;" of hunting deer in "the mountains of the Delaware and Hudson;" and of trapping beaver in the "Upper Lakes," not only serve, in part, to remind Cooper's readers of his two previous Leather-Stocking tales, but in conjunction with Natty's all-encompassing declaration, serve as testament to how far "America has grown" (*P* 61,75). Natty's reminiscences are not only geographical, but temporal as well, as Cooper traces Natty's own life and successive displacements with those of the Natives over the first three Leatherstocking tales—from 1757 (*Mohicans*) to 1793 (*Pioneers*) to 1804. In the "History of the Country," Natty

has lived to “see it all!”—“all the inventions and deviltries of man [that] are spread across the region!” (P 85, 251).

In his preface to the 1849 edition of *The Prairie*, Cooper writes that “since the original publication of the book, the boundaries of the republic have been carried to the Pacific, and the “settler,” preceded by the “trapper” has already established himself on the shores of that vast sea” (P 6). Cooper is, of course, writing this at the beginning of the Gold Rush, undoubtedly one of the “[r]ecent events that have brought the Grand Prairies into familiar notice” (P 6). When he wrote *The Prairie*, however, those events had not yet occurred and trans-continental settlement could only be imagined. Though the “trapper” Natty has traversed the continent, perhaps establishing inroads for further white encroachment, Cooper seems unwilling, or unable, to grant his hero any larger role in the nation’s territorial expansion. Apart from the purely creative difficulties such a shift in story line would have posed for the author, Natty’s dismay over the spread of “inventions and deviltries” is reflective of Cooper’s ambivalence over expansion. While Jerome McGann notes that Natty is “implicated in the white history of America,” in his return from the west coast, and more importantly, his death, Cooper works to preclude that possibility.³⁵

In the end, it is the government-sanctioned Lewis and Clark survey and, by proxy, Middleton and his “faithful and sturdy artillerists” that come to represent western territorialization in Cooper’s tale, not the individual figure of Natty (P 365). Following the Louisiana Purchase, Jefferson lost no time in sending out expeditions to try and map the nebulous boundaries of the territory, the years 1804 to 1806 witnessing the expeditions of Lewis and Clark, Zebulon Pike, Thomas Freeman and Peter Curtis, and the shorter survey of William Dunbar and George Hunter. In *The Prairie*, the old trapper’s reference to the “two seas”

anticipates later references in the tale to the Corps of Discovery Expedition as, farther from the scenes of action, Lewis and Clark move towards the Pacific. Rightly tying the expedition to the annexation, Cooper's trapper wonders whether Middleton is "of the party which the States have sent into their new purchase to look after the nature of the bargain they have made" (P 117). Middleton is quite aware of the expedition: "I am not. Lewis is working his way up the river, some hundreds of miles from this. I come on a private adventure" (P 117). Echoing this exchange, Hard-Heart queries Natty as to whether "warriors are [also] wading up the Long River, to see that they have not been cheated, in what they have bought" (P 187). While Natty acknowledges the veracity of Hard-Heart's information, he expresses fear that the expedition will also bring an "accursed band of choppers" to the region in its wake, unsettling the notion of his finding comfort in helping to foster the growth of the nation (P 188).

While the expedition, like the Purchase, is, of course, an important part of the historical framework of Cooper's tale, his brief references to it represent more than just temporal markers or quasi-geographical reference points. Both the Corps and Middleton signal, as Geoffrey Rans suggests, "the advance of the United States empire" even as their presence "foretells the iteration of Natty's and the Indians' past experience" of environmental destruction and exploitation.³⁶ For Natty and the western tribes, the Corps and Middleton are harbingers of a corrupting progressiveness and of what Andy Doolen sees as the "failed promise of the Louisiana Purchase"—that is, that the west in *The Prairie* is neither a safe haven for Native Americans from "extinction" nor a space to allow them to move towards a higher level of civilization, however much Cooper attempts to hold the Pawnee in those positions.³⁷ At one point, in the novel, a Teton brave points to the tenuous hold the Natives have on their land, his sentiments perhaps a nod as well to Cooper's own difficulties with land titles. In referencing the Purchase

and the ability of the Spanish to sell “their incomprehensible rights over these vast regions,” Cooper renders the brave unable to “embrace the reasons why one people should thus assume a superiority over the possessions of another” (*P* 223, 224). In both Natty’s and the Native expressions, Cooper registers his trepidation not only towards the potential damage of the exchange on the physical environment and indigenous populations, but gestures towards the fragile hold the U.S. has on powers of governance in those “vast regions” (*P* 223).

Importantly, however, the expedition also marks an early demonstration of the promises of the Louisiana Purchase for national unity, if often only in the abstract, and for opening avenues to national growth, especially commercial—prospects that Cooper clearly invites. As John Kukla notes: “Congress approved the money [for the Corps], and planning was well under way before Robert Livingston and James Monroe bought Louisiana. Their diplomatic coup transformed the expedition into a great national adventure.”³⁸ Jefferson himself was happy to supply editor Paul Allen with a biographical sketch of Meriwether Lewis, in which he declares of the Expedition’s success that “[n]ever did a similar event excite more joy through the United States.”³⁹

With the *History* as one of his sources, Cooper could not have failed to read Lewis’ exultant words from that same time: “We had not gone far from this village when, the fog suddenly clearing away, we were at last presented with the glorious sight of the ocean—that ocean, the object of all our labours, the reward of all our anxieties.”⁴⁰ It is no accident that Cooper chooses to frame his tale around the nationally popular Corps of Discovery Expedition, as against the more politically and transnationally-charged Pike expedition occurring almost simultaneously and through terrain closer to his prairie setting.⁴¹ If Natty’s return to the prairie represents Cooper’s disillusionment with annexation and the failure of the Louisiana Purchase to

provide a space for both a burgeoning democratic republic to flourish or for Natives to happily vanish, the expedition traveling on the periphery of the tale “hundreds of miles” away, however fleetingly referenced, maintains Cooper’s empire-building vision from his opening and embodies a hope of cross-continental unity as constitutive of a territorializing nation (*P* 117).

Following on Stephanie LeMenager’s recognition that the Great Plains had, by the time of Stephen Long’s 1805-1807 expeditions “solidified into a complex regional economy, but not a national place,” by the late 1820s, issues surrounding slavery and racial and ethnic identities arising out of those same Great Plains posed a threat to the very concept of “national” itself.⁴² At the same time, the far western terrain Natty fictively traversed in Cooper’s romance to get to the Pacific—New Spain (Mexico after 1821) or the unclaimed territories of the Northwest—pressed harder on 1827 conceptualizations of the nation’s boundaries. Yet, while Anne Perrin posits that Cooper “counters the nationalistic tendencies motivating” his source writers such as Lewis and Stephen Long, Cooper nonetheless teases out a vision of republican national cohesion and, with it, a nation’s imperialistic desires, bypassing the tensions found in the still emergent center.⁴³

Borderers in All Directions

In the vast grasslands of his tale, however, this vision of cohesion breaks down. While Natty suggests to Bush at one point that there is rich soil in the lower depressions of the immediate area, the overriding message is that this is an environment to pass through, if at all, on the way to somewhere else. At the same time, whatever sense there might be that Cooper placed his characters into a neutral space as a form of democratic experiment with diverse populations, or to enact a viable solution to the problems of territorial assimilation, quickly dissolves, not only

through draining the prairie setting of his heterogeneous mix of characters, but in his treatment of existing westerns populations.

Cooper's descriptions of Anglo-Americans moving into the interior attest to his discomfort with the notion that a large number of them will be like the Bushes, that is American borderers who, for Cooper and others, exemplify a state of disorder. Though some of the elder Bush's progeny "were reclaimed from their lawless and semi-barbarous lives," one can almost hear a sigh of relief on Cooper's part as he writes of his fictional characters, Ishmael and Esther, that they "were never heard of more" (*P* 364). But importantly, Cooper's concern over who might end up populating the western region from the east—of the "hundreds of others" whose trains are massed to head into the territories—finds its counterpart in his trepidation over borderer populations who are already there, hunters and trappers who, along with the commercially and politically savvy Native populations who traded with them, contributed in large part to the diversity and cosmopolitan nature of the Missouri Territory (*P* 167).

Even if not integral to his plot or mentioned only for clarity or dramatic effect, Cooper's underlying anxiety is reflected in his representations of those character types. At one point, he informs his readers that it was not uncommon for the "semi-barbarous hunters from the Canadas, the same description of population, a little more enlightened from the States, and the metiffs or half breeds, who claimed to be ranked in the class of the white men" to encounter each other—descriptions ostensibly included to authenticate the unlikely scenario of Captain Middleton happening upon the group of Natty, Paul Hover, and Obed Bat in the "solitary wastes" of the prairie (*P* 107). Earlier in the tale, Natty warns Ellen that: "[i]t would be well to be ready for the worst, as the half-and-halves that one meets in these distant districts, are altogether more barbarous than the real savage" (*P* 29). For the 1832 edition, Cooper felt compelled to add the

following footnote for further clarification: “Half-breeds; men born of Indian women by white fathers. This race has much of the depravity of civilization without the virtues of the savage” (*P* 29). Recalling *Notions*, this is an “amalgamation of the two races” which Cooper cannot countenance.

It is this aggregate of western populations, however, that drove the “inland trade” Cooper extols in his opening, and engagements in this economy are woven throughout Cooper’s tale (*P* 10). The Louisiana Purchase is even referenced through the language of trade, as in Hard-Heart’s biting comments: “And where were the chiefs of the Pawnee Loups, when this bargain was made!”; “Is a nation to be sold like the skin of a beaver?” (*P* 188). Natty, reduced by age to being “nothing better than a trapper” and a man who can “hardly be called a settler,” is little different from other local players in the business of extracting western environmental resources, primarily fur, for trade and subsistence (*P* 21, 22). As his moral philosopher, however, Cooper draws Natty as begrudging his fate and minimizes his role in that robust local, regional, and global market economy. When Natty takes leave of Middleton and party, he gives Middleton “the skins of four beavers” to offer as “lawful barter” with “some of the trappers you will not fail to meet below in exchange for a few traps, and to send the same into the Pawnee village” (*P* 372). Again, because of his age, Natty has little use for skins, as “food and clothing be all that is needed” (*P* 372, 22). In keeping with the character he has drawn, Natty’s impact on the local environment, then, is minor, and with his traps having been stolen by the Sioux, he is portrayed here as victim, rather than player.⁴⁴

The “inland trade” that Cooper foresees for the future, however, is one devoid of the current players, whose very presence marks the potential for troubling alliances and for a threatening hegemony over the local and global trading and political economy of the Great

Plains, an economy in which the Sioux had already, and would continue to play a large part in fashioning. Cooper gestures towards this unsettling prospect in Mahtoree's "frequent communication with the traders and troops of the Canadas," and again near the close of the tale (*P* 288). On entering the Pawnee grounds, Middleton and Hover find their reception "friendly though a little restrained on both sides" (*P* 378). Before learning that the subdued greeting is due to Natty's imminent demise, Middleton is initially offended that his own rank and "authority of the government" are not properly acknowledged (*P* 378). At the same time, he suspects that this slight is caused by "some undue influence on the part of the agents of the Canadas" (*P* 378). For his part, Natty is grateful for Middleton's presence, not only since he and Paul can oversee a Christian, rather than Native burial, but also because "little faith can be put in the traders of these regions" to grant his last requests, due to their inability to speak English (*P* 381).

Cooper's Anglo and class-centric views of the métis and French-Canadians, who were well established in the region by 1827, were not uncommon for the time. Yet, as Edward Watts notes in his discussion of the French presence in "western texts" of the early republic, Cooper's omission of these populations from the action of his tale is striking.⁴⁵ Cooper's de-populated Missouri territory can be attributed in large part to his lack of first-hand experience in the region, even though he would have found textual evidence of the very real presence of these populations—however marginalized and racialized—through his source material. Cooper also makes no secret of the fact that his is a work of fiction, admitting to "an occasional departure from strict historical veracity" (*P* 1). If, as Watts suggests, however, Cooper's nationalism and unwillingness (or inability) to confront the "messiness" of western realities, drives these populations and "the century of fur trade history," from his tale, the fact that these varied characters hover on the margins troubles this argument.⁴⁶

As mentioned, Cooper's opening imperialistic rhetoric coupled with his descriptions of the early emigrants into the annexed territory, betray a conflicted view of expansion. For Cooper, it is not only what those "restless people" represent in terms of a disparate social class that bothers him, but also the vision of a "new and sudden out-breaking of a people, who had endured a momentary restraint" (*P* 9,10). Cooper's rhetoric of a population quickly breaking a barrier suggests the potential for chaos, and his borderer populations become the embodiment of anxieties not only of disunion, but also of populations existing outside of economic and socio-cultural bounds or of nation-state control. Cooper narratively moves to resolve these issues by effectively emptying his prairie of both populations. In Cooper's sweeping aside the transient and "barbarous" populations from his narrative, however, he not only clears the prairie of their troubling and very real presence, but also leaves open the prospects for an alternative outcome with very different populations of Anglo-Americans effecting the commerce of the interior (*P* 29).⁴⁷

New Orleans on the Plains

Cooper's unease surrounding issues of national and social cohesion, ones made even more pronounced in the vast western territories, and his attempts to narratively control the outcome, finds similar expression in his representations of the Louisiana Purchase and in the marriage-kidnapping-consummation tale that grows out from "the banks of the Mississippi" (*P* 9). Writing in *Notions of the Americans*, Cooper's avatar bachelor proclaims the Louisiana Purchase as "the greatest masterstroke of policy that has been done in our times," a "peaceful" acquisition, rendering all the "wars, and conquests, and cessions of Europe," insignificant by comparison (*N* 2:347). He goes on to add, "Spain too was quietly made to contribute to the

peace and security of the republic, by a cession of the Floridas” (N 2:347). Though several decades apart, Cooper’s rhetoric nonetheless mirrors that of a number of policymakers and pamphleteers who, immediately following the purchase, “found the peaceful means of acquiring Louisiana easier to celebrate than the acquisition itself.”⁴⁸

Cooper’s nationalistic stumping in *Notions* echoes his opening to *The Prairie*, where the widely heterogeneous population of the lower Louisiana Territory is ultimately brought into the Union as a state in 1812 through a similarly violence-free form of benign assimilation. Though he gives a dispassionate and brief nod to the fact that the purchase engendered partisan “controversy” and that it took time to “blend the numerous and affluent colonists” of the lower Mississippi, or more specifically New Orleans, into the Union, the larger message is that annexation proceeded smoothly (P 9, 10). Up and down the Mississippi, the “mild and indolent descendants of the Ancient Colonists received their new compatriots without distrust, well knowing that the transfer, raised them from the condition of subjects, to the more enviable distinction of citizens in a Government of Laws,” to which Cooper adds, “the new rulers exercised their functions with discretion, and wielded their delegated authority without offence” (P 156).

Yet in reality, the opportunity for French and Spanish Louisianans to achieve political equality in the Union was postponed for nine years through what Andy Doolen refers to as a policy of “empire-by-deferral,” that is, one in which the U.S. could withhold statehood or other jurisdictional status to newly annexed territories as a means of keeping culturally or racially diverse foreign populations from gaining immediate equality.⁴⁹ In a March 2, 1803 letter to Robert R. Livingston and James Monroe, who were in Paris negotiating the Purchase, then Secretary of State James Madison illustrates this process, as he equivocates on the issue of what

would become the involuntary incorporation of a population, leaving the timetable open for interpretation:

To incorporate the inhabitants of the hereby ceded territory with the citizens of the United States on an equal footing, being a provision, which cannot now be made, it is to be expected, from the character and policy of the United States, that such an incorporation will take place without unnecessary delay. In the meantime they shall be secure in their persons and property, and in the free enjoyment of their religion.⁵⁰

As Doolen effectively argues, the kidnapping of Inez in *The Prairie* mimics the loss of civil rights for Creoles who suddenly found their “local rights and privileges vanish” after annexation.⁵¹ It would have been some time, therefore, before Cooper’s “Louisianan Lady” and her father would have gained the full “distinction of citizens in a Government of Laws” (*P* 156). That it takes most of the tale before Middleton and Inez are finally united mirrors this deferral. In analogous fashion to Cooper’s representation of the transfer itself, however, Inez—wrested from a hostile and unstable slaver and his accomplices—is received into Middleton’s hands just as the “populous and sovereign state” of Louisiana was “parcelled from its inhabitants, and received into the bosom of the national Union” upon statehood (*P* 11).

Cooper’s iterations of a calm transference of power, land, and people, however, evade the deep contentions and fears of instability that emerged with the annexation—sparking sectional tensions that had lain barely dormant since the ratification debates, and fomenting the controversies over the spread of slavery into the western territories that would culminate with the Missouri Compromise as a fragile and polemical solution. Granted, there is little argument at

this point in time, that after the acquisition of Louisiana, most Americans were grateful to have secured access to both sides of the Mississippi and to the port of New Orleans, thinking it an end to “the long struggle for control of Mississippi’s outlet to the sea.”⁵² For Cooper, this same “control” was just one of the ways of averting what he saw as the “danger of [sectional] separation,” a danger he viewed as clearly present “when the outlet of the Mississippi was the property of another nation” (*N* 2:344).

Yet, as Jon Kukla succinctly puts it: “The size of Louisiana and the diversity of its population were threats to the republic.”⁵³ For a number of Americans, New Orleans itself became the prime locus for early republican fears about a diverse and foreign populace, and the prospect of free blacks, slaves, Roman Catholic French and Spanish creoles, Caribbean natives, and others who made up that city’s population suddenly becoming part of the United States terrified many. Those fears were amplified in the decade in which *The Prairie* was written, a decade where the memory of the Haitian Revolution regained strength in the years leading up to and following the Missouri debates and Compromise of 1820. Lurking behind those fears was the specter of slave insurrection on the continent, a prospect confirmed for Americans in the early years of the decade on learning of the planned uprising spearheaded by the free black, Denmark Vesey in 1822. As Daniel Walker Howe notes, while whites were particularly concerned about insurrection in those states, such as Vesey’s South Carolina, where the black population held the majority, even where blacks were a minority, “whites worried that freed people might become public charges,” or as in Vesey’s case, plot a takeover.⁵⁴ Much like Cooper’s representation of borderer populations, for many Americans, worries of a “new and sudden out-breaking of a people,” while perhaps localized, nonetheless reverberated along the east coast (*P* 10).

It is unlikely that Cooper felt personally threatened by slave rebellion or black domination as he wrote *The Prairie*. In fact, to read his letters from the time he was in Paris finishing his western tale, one might surmise, incorrectly, that Cooper was little concerned with the pressing issues of the late 1820s, his mind focused on his career, money, publishing and copyright issues, and in comparing and defending American politics, institutions, manners, and character as against those of the British and French. In *Notions*, Cooper's bachelor does touch on the subject of slave insurrection, admitting that "[d]istricts might be ravaged, beyond a doubt" but that given the "prodigious superiority of the whites," he concludes that: "I do not think that slavery, under any circumstances, can entail very serious danger to the dominion of the whites" (*N*: 2:275). Cooper was also a staunch supporter of state's rights, particularly in regard to slavery, where he often laid "control" of slaves, and hence their freedom, in the hands of the slave states, adding further to the sense that he may have felt the issue would not effect him directly (*N*: 2:275).⁵⁵

Yet at the same time, Cooper was afraid of any loss of control that would threaten the permanence of the Union or challenge the Constitution. In an 1830 letter to Peter Augustus Jay, for example, Cooper offers his views on nullification, a sectional conflict between South Carolina and the federal government over tariffs which pressed on issues of constitutionality and the rights of states to determine their own policies within their borders.⁵⁶ Calling for "a stronger naval force," he avers that he is "fully persuaded England is, at this moment, intriguing in the Southern States in order to separate the Union... These things should be gravely considered, at home, and a remedy applied. I have great confidence in the perpetuity of the Union, but then we may have to fight for it"—the later, a viewpoint Cooper would give voice to on repeated occasions.⁵⁷

Insecurities over the impact of diverse populations on the national psyche carried forward from annexation through the 1820s and in *The Prairie*, Cooper's anxieties about disparate populations in the Missouri Territory arc back to that same southern source, and in particular, the creole societies which existed in the complexly heterogeneous New Orleans. That is, whether intentionally or not, Cooper maps the lingering fears of local and regional diversity vis-à-vis New Orleans onto the regional populations already existing in, or moving into, the western territories.

As suggested, Cooper sought to subdue those anxieties both in and through his character of Inez. Signaling what many read as a hopeful vision of unification, Inez's marriage to Middleton can be viewed as Cooper's attempt to solve the problematics of annexation in the face of diverse, regional others. Though the prospects of an inter-racial marriage in *The Last of the Mohicans* between the genteel, mixed-race Cora Munro and the Mohican warrior, Uncas, dies along with them, that between Inez and Middleton, between two elite whites of European ancestry, portends as Watts suggests the "coming of stability and order."⁵⁸ In her marriage to Middleton, Cooper effects a union that, on the surface, appears to offer a temporally more immediate resolution to the issues of equality raised by annexation.

Inez, however, becomes less a symbol of inter-ethnic and upper class equality, than of absorption. The Spanish presence, as embodied in Inez, is rendered meek and tame throughout the tale and for all intents and purposes, voiceless. Her Spanish voice is lost as well; no Spanish word, even one of endearment, is uttered by any of the Spanish-speaking characters in the novel. She is insubstantial—a "fairy form"—the few lines she speaks given over primarily to expressions of deep piety (*P* 162). Significantly, while Ellen goes on, as the reader learns, to enjoy "the maternal delight of seeing her children placed far beyond the danger of returning to

that state from which both their parents had issued”—Paul having moved from “landholder,” to “prosperous cultivator of the soil,” to “town-officer”—there is no mention of any progeny for Inez and Middleton (*P* 376). While the couple marries in the Catholic Church and Middleton attests to “his own continued happiness” over time, Cooper seems hesitant to press Inez’s Spanish heritage farther by writing children into their future (*P* 376). At the same time, in order to give the “worthy priest,” something to “employ his mind,” Middleton “made him the instrument of uniting Paul and Ellen” shortly after their arrival back from the prairie—clearly a dominant gesture, but one in keeping with Cooper’s expression that the “new rulers...wielded their authority without offence” (*P* 375, 156). Cooper ensures, however, that as soon as Paul and Ellen reach the “plains of Kentucky,” their marriage is “properly solemnized” by a justice of the peace (*P* 375).

Cooper doesn’t completely deny Inez’s ethnicity, as much as he works to contain it, and in containing it he can, as he does with the border populations, at least narratively control it. He extends this kind of rhetorical restriction geographically as well. Rather than allowing for any associations with New Orleans, the “haughty and reserved” Don Augustin de Cervatallos and his daughter live in a “little town” farther up the Mississippi, away from the circum-Caribbean Gulf region (*P* 157). Given Ishmael’s path of escape and the town’s “immediate vicinity” to Middleton’s garrison, Cooper may have felt the need to locate the town in such a way as to match the geographical trajectory of his plot, though given other inconsistencies in the text, this might not have been of paramount concern (*P* 156).⁵⁹

The lack of specificity regarding the Certavallos’s residence, however, does serve several related functions. The “little town” implies a small populace, a place that would offer few opportunities for any type of resistance to annexation, thereby projecting a vision in keeping with

Cooper's narrative expression of the benign assimilation of the Louisiana territory. The heterogeneous community—one that would have included native populations as well—is rendered non-threatening and acquiescent. Similarly, though he stands “aloof” from his “vivacious Gallic neighbors,” the name Certavallos is barely known outside the town, his boastful pride in an earlier career as “officer of the crown,” being of no interest to anyone in the town or elsewhere (*P* 156, 157). Not only do these kinds of representations move Cooper's Spanish and French populations away from the more troubled realities of, by 1804, the District of Louisiana, but the inhabitants of the nameless “little town” are, like Inez and the town itself, essentially neutralized through their fundamental obscurity and ambiguous position on the nation's map.

At the same time, Middleton, as an analog of the republic, or as Lance Shacheterle remarks, an “Anglo-America taking control of a territory dominated by Spanish and French Catholicism,” profits from his “union with the daughter of so affluent a proprietor as Don Augustin.”⁶⁰ Gaining first local, then governmental attention, Middleton is propelled by steps to the higher levels of “Legislative Authority” (*P* 376). Within the logic of Cooper's tale, what Inez and her father, along with their small community gain is the dubious “distinction” of becoming Spanish-American citizens (*P* 157). In their symbolic union, one which “cements” the “political tie which had made a *forced* conjunction between people so opposite in their habits, their educations, and their opinions,” Cooper depicts amalgamation as workable, even as he underscores the difficulties of such (*P* 156, emphasis added). Middleton *does* assume Inez's Catholic faith, and hence her Spanish heritage, and has no qualms urging the same on Paul and Ellen. In what Sandra M. Gustafson suggests is Cooper's “cautious mixing of creole societies,” it is possible that he imagined an outcome where the Native heritage as honored in Duncan

Uncas Middleton's name, might be extended to children who would bear the names of Uncas and Certavallos as well.⁶¹ Cooper's expressions of homogeneity, however, for a population that will "possess our language, our religion, our institutions, and it is also to be hoped, our sense of political justice" in the event of sectional division of "this vast empire," does not seem achievable through their union, and he forecloses on the possibility of integration for the future (*P* 9).

The regional diversity that Inez embodies, including her creole exoticism and cross-cultural desirability, resonates with anxieties over territorialization and slavery that emanated from the Louisiana Purchase up through the Missouri controversies and beyond. In recent studies that have examined how Cooper's early frontier romances bring to the forefront the "unresolved issues on slavery and race" that were heating up in the 1820s, it is the evanescent figure of Inez that comes to embody both the issue of slavery and contemporaneous debates over racial identity.⁶² Stephanie LeMenager, who reads the romance through the lens of white-Indian captivity narratives, sees Inez's abduction as "among other things, a test case for the idea of the extension of slavery into far western territories."⁶³

Suggesting that Cooper "stages a Missouri Crisis in miniature" in the tale, Jared Gardner argues that Cooper resolves the question of slavery and territorialization by essentially making it vanish.⁶⁴ Reading the core of the novel as the transporting of a slave (Inez) into Missouri territory, it is through her emancipation and in emptying the prairie of his white characters, that the "problem of race is left behind in the desert."⁶⁵ Gardner further suggests that the allegiances and compacts of indebtedness and silence which Ellen, Obed, and even Inez form with Ishmael, simulate the difficult position Northerners such as Cooper faced when, because of a firm belief in

the inviolability of the Constitution, found themselves compelled to defend the Southern right to slavery.⁶⁶

While these readings are compelling, what they miss, I would argue, is the long trajectory from the New Orleans of annexation to the west of the Missouri Compromise, a trajectory which is traced in Cooper's historical romance, albeit obliquely. In her provocative exegesis of *The Last of the Mohicans*, Anna Brickhouse draws out that novel's "[w]est Indian crossings" through the figure of the mixed-race Cora. Brickhouse argues for how Cora's very presence in the narrative is constitutive of a transamerican influence; of how Cooper and other Anglo-American writers "derived economic and imaginative sustenance from a Caribbean they relied upon and exoticized yet consistently abjected."⁶⁷ While the Caribbean is not explicitly located in *The Prairie* as it is in *Mohicans*, the character of Inez nonetheless troubles that sphere. If Inez can be viewed as an aristocratic, white, Old World re-figuration of Alice Munro, she is also an iteration of the equally aristocratic, yet dark, New World, Cora. Cooper doesn't so much "leave behind" issues of race on the prairie, as Gardner suggests, as hold them at bay, much as he does with his borderer figures and with the inevitability of Native displacement. His narrative containment of Inez speaks to his anxieties over the kinds of ruptures that take place with annexation, and the diversity and foreignness she represents stays on the banks of the Mississippi.

Linguistic Diversity and Authority in U.S. Territorialization

But on arrival in New Orleans in the morning, a sound more strange than any that is heard anywhere else in the world astonishes him. It is a more incessant, loud, rapid, and various gabble of tongues of all tones than was ever heard at Babel.

Benjamin Henry B. Latrobe, January 12, 1819⁶⁸

While there is no evidence that Cooper was aware of Latrobe's observations, his "gabble of tongues" finds its way on to the prairie. Tensions surrounding the amalgamation of diverse populations as one outcome of territorialization are manifest in the difficulty that Cooper's characters have in comprehending each other. Though often used for humor, these frequent moments of linguistic confusion not only evince Cooper's concerns over a lack of cohesion in the Missouri Territory but also underscore the existing multi-lingual reality of those western territories. That these conversations of confusion, which reference class, regional and occupational distinctions, take place in an environment unfamiliar to most of the characters, further accentuates the strangeness of that actual and imagined geography.

At the same time, the "babel" found in *The Prairie*, a word Cooper uses to describe the sounds in the Sioux camp before a battle with the Pawnee, mimics both the polyglot New Orleans and the western Mississippi, particularly post-Purchase, as well as the multi-level and multi-sided debates and discourse surrounding the tension-filled issues of the 1820s. In *Notions*, Cooper's traveling bachelor states that: "[i]n nine cases in ten, the tribes have gradually removed west; and there is now a confused assemblage of nations and languages collected on the immense hunting grounds of the Prairies" (N 277, 278).⁶⁹ In *The Prairie*, this "confused assemblage" converts to the English-speaking Anglo-American characters that have gathered in Cooper's western plains.

Cooper scholars have tended to focus their attention on the verbal misunderstandings between Obed Bat and the other characters in the text. As a number of conversations in the narrative consist of comedic wordplay between Bat and others, particularly Natty, this is understandable.⁷⁰ Unable to converse in any language but that which is colored by the strictures of academia and natural history, Bat confounds everyone with his "bookish l'arning and hard

words” while, in turn, he can only interpret the words of others through that same narrow frame of reference (*P* 100). Cooper’s comedy of verbal errors—what Eric Chefitz refers to as “verbal slapstick” in *The Pioneers*—runs throughout the novel.⁷¹ When Paul realizes that Obed’s “compactum or agreement” with Ishmael is the “very blood-letter that Ellen told me of,” Obed hears “blood-letter” as phlebotomizing and states he is not of that school of practice at all; Paul hears Obed’s “virtue of compactum,” as “virtue of packing”; Natty hears “incisores” as “inside-overs” (*P* 101, 102, 99). While admitting his difficulty in classifying the unseen “solitary animal” in the wagon (Inez), Obed tosses out words such as “quadruped” and “vagary,” which excites Hover to interrupt: “Harkee, stranger! in Kentucky we are but small dealers in dictionaries. Vagary is as hard a word to turn into English as quadruped” (*P* 103).

Just prior to this admission, however, the reader learns that Paul and Obed have met before:

I am the man you met in the woods east of the big river...we tarried together a week, as you may remember; you at your toads and lizards, and I at my high holes and hollow trees...I filled my tubs with the sweetest honey I ever sent to the settlements...and your bag was near bursting with a crawling museum. I never was bold enough to put the question to your face, stranger, but I reckon you are a keeper of curiosities? (*P* 100, 101)

Obed counters with a classification of the bee-hunter: “Ay, I remember you well, young man. You are of the *class*, mammalia; *order*, primates; *genus*, homo; *species*, Kentucky,” a joke only he gets (*P* 101). While they may have gone about their different pursuits singly, the notion that the “stranger” is someone who lingered with Hover for a week underscores an anxiety over the pace of territorialization. Within the context of their immediate inability to comprehend one another, the presumption that these two parties may not have understood each other “east of the

big river” bodes ill for the diverse emigrants rapidly moving into an enormous and confusing western terrain and for their ability to communicate in turn with existing populations.

As in the two earlier Leather-Stocking tales, Natty acts as a “linguister,” translating as he chooses to between the Sioux and Pawnee, and between these populations and the white emigrants (*P* 282). As Mahtoree reminds Natty (and the reader), a “Sioux is not more than a Sioux, but a Pale face is every thing! [*sic*] He can talk to the Pawnee, and the Konza and the Omahaw, and he can talk to his own people” (*P* 282). Yet, not only do others confound Natty besides Obed, but the Anglo-American newcomers also find the trapper to be equally incomprehensible at times given his propensity to relay his thoughts metaphorically (*P* 259). More than once, Ishmael asks Natty to “speak plainly” (*P* 77). Hover, whose speech is dotted with the idioms of his profession and the provincial dialect of rural Kentucky, feels that Natty is “good at buzzing” with words (*P* 43).

Cooper was writing during a period when, as Kenneth Cmiel writes, debates over the use of the vernacular and colloquialisms pitted those who applauded a mixed, high-low style of rhetoric—exemplified in figures such Andrew Jackson and exploited by elites such as Henry Ward Beecher—as against those who felt a cultivated language was more appropriate.⁷² Careful not to conflate “middling rhetoric” with a middle class of which there were actually “important divisions,” Cmiel offers a way of using the term more broadly to describe a rhetorical style that could adjust “its tone to appeal to as wide an audience as possible.”⁷³ Cmiel notes that, “[i]ncreasingly, more Americans were able to command at least bits of refined language. Increasingly, the public culture taught citizens that some vulgar language was useful.”⁷⁴ For the proponents, this blend of the eloquent with the folksy was all part of a burgeoning democratic culture.

In one passage, Cooper seems to provide his own, amused commentary on these debates. In an exchange that becomes increasingly frustrating for Ellen, Bat wonders whether she has seen Paul Hover, or rather “certain *bipeds*, called, *men*, wandering about the prairie” (P 126). Failing with this he tries, “I must speak in the vernacular to be comprehended! Ellen, I would say of the *species*, Kentucky” (P 126). Eventually parsing meaning out of Bat’s oblique words, Ellen nonetheless lets Bat know that if he wants “to speak in parables” to find another listener, but if willing to “put [his] questions plainly, in English...I will answer them honestly in the same tongue” (P 126). Bat finally settles on: “Hover, by profession a collector of *Apes*, or *Bee*...Do I use the vernacular now—am I understood?” (P 126, emphasis added).

Bat may be his primary linguistic straw man, but Cooper’s almost relentless focus on intelligibility and interpretation throughout the text suggest deeper concerns. As Cmiel notes, the debates over the use of a “middling rhetoric” raised questions over whether there could be any kind of “language of authority” in a culture where social boundaries among Americans were becoming increasingly blurred.⁷⁵ In *The Prairie*, the issue of linguistic control is often reserved for discussions of Natty’s role as translator. His “authority” rests not only on his ability to translate Native languages, but also in how he chooses to interpret Native words for others, even if he often does so to avoid conflict. When Mahtoree demands that Natty instruct him in how to woo the captive Inez, Natty informs him to “speak with a white tongue” (P 291). After the Sioux chief complies with an “extraordinary address,” Natty reluctantly prepares to “render it into English, in such a manner as should leave its principal idea even more obscure than in the original.” Interrupted by an outburst from Ellen for Mahtoree to “spare [his] breath,” Natty instead renders her words as a flattering response to the chief’s eloquence (P 291). Cooper

presses here on Mahtoree's lack of awareness that he has been duped, but the underlying message of Natty's linguistic authority in this situation is unquestioned.

While Natty holds a certain authority by virtue of his ability to translate among whites and Natives, and Ishmael, as judge and jury, will briefly hold control during his prairie tribunal, it is Middleton who assumes the authoritative voice of the nation-state in *The Prairie* both literally, as in his eventual rise to a high level of "Legislative Authority" and figuratively (*P* 376). Through Cooper's conceit that Middleton "is the source from which we have derived most of the intelligence necessary to compose our legend," it is also Middleton's "short narrative" which concludes the tale and, as seen, it is 'his' words that end it (*P* 376).

Though Middleton is emblematic of Cooper's expansionist vision, in part as the figure of future white authority on the plains, the disruptions of communication between his characters, however humorously drawn, register anxieties about the blurring of social boundaries that were both caused by, and a cause of, shifts in language usage in the early republic. One could argue that social boundaries in *The Prairie* are essentially maintained among Cooper's characters in part because they often *can't* understand each other, and critics such as Jared Gardner have viewed Cooper's draining of the prairie as returning his Anglo characters to their "proper order," and rightful places in the social hierarchy.⁷⁶ Yet, in his character's failures to communicate—often creating what Eric Chefitz sees in *The Pioneers* as "a confusion of identity...posed in terms of a confusion of tongues"—Cooper, whether consciously or no, also draws out fears of Anglo-American diversity in a territorializing nation.⁷⁷ Rather than effecting a democratizing common language on the prairie, Cooper's linguistic "confusion" signals instead the potential difficulties posed for an expanding republic.

The Prairie, however, also registers a nation's concerns with the amalgamation of those speaking "foreign words," terms used by Ishmael to describe an exchange between Natty and Obed (P 77). The annexations of Louisiana and east and west Florida brought the internalization of populations who, for most Americans, spoke an unintelligible babel, a process that would be repeated with the annexation of Texas in 1845, and again in 1848 following the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, as more Spanish-speaking populations were involuntarily incorporated into the Union. As though in anticipation of the latter, Cooper elides the Mexican presence pressing geopolitically and culturally on the western edges of his prairie setting, reducing that population to the material through a few brief references to a Mexican saddle, and to silver currency and trimmings.

But this elision also covers an uncertainty regarding that presence; one felt in Cooper's qualification that the Union's acquisition of the "immense regions of Louisiana" is an exchange that "*it is to be hoped*" is one transacted "for the last time" (P 107, emphasis added). Though opinions were initially mixed regarding the Purchase, for all the nationalistic rhetoric that rose out of it, geophysical and sociopolitical boundaries were hardly fixed, and in his "gabble of tongues," Cooper's concerns over diversity become coupled with an underlying tension over which constituencies, or perhaps which nation-states, will come to dominate the future in the Missouri Territory.⁷⁸

The Prairie

With his title, Cooper's establishes the trans-Mississippi setting of his romance as a singular geophysical environment constitutive of the vast region. In the same way that a description of Hard-Heart "may furnish some idea of the personal appearance of the whole race,"

Cooper's prairie setting essentially functions as synecdoche, even though his title also circumscribes the larger, equally ill-defined and ineffable Missouri, and by 1827 Arkansas Territory (*P* 185). Cooper's prairie is an abstraction, and it is for this reason, in part, that Cooper scholars have consistently chosen to read his western setting as "more of an allegorical wilderness than a real place;" as "almost a character;" a "symbolic topography;" or a "mythic destination."⁷⁹ At one point in the tale, when the Bush party has settled in for a meal, Cooper writes that a "painter would gladly have seized the moment, to transfer the wild and characteristic scene to the canvas," perhaps thinking here of his friend, the painter Thomas Cole (*P* 120).

As if following his own suggestion, there is no question that Cooper's tale often reads like a series of tableaux vivant, his theatrical narrative style brought forward when he directs the reader's gaze, as in "[t]here was still another corner of the picture that was occupied" or the "curtain of our imperfect drama must fall to rise upon another scene (*P* 275, 271). At the same time, it is hard to ignore the emblematic set pieces—such as the solitary rock formation which becomes the Bush family's "citadel" or the singular, leafless, willow tree from which Abirim is hung—all of which heighten the drama of individual scenes, while contributing to the tales' "atmosphere of desolate solitude" (*P* 86).⁸⁰ Similarly, strong prairie winds and circling birds of prey occur at properly dramatic moments, prefiguring or driving the plot and heightening the tension of a scene, or conversely, descriptions of a calm and windless landscape provide a narrative pause after scenes of violence.

However figuratively rendered, though, Cooper's prairie is nonetheless a very real geophysical environment. In the expedition writings of Stephen Long, Lewis and Clark, and others, Cooper would have found a number of descriptions recounting their experiences with

extremes of heat, thirst, biting cold, hunger, flies, severe storms, and mosquitos. He would have also read descriptions of local flora and fauna and of the prairie landscape in general that these explorers found “extremely pleasing to the eye,” along with extended reports of local geology, including the locations of rich mineral deposits.⁸¹ It was Cooper’s decision, however, not to borrow many of these kinds of realistic details, along with his lack of first-hand familiarity with the west, that has driven critics past and present to deride or question the lack of representational veracity in the tale, even though he attests it to be a work of the “imagination.”⁸²

Most of Cooper’s readers would not have known the difference between a fictionalized or accurately represented west (nor would they have cared). Nonetheless, throughout *The Prairie* Cooper does manage to elucidate a western environment wrought from his sources—the “monotonous rolling of the Prairies,” for example, echoes Stephen Long’s “monotony of a vast unbroken plain.”⁸³ In the first and second (1832) editions, he delineates the geo-physical parameters of the post-Purchase region for his readers as: “these natural meadows [which] lie[s] west of the Mississippi, at a distance of a few hundred miles from that river” and “which extend, with so little diversity of character, to the bases of the Rocky Mountains” (*P* 4, 11). Distances to previously explored and mapped rivers are specified, albeit loosely: “the place of rendezvous is many leagues from this, on the banks of La Platte” (*P* 177). The dry environment endemic to much of what was then known of the Great Plains is brought forward for the reader through a number of periodic phrases such as “bruised and withered grass”; “clouds of dust”; “hard and thirsty soil”; “wilderness of weeds”; and decaying herbage (*P* 11, 205, 74).

What Cooper chose to draw from his sources in terms of realistic detail, does more than set a physical background. Representations of aridity and barrenness, for example, are all in

keeping with the “disheartening assurance that long, and seemingly interminable, tracts of territory must be passed, before the wishes of the humblest agriculturist could be realized” (*P* 14). With an abundance of “meagre herbage” and “a hard and unyielding soil,” Cooper’s rhetoric positions his prairie setting far from that “distant” day in which he foresees condensed settlement—where agricultural and other “employments” can flourish—even while he underscores the existence of more arable land farther west (*P* 11, *N* 289).

Though agricultural practice is mentioned in the tale, it is relegated to the “accursed” Teton Sioux (*P* 203). In his description of the tribe’s “temporary encampment,” Cooper writes that “[h]ere and there on the bottom, were to be seen the evidences of a hasty and imperfect culture of such indigenous vegetables as were of a quick growth, and which were known to flourish, without the aid of art, in deep and alluvial soils” (*P* 271). While recalling Natty’s mention of the prairie’s “rich and extensive bottoms,” the Sioux are stripped of any real agency in the production of their food (*P* 355). Given where they are positioned in Cooper’s Native taxonomy, his readers would be quick to find the negative in this description and dismiss this migrating tribes’ obvious abilities to work with their environment as easily as Cooper does.

Similarly, apart from the requisite bison and horses, the only other fauna that appear in the tale are those which the Sioux attach to the physician-cum-naturalist, Obed: “[a]s if in mockery of his pursuit, sundry toads, frogs, lizards, butterflies, etc. all duly prepared to take their places, at some future day, in his own private cabinet were attached to the solitary lock on his head, to his ears, and to various other conspicuous parts of his person” (*P* 304). This is, of course, one of the many times Obed is the butt of Cooper’s humor and for his readers the image of the naturalist essentially wearing the prairie home would certainly have been an amusing one. Anxious to return to the settlements to preserve “the treasures of knowledge of which” he is “the

unworthy receptacle,” Obed’s drapery, however, not only attests to a rich environment, but also enacts the appropriation of Native land by Anglo-Americans and, increasingly, the reduction of the local to the status of de-contextualized specimens (*P* 322). Obed and his “crawling museum” disappear from the tale, though, effecting an erasure of the indigenous environment, just as Cooper’s less noble Sioux also vanish from the prairie setting.

If the geographic size of the Purchase was felt to be a threat after annexation, those fears, as previously noted, were even more pronounced by 1827, and the unknowns of the boundless physical landscape itself heightened the public’s unease, even while that same open territory excited the public’s imagination and appetite for speculation and settlement. Cooper seems to want his readers to recognize the western territories as existent, even if only in a limited way. Yet, even in those moments where a more realistic vision of the western territory strikes through, those representations are contained through erasure or deferral, narratively holding the environment at bay, as he does with human populations. With the actual west a site of geophysical and geopolitical unknowns, for Cooper to have borrowed more from his sources, would perhaps have made this troubling region *too* real, and instead, anxieties around this vast terrain manifest in his more impressionistic figurations.

A River Running Through It

Cooper’s endlessly noted prairie as ocean analogy, one found in expedition reports such as Stephen Long’s, is in many ways a concession to his reader’s (and his own) lack of familiarity with the landscape. For all his use of this trope, of the “endless waves of the prairie,” however, it is the springs and rivers that stand out in Cooper’s text and for a “desert district” it is surprisingly wet (*P* 25, 27). Clearly, the many expressions of fog and vapour strewn throughout the narrative

are used for dramatic effect and as an atmospheric space of concealment for many of his characters. At the same time, though, his descriptions of waterways, even if hyperbolic, contribute to a more realistic depiction of his western setting. Though Cooper's tale takes place in the wetter autumn, for example, Natty accurately states that, depending on the time of year, a "foaming watercourse" will become a "desert of drifting sand" (*P* 262).

While Matthew Wynn Sivils notes that "[w]hile the environment of Cooper's novel is not devoid of water, it is a scarce resource that scrawls thin veins of lushness across the land," Cooper's representations of rivers suggest a different, though perhaps, parallel reading, as over the course the tale Cooper builds an image of an immense watershed, one in keeping with the size of the Louisiana Purchase itself.⁸⁴ At the Bush's first camp, Cooper writes:

A clear and gurgling spring burst out of the side of the declivity, and joining its waters to those of other similar little fountains in its vicinity, their united contributions formed a run, which was easily to be traced, for miles along the Prairie, by the scattering foliage and verdure which occasionally grew within the influence of its moisture. (*P* 18)

Later, when Natty and party are fleeing the Sioux after a prairie fire, they arrive at "the bank of the stream, which was one of the hundred rivers that serve to conduct, through the mighty arteries of the Missouri and Mississippi, the waters of that vast and still uninhabited region to the ocean" (*P* 259, 260). Similarly, the Teton encampment "rose...somewhat abruptly from a fertile bottom which stretched along the margin of one of the numberless water-courses of that region;" the "river took its rise near the base of the Rocky Mountains, and after washing a vast extent of the plain, it mingled its waters with a still larger stream, to become finally lost in the turbid current of the Missouri" (*P* 271).

These descriptions, which convey a surprising topographical awareness of the Mississippi drainage basin for the time, even if informed by expedition reports, all contribute to the sense of a continuous emptying of the western interior.⁸⁵ At the end of *The Prairie*, these waterways speed his Anglo characters away from the barren grasslands as quickly as Cooper describes the squatters and settlers moving towards them:

The water-courses were at their height, and the boat went down the swift current like a bird. The passage proved prosperous and speedy. In less than a third of the time that it would have been necessary for the same journey by land, it was accomplished by the favor of those rapid rivers. Issuing from one stream into another, as the veins of the human body communicate with the larger channels of life, they soon entered the grand artery of the western waters and landed safely, at the very door of the father of Inez. (*P* 375)

Apart from removing his characters quickly from the prairie (while also speeding the narrative along), these waterways are those of commercial conveyance, ones which in this passage are represented as a “prosperous” lifeblood (*P* 375). For Cooper it is water, the “thousand avenues to the inland trade, and to the waters of the Pacific” which brings commercial and national viability to the interior, and it is annexed water rights that act as an important buffer against regional separation from the Union, else “a thousand irritating and embarrassing questions about the right to navigate the rivers and bays, would unavoidably occur, which are now unknown” (*P* 9, *N* 2:341). “Nature,” as he writes in *Notions*, “has adapted these vast regions to profit by internal trade. This species of commerce can never be conducted on terms so favourable as those offered by the Union” and in *The Prairie* his description of the “united

contributions,” of smaller into larger waterways suggests a similar contribution from local and state interests to a commercially and, hence, geographically unified nation (*N* 2:344, *P* 18).

In the same way that Cooper projects a vision of both national cohesion and imperialist desire through the narratively peripheral expedition of Lewis and Clark, in his representations of the “hundred rivers” and “numberless water-courses” coursing through and from the prairie interior, he effects a similar outcome (*P* 259, 271). Erasing geophysical obstructions, Cooper’s rivers etch the parameters of the Missouri Territory and beyond; from the Pacific, to “the base of the Rocky Mountains,” to the mouth of the Mississippi, marking both internal and global trade potentialities (*P* 271). Though many of these rivers run through a “still uninhabited region,” the prospects for a vital expansion are clear (*P* 260). While as Ann Perrin suggests, Cooper may have purposely chosen to ignore realistic details from sources such as Lewis’ *Journal*, which described areas of “commercial opportunities and their relation to future urbanization,” those opportunities are made implicit in his representations of the vast Mississippi water basin.⁸⁶

Cooper narrates a nation rich with waterways that not only erase commercial and other barriers to the process of territorialization, but encourage it—his nationalistic representations bypassing the amorphous boundaries of the interior west, as well as other contested territories and land held by others. As with much else in *The Prairie* and in his prefaces to later editions, his depictions of a watery west, however, are ambiguous. While he will acknowledge that, “rivers abound,” he adds that the region “is nearly destitute of brooks and the smaller water courses, which tend so much to comfort and fertility”⁸⁷ In a similar fashion, the fictional Natty remarks on “a broad and swift river, such as the Lord has made many of its fellows in this desert,” but this, too, is qualified: “For here may natur’ be seen in all its richness, trees alone excepted. Trees, which are to the ‘arth as fruits are to a garden; without them nothing can be

pleasant, or thoroughly useful” (P 253). Apart from the troubling inconsistency that chopping down local trees is also a concern vocalized by Natty, in these expressions Cooper nonetheless re-situates the prairie grasslands as untenable for Anglo-American settlement, reflecting his uncertainty towards expansion and forestalling engagement in the region’s potential to some future time.

Conclusion: A Return to the Sea

Not long after publishing *The Prairie*, Cooper returned to the more familiar environs of the east coast and the Atlantic with his second sea tale, *The Red Rover* (1827). Set in 1759 shortly after the fall of French Quebec to the British, Cooper’s moral drama of shifting allegiances, multiple identities, and law versus anarchy, revolves around the interactions between the pirate, the “Red Rover,” who for most of the novel conceals his patriotism, and the naval officer, Harry Wilder, who practices his own masquerades. Though much of the action takes place in Newport, R.I., the eventual chase of Wilder’s ship, the *Royal Caroline* by the Rover, provides the height of maritime action in the tale. Written at Cooper’s summerhouse in St. Ouen, the story of the Rover, as biographer Wayne Franklin remarks, “owed various debts” to Cooper’s crossing the Atlantic with his family in 1826.⁸⁸

There are a number of reasons why Cooper may have chosen to shift his attention both spatially and temporally away from the vast grasslands of *The Prairie*, not the least of which is that he had just written three wilderness novels and had temporarily killed off his main character. In a letter to Henry Colburn describing his forthcoming novel, Cooper provides another reason for returning to the sea, stating that it will be “nautical” and that he had never been “satisfied” with his first sea tale, *The Pilot*.⁸⁹ At the same time, Cooper’s health and circumstances had

both improved and as Franklin describes, he relished in the idyllic view from his house: “a landscape that hovered beyond him like a potent emblem of the world from which he, like his characters, enjoyed a fruitful if temporary detachment;” the house a refuge from personal and political affairs he had left behind in Manhattan.⁹⁰

I suggest, however, that there were deeper reasons for Cooper’s authorial desire to return to the sea novel than those above. Jerome McGann has noted how the time of a work’s composition or publication was the “crucial moment of critical reflection for Cooper, because it was the crucial moment that was for him in the greatest social flux.”⁹¹ One of the more noticeable aspects of *The Prairie* is how close in time the action of his western tale is to the time of publication, and given Cooper’s expressions of anxiety over territorialization that infuse the text, one senses that they were *too* close in time. While the Louisiana Purchase provides the historical framework for his tale, the ramifications of that exchange in the succeeding twenty-three years, as earlier discussed, manifest in *The Prairie* in numerous ways. As with similar work of the time, perhaps most notably Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s 1827 *Hope Leslie*, in all of Cooper’s historical romances, the temporal setting acts as a vehicle for “critical reflection” on contemporaneous issues. With *The Prairie*, however, temporality appears more porous, the exchanges between the past and the present perhaps too contiguous for comfort, however many changes in the nation had occurred in the interim. As such, and with his “poor Prairie” not selling particularly well, Cooper may have felt a strong desire to take up his pen and write a pre-Revolutionary tale as a way, in part, to focus on the early dreams and, hopefully, current successes of a democratic experiment that was still unfolding.⁹²

For some critics, it is Cooper’s prairie setting itself, which provides the means for him to work out the implications for democracy in a socially changing society. Blake Nevius, for

example, sounds a not uncommon theme that the advantage of Cooper's "neutral" setting is so he can "introduce, however implausibly, a variety of types embracing the whole spectrum of society and let them interact in a kind of forced and artificial democracy."⁹³ Orm Overland also suggests that this "neutral ground" allowed Cooper to bring his characters together "without the stifling influence of their all too barren social context."⁹⁴ Granted, the prairie setting often seems little more than a platform for his characters to project Cooper's opinions on a variety of topics, some only marginally related to the geographic space they find themselves in.

Yet, if Cooper was engaged in a narrative experiment, any sense of his enacting a positive outcome for an egalitarian democracy in the nation's 'center' is quickly curtailed by removing his characters from it—a not unsurprising outcome, given that many of the sociopolitical transitions which haunted Cooper emerged in large part because of the opportunities for emigration and settlement brought on by territorial expansion. As Cooper and many of his reader's well knew, in 1827, the (by then) State of Missouri, and Missouri and Arkansas Territories, were anything but "neutral" environments. The Creek had given up the remainder of their land in Georgia, with the removal of the Cherokee and Choctaw farther west several years away, all pressing on spaces occupied by existent indigenous populations. Farther south, Texas loomed as a space for troubling U.S. migration and potential separatism. The quasi-calming effect of the Missouri Compromise had done little to settle the debates over the extension of slavery deeper into the territories. From his sources alone, Cooper would also have gleaned that diverse populations with ever-changing levels of monopoly and varying allegiances had long inhabited his Great Plains setting.

In *The Prairie*, Cooper works to contain, neutralize, or erase the problematics inherent to the annexed region, though it is perhaps through these gestures that the author, intentionally or

not, acknowledges the difficulties of maintaining any form of neutrality in that conflicted space. From his Parisian aerie, this cosmopolitan author well knew that geography wields power—sociopolitical, cultural, commercial, and perceptual. Yet, the territorial claims in the west, which may have seemed firm through their paper purchase, when set in the context of national tensions in the 1820s, appear tenuous at best, as potentially uncertain as those for Cooper’s “Teton and the Pawnee and the Konza, and men of a dozen other tribes [who] claim to own these naked fields” (*P* 78). Cooper’s prairie ultimately manifests as an “unsettling foreign space,” one that traces back to the 1803 annexation, and one that projects forward to further territorialization and to the potential incorporation of other alien environments and populations.⁹⁵ In conjunction with his own imperialist projections of trans-continental expansion, however, *The Prairie* also reveals a nation struggling with the simultaneous desires for territorial growth versus a more considered restraint, a dichotomy which exemplifies in part what Andy Doolen refers to as the “paradox of ‘republican-imperial expansion,’” that is, that the expansion of slavery, the removal of native populations, and other processes of territorialization, “contradicted the popular theory that republicanism and colonialism were inimical to each other.”⁹⁶

One of the sustaining views of Cooper, admittedly one drawn to a large degree from his own works, is that of epicist of the west. As Philip Gura writes, the *Leatherstocking Tales* are a “paean to Manifest Destiny that described the settlement of the United States from New York to the Great Plains,” or as Anne Baker puts it more simply, the *Tales*, taken together, form an “epic of westward expansion,” though manifest destiny would not be coined for two more decades, and Cooper’s vision of “settlement” on the Great Plains is hardly laudatory.⁹⁷ These types of totalizing depictions of Cooper’s oeuvre (and of the west), while in some cases perpetuate a

triumphalist historicism, are also not surprising, as Cooper worked hard not only to ensure that his tales *were* read together, but to pen a history of the American experience in and through them

As the third of his *Leatherstocking Tales*, however, it is important to read *The Prairie* from the “crucial moment” in which it was written and published, not only for its many ideological and sociocultural undercurrents, but for the western imaginary Cooper constructs.⁹⁸

As Hsu remarks “literature both represents real places and actively reshapes their boundaries and cultural meanings,” a process that while not exclusive to Cooper is made clearly evident in *The Prairie*.⁹⁹ Yet, in his fictional grasslands, Cooper grapples not only with *where* to locate the literal and conceptual boundaries of the west, one that is encoded with earlier events and imaginings arising from other geographies, but with how to render and address the multiple “cultural meanings” that originate from the nation’s territorialization into that space.

Notes

¹ James Fenimore Cooper, *The Prairie: A Tale*, ed. James P. Elliot (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 9 (emphasis added), hereafter cited in text as *P*.

² Though written in very different time periods and circumstances, Cooper’s paean to homogenous unity is remarkably similar to that of John Jay, who as “Publius” wrote in his essay “Concerning Dangers from Foreign Force and Influence” that: “With equal pleasure I have as often taken notice that Providence has been pleased to give this one connected country to one united people--a people descended from the same ancestors, speaking the same language, professing the same religion, attached to the same principles of government, very similar in their manners and customs, and who, by their joint counsels, arms, and efforts, fighting side by side throughout a long and bloody war, have nobly established general liberty and independence.” *Federalist Papers*, No. 2, October 31, 1787, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/fed02.asp.

³ Cooper, *The Prairie*, 4, 6 (1832 and 1840 prefaces respectively).

⁴ Hsuan L. Hsu, *Geography and the Production of Space in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 21; Ann Baker, *Heartless Immensity: Literature, Culture, and Geography in Antebellum America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 13.

⁵ Hsu, *Geography*, 26.

⁶ Baker, *Heartless Immensity*, 28.

⁷ Here I borrow from Christopher Irmscher who refers to the hybrid productions of natural history in the early republic as “products of the *instructed* imagination,” that is texts which merged both art and science. *The Poetics of Natural History: From John Bartram to William James* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 7 (emphasis in original).

⁸ Susan Fenimore Cooper, introduction to *The Prairie* (New York: Hurd & Houghton & Cambridge Riverside Press, 1877), xii.

⁹ Meriwether Lewis, *History of the Expedition under the Command of Captains Lewis and Clark*...., 2 vol., ed. Nicholas Biddle and Paul Allen (Philadelphia and New York: Bradford & Inskeep; Abm. H. Inskeep, 1814); Edwin James, *Account of an Expedition from Pittsburgh to the Rocky Mountains*...., 2 vol., Edwin James, compilation (Philadelphia: H.C. Carey and I. Lea, 1823); Zebulon Montgomery Pike, *An Account of Expeditions to the Sources of the Mississippi, and through the Western Parts of Louisiana*.... (Philadelphia: Cornelius and Andrew Conrad and Co., 1810).

¹⁰ Susan Fenimore Cooper, introduction to *The Prairie*, xii.

¹¹ Cooper, *The Prairie* 1, 4 (1827 and 1832 prefaces respectively).

¹² For more on this, see Matthew Wynn Sivils, “Dr. Bat’s Ass: Buffon, American Degeneracy, and Cooper’s *The Prairie*,” *Western American Literature* 44, no. 4 (Winter 2010): 342-359. While there is no immediate evidence that Cooper read botanist Thomas Nuttall’s *A Journal of Travels into the Arkansa Territory* (1819), the character of Obed Bat is a fair caricature of the hyper-devoted naturalist.

¹³ James Fenimore Cooper, *Notions of the Americans Picked up by a Travelling Bachelor*, 2 vol., introduction Robert E. Spiller (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1963), 2:287 (hereafter cited in text as *N*).

¹⁴ Though the Pawnee and Sioux find counterparts in *Mohicans and The Pioneers*, Cooper still understood them as far western tribes and, given many of his sources, he was predisposed to paint the Sioux as he does. Writing to Parisian bookseller, Charles Gosselin, Cooper remarks that the Sioux are “notoriously the most troublesome and the most lawless of all the western Indians” and that his own description of them is “a little poetic, as it should be, but in the main it is correct enough.” Cooper to Charles Gosselin, 1-7? [*sic*] April 1827,” *The Letters and Journals of James Fenimore Cooper*, 6 vols., ed. James Beard (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960-1968), 1: 212. As has often been noted, Cooper lets it be known that the model for Hard-Heart is the Pawnee “Apollo” Peterlasharoo, mentioned in Long’s account and, for Cooper, an “acquaintance.” Cooper to the Duchess de Broglie, Ce 22 de Mars 1827,” *Letters*, 1:199.

¹⁵ An early example of this binary can be found in John Filson’s 1784 pamphlet *The Discovery, Settlement and Present State of Kentucke*, where “barbarous savages” are set against more noble Native attributes of hardiness, courage, and “well formed” physiques. (Wilmington: James Adams: 1784), 57, 75.

¹⁶ Cooper to Carey and Lea, Tuesday the 4th April—1826,” in Beard, *Letters*, 1:131.

¹⁷ Wayne Franklin, *James Fenimore Cooper, The Later Years* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 266.

¹⁸ Sandra M. Gustafson, “Natty in the 1820s: Creole Subjects and Democratic Aesthetics in the Early Leatherstocking Tales,” in *Creole Subjects in the Colonial Americas: Empires, Texts, Identities*, ed. Ralph Bauer and José Antonio Mazzotti (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 483.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 482.

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- ²⁰ In a letter to New York publisher John Murray, Cooper, in referencing *The Pioneers*, acknowledged the public's taste for scenes of "action and strong excitement" and hoped that his new work (*The Last of the Mohicans*) would not be found wanting. Cooper to John Murray, New York, Nov 29th 1822, in Beard, *Letters*, 1:85.
- ²¹ Andy Doolen, *Territories of Empire: U.S. Writing from the Louisiana Purchase to Mexican Independence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 165.
- ²² France had taken over the territory from the Spanish in March 1803; the United States raised the flag in New Orleans in December of that year. The exchange was more dramatic in St. Louis, where on March 9 and 10, 1804, the Spanish flag was lowered, the French flag was raised and then lowered, and the American flag was then raised.
- ²³ Doolen, *Territories of Empire*, 151.
- ²⁴ As Cooper wrote: "Colburn has announced it 'Notions of the Americans, picked up by a travelling Bachelor.' This is his title and not mine; but I think it will be your interest to retain it." Cooper to Carey, Lea, and Carey, London May 6th 1828, in Beard, *Letters*, 1:262.
- ²⁵ Cooper to Charles Wilkes, Paris, Jan. 25th, 1828, in Beard, *Letters*, 1: 240.
- ²⁶ Cooper to Carey, Lea, and Carey, London. March 11th 1828, in Beard, *Letters*, 1: 258.
- ²⁷ Cooper, *The Prairie*, 4 (1832 preface).
- ²⁸ Jeffrey Ostler, *The Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism from Lewis and Clark to Wounded Knee* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 36.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*
- ³⁰ Ezra Tawil, *The Making of Racial Sentiment: Slavery and the Birth of the Frontier Romance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 61.
- ³¹ There are many excellent texts covering Indian removal. For a good overview of policy, see Ronald N. Satz, *American Indian Policy in the Jacksonian Era* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001). For policy and its affect on literary production, see Lucy Maddox's *Removals: Nineteenth-Century American Literature and the Politics of Indian Affairs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991). For specific tribes, see Christopher D. Haveman, ed. and annotation, *Bending Their Way Onward: Creek Indian Removal in Documents* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press), and Theda Perdue and Michael D. Green, *The Cherokee Nation and the Trail of Tears* (New York: Viking, 2007). See also Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire-Building* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997).
- ³² Cooper, *The Prairie*, 6 (1849 preface).
- ³³ Jared Gardner, *Master Plots: Race and the Founding of an American Literature, 1787-1845* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1998), 114; Anna Brickhouse, *Transamerican Literary Relations and the Nineteenth-Century Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 73.
- ³⁴ Doolen, *Territories*, 169, 170.
- ³⁵ Jerome McGann, "Fenimore Cooper's Anti-aesthetic and the Representation of Conflicted History," *Modern Language Quarterly* 72, no. 2 (June 2012): 145.
- ³⁶ Geoffrey Rans, *Cooper's Leather-Stocking Novels: A Secular Reading* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 115.
- ³⁷ Doolen, *Territories*, 156.
- ³⁸ John Kukla, *A Wilderness So Immense: The Louisiana Purchase and the Destiny of America* (New York: Random House, Inc., 2003), 261.

³⁹ Thomas Jefferson, “Biographical Sketch of Meriwether Lewis, to Paul Allen, April 13, 1813,” in *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. H. A. Washington (New York: H. W. Derby, 1861): 7:480.

⁴⁰ Lewis, *History of the Expedition*, 2:70.

⁴¹ Ironically, Pike visited a Pawnee village in southern Nebraska in the fall of 1806, around the same time the fictional Middleton returns to Hard-Hearts village in the same general area. The Pawnee were requested by Pike to take down the Spanish flag, a further irony given his subsequent arrest by the Spanish for entering their territory.

⁴² Stephanie LeMenager, *Manifest and Other Destinies: Territorial Fictions of the Nineteenth-Century United States*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 42.

⁴³ Anne Perrin, “Open Frontiers, Closed Deserts: The Contradictions between Source and Text in James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Prairie*,” James Fenimore Cooper Society, <http://www.oneonta.edu/external/cooper/articles/suny/2001suny-perrin.html>, 2001, 72.

⁴⁴ Referring to *The Pioneers*, Timothy Sweet suggests, “Cooper is reluctant even to recognize the hunting economy as an economy. Rather, he identifies a purely hunting and trapping mode of life with the Indians.” For Sweet, Natty (and Mohegan) as “solitary outsiders,” who are not part of a complex economy and do not threaten the limits of natural abundance, “provide the illusion of escape from economy altogether.” I would argue that Cooper’s portrayal of Natty in *The Prairie* is also designed to disassociate him from non-Native players in the local economy, one that he is very much a part of. Timothy Sweet, *American Georgics: Economy and Environment in Early American Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 157, emphasis in original.

⁴⁵ Edward Watts, “Exploring, Trading, Trapping, Travel, and Early Fiction, 1780-1850,” in *A Companion to the Literature and Culture of the American West*, ed. Nicolas S. Witschi (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2001), 24.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴⁷ Admittedly, Paul Hover is also “an American borderer,” who exhibits by “thrusting forth his hand” in greeting, “the true freedom of manner,” that marks his type (*P* 109). At the same time, Cooper admits that those who live on the “skirts” lay the ground for the “intelligent people” to advance (*P* 66). And, of course, Natty is also a border figure. But in his expressions, Cooper’s overall discomfort with liminal figures is evident.

⁴⁸ Peter J. Kastor, “What are the Advantages of the Acquisition?”: Inventing Expansion in the Early American Republic,” *American Quarterly*, 60, no.4 (December 2008): 1014.

⁴⁹ Doolen, *Territories*, 4. As Doolen notes, the term is used by Christina Burnett and Burke Marshall to refer to post 1898 U.S. policies towards the newly acquired Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines, a policy which he argues can be seen a work as early as the Louisiana Purchase.

⁵⁰ James Madison, *The Writings of James Madison, comprising his Public Papers and his Private Correspondence, including his numerous letters and documents now for the first time printed*, ed. Galliard Hunt (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Son, 1900), 7:160.

⁵¹ Doolen, *Territories*, 156.

⁵² Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 369.

⁵³ Kukla, *A Wilderness So Immense*, 294.

⁵⁴ Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 53.

⁵⁵ Cooper's views on slavery are difficult to parse and often lead to perplexing contradictions. Though outside the scope of this project to delve deeply into Cooper's political leanings, his varied responses near the time he wrote *The Prairie* nonetheless convey the often conflicted and edgy discourses over the question of 'control' as pertaining to the socio-political issues of the time. For more thorough explorations of Cooper's evolving political views, see his own writings and letters. See also Wayne Franklin, *James Fenimore Cooper, The Early Years* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007) and Franklin, *The Later Years*.

⁵⁶ For a concise overview of the Nullification crisis, see Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, esp. pp. 395-410.

⁵⁷ Cooper to Peter Augustus Jay, Dresden, July 15, 1830, in Beard, *Letters*, 421. In similar fashion, Cooper would term the Compromise of 1850 "a fatal error," adding that "Every week knocks a link out of the chain of the Union" (208). Cooper to William Branford Shubrick, Hall, Cooperstown, July 22, 1850, in Beard, *Letters*, 6: 207.

⁵⁸ Watts, "Exploring, Trading, Trapping," 24.

⁵⁹ Karen Lentz Madison and R. D. Madison offer up the French-established towns of "Ste. Genevieve and Fort de Chartres/Fort Kaskaskia" as possible candidates, adding "if Cooper indeed had any real place at all in mind." Karen Lentz Madison and R.D. Madison, "Reading James Fenimore Cooper's *The Prairie*, An Introduction and Annotations," James Fenimore Cooper Society Miscellaneous Papers No. 32, 2016, James Fenimore Cooper Society, <http://external.oneonta.edu/cooper/articles/other/2016other-madison.html>.

⁶⁰ Lance Shachterle, "On The Prairie," in *Leather-Stocking Redux; Or, Old Tales, New Essays*, ed. Jeffrey Walker (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 2011), 376 (emphasis in original).

⁶¹ Gustafson, "Natty in the 1820s," 471.

⁶² Robert S. Levine, "Introduction: New Essays on "Race," Writing, and Representation in Early America," *Early American Literature* 46, no. 2 (2011), 201.

⁶³ LeMenager, *Manifest Destinies*, 39.

⁶⁴ Gardner, *Master Plots*, 114. See also Ezra Tawil, who reads Cooper's portrayal of "white-Indian warfare," through the lens of contemporaneous insecurities over black-white conflict, *The Making of Racial Sentiment*, 6; and Bill Christopherson, "The Last of the Mohicans and the Missouri Crisis," *Early American Literature* 46, no. 2 (2011).

⁶⁵ Gardner, *Master Plots*, 86, 114.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 109-10.

⁶⁷ Brickhouse, *Transamerican Literary Relations*, 60, 61.

⁶⁸ Benjamin Latrobe quote in Kukla, *A Wilderness*, 333.

⁶⁹ Cooper, *Notions*, 277-8. In his 1827 preface to *The Prairie*, Cooper similarly remarks that "in the endless confusion of names, customs, opinions and languages, which exists among the tribes of the West, the author has paid much more attention to sound and convenience, than to literal truth." *The Prairie*, 1.

⁷⁰ For more on the comedy of Bat's language, see Sivils, "Dr. Bat's Ass" and Jillian Sayre, "A Cuisine of Contre Te(r)ms: Consumption, Community and Intralinguistic Struggle in *The Prairie*," *James Fenimore Cooper Society Miscellaneous Papers*, 28 (May 2011), <http://www.external.oneonta.edu/cooper/articles/ala/2011ala-sayre.html>.

⁷¹ Eric Cheyfitz, "Literally White, Figuratively Red: The Frontier of Translation in *The Pioneers*," in *James Fenimore Cooper: New Critical Essays*, ed. Robert Clark (London and Totowa, NJ: Vision Press Limited and Barnes & Noble Books, 1985), 60.

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- ⁷² Kenneth Cmiel, *Democratic Eloquence: The Fight over Popular Speech in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 13, 58.
- ⁷³ *Ibid.*, 17.
- ⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 57.
- ⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 17, 57.
- ⁷⁶ Gardner, *Master Plots*, 114.
- ⁷⁷ Chefitz, "Literally White, Figuratively Red," 66.
- ⁷⁸ For a concise overview of negative reactions to Jefferson's purchase from (mostly) New England-based Federalist-Whigs and others, sparking a separatist movement that lasted until 1815, see Kukla, *A Wilderness So Immense*, 284-309.
- ⁷⁹ Matthew Wynn Sivils, "Its Ghastly Visage": Cooper's Leather-Stocking Tales and the Grotesque," in *Leather-Stocking Redux; Or, Old Tales, New Essays*, ed. Jeffrey Walker (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 2011), 180; Franklin, *The Later Years*, 441; Gustafson, "Natty in the 1820s," 483; William Merrill Decker, "The Africanist Presence in *The Pioneers*," in *Leather-Stocking Redux; Or, Old Tales, New Essays*, ed. Jeffrey Walker (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 2011), 12.
- ⁸⁰ Sivils, "Ghastly Visage," 180.
- ⁸¹ James, *Account of an Expedition*, 182.
- ⁸² Cooper, *The Prairie*, 2 (1827 Preface).
- ⁸³ James, *Account of an Expedition*, 232.
- ⁸⁴ Sivils. "Dr. Bat's Ass," 348.
- ⁸⁵ This draining also mimics contemporaneous views of how the region was formed, Cooper taking pains to reiterate those views while etching the prairie/ocean metaphor in his reader's minds: "Indeed so very striking was the resemblance between the water and the land, that, however much the geologist might sneer at so simple a theory, it would have been difficult for a poet not to have felt that the formation of the one had been produced by the subsiding dominion of the other" (*Prairie*, 13).
- ⁸⁶ Perrin, "Open Frontiers, Closed Deserts," 72.
- ⁸⁷ Cooper, *The Prairie*, 4 (1832 preface).
- ⁸⁸ Franklin, *The Later Years*, 27
- ⁸⁹ Cooper's letter to Henry Colburn quoted in Franklin, *The Later Years*, 26.
- ⁹⁰ Franklin, *Later Years*, 28.
- ⁹¹ Jerome McGann, "Fenimore Cooper's Anti-aesthetic and the Representation of Conflicted History," *Modern Language Quarterly* 72, no. 2 (June 2012): 145.
- ⁹² Cooper to Carey, Lea, and Carey, London. March 11th 1828," in Beard, *Letters*, 1:257.
- ⁹³ Blake Nevius, introduction to *The Prairie* (New York: Penguin, 1987), xii.
- ⁹⁴ Orm Overland, *The Making and Meaning of an American Classic: James Fenimore Cooper's The Prairie* (New York: Humanities Press, 1973), 40.
- ⁹⁵ Hsu, *Geography*, 26.
- ⁹⁶ Doolen, *Territories*, 153-4.
- ⁹⁷ Philip F. Gura, *Truth's Ragged Edge: The Rise of the American Novel* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013), 39; Baker, *Heartless Immensity*, 105.
- ⁹⁸ McGann, "Fenimore Cooper's Anti-aesthetic," 145.
- ⁹⁹ Hsu, *Geography*, 19.

Chapter Two

Troubling Expansion on the Oregon Trail: Francis Parkman and the Enclosing of the American West

Introduction

A young man on board from St. Louis, bound for Santa Fe, has one brother on the Atlantic, another on the Pacific, and a third on the Mississippi, while he is going to the [Rio Grande] del Norte. So much for American wandering.

Francis Parkman, *The Oregon Trail Journal*, 1846¹

At the beginning of their return trip home, and several days out from Fort Laramie in what is now eastern Wyoming, Francis Parkman Jr., along with fellow traveler, his cousin Quincy Adams Shaw, and the rest of the small party, accept the invitation of fur trader Joseph Bissonette to spend some time at his camp. The camp, as Parkman describes it, was one “where about forty Dakota lodges were pitched in a circle, and beyond them a few lodges of the friendly Shienne” [*sic*], while the St. Louis-born Bissonette also “lived in the Indian manner.”² At one point during their stay, Parkman writes: “[a]s the sun was setting that evening a great crowd gathered on the plain by the side of our tent, to try the speed of their horses. These were of every shape, size, and color. Some came from California, some from the States, some from among the mountains, and some from the wild bands of the prairie” (*OT* 261). The horses “were of every hue, white, black, red, and gray, or mottled and clouded with a strange variety of colors. They all had a wild and startled look, very different from the staid and sober aspect of a well-bred city steed” (*OT* 261).

In his description of these horses, Parkman delineates a western space that incorporates the entirety of the continent, one reminiscent of the brothers who are either heading to, or have already settled in Santa Fé, on the Pacific, on the Mississippi, or who have remained on the Atlantic coast, a geophysical breadth of Anglo-American dispersion and emigration that for many in the 1840s signaled an exhilarating national expansion and greater opportunity; for others, such as Parkman, an unnerving display of an egalitarian democracy and potential chaos. At the same time, the spectrum of colors the horses exhibit barely mask Parkman's racialized hierarchy of humans, from white dominancy to mixed races "mottled and clouded with a strange variety of colors" (*OT* 261). For Parkman, nurtured among Boston's patrician elite, these uncivilized and seemingly disoriented horses not only display a heterogeneous complexity that disturbs his sense of whiteness, but one that resonates with New England Federalist-Whig anxieties over the make-up of the emigrants heading west and a nation's trepidation over other populations that might ultimately inhabit those vast territories.

Parkman set out in 1846 on his "tour of curiosity and amusement to the Rocky Mountains" in part to find some relief for his nerves and poor eyesight (*OT* 9). More importantly, he traveled west with the professed goal of viewing Indians in their "primitive state" in order to add verisimilitude to his planned history of "the whole course of the American conflict between France and England; or in other words, the history of the American forest," a project that over the course of his life would cover a hundred years from 1632-1763 (*OT* 111).³ Parkman was convinced he must "live in the midst of" the Natives, and "become, as it were, one of them" in order to meet his objective (*OT* 111). He gets his wish, spending several weeks in the company of one band of Oglala Sioux, though the experience will do little to alter the preconceived racial stereotypes he traveled west with. Parkman, however, also finds something

he may have expected, but hadn't gone searching for—a wave of emigrants and migrants heading towards Oregon, California, and other western reaches. As he traveled from Independence, Missouri, through the Platte River valley of Nebraska, then into Wyoming and southeastern Colorado, Parkman observed western expansion in action, and he didn't like what he saw.

Everywhere Parkman turns, he is faced with their movement. But unlike Cooper's fictive borderer populations who are fairly trampling each other to gain access to the newly designated territory of the Louisiana Purchase, the emigrant's movements in Parkman's west exhibit a sustained and inexorable plodding, a representation that makes sense given that the average distance a caravan covered in a day was only ten to twenty miles. Yet, over and over Parkman remarks on the wagons, "creeping on the slow procession," moving "inch by inch, on the interminable journey," or of a caravan found "[s]teadily advancing from the hills, dragging it's slow length along the plain, wearily toiling on its way, to found new empires in the West" (*OT* 57, 103, 65). In his journal notes for *The Oregon Trail*, Parkman expresses his annoyance early on with the "lagging pace of the emigrants" and resolves that his party should "push on alone" (*J* 435). He is eager to get on with the business of finding Indians and the 'past,' and these forward-thinking Americans are slowing him down.

Parkman claims to be baffled by the "various motives that give impulse to this strange migration," adding that "whatever they may be, whether an insane hope of a better condition in life, or a desire of shaking off restraints of law and society, or mere restlessness, certain it is, that multitudes bitterly repent the journey, and after they have reached the land of promise, are happy enough to escape from it" (*OT* 13). Though he will also mark "restlessness" as one of the motives for his own travels, and will encounter a handful of individual emigrants he can find

favor with, when taken as “multitudes,” Parkman sees only ignorant rubes dressed in “brown homespun” who are embarked on a fool’s mission (*OT* 16, 13). Yet, here on the plains is the nation’s expansion playing out in real time—linear, endless, and persistent. For Parkman, whose own political leanings grew from a background steeped in a conservative Federalist-Whig ideology, and for whom, any power in the hands of the ignorant masses represented “the source of all the dangers which threaten the United States,” this visible outpouring of post-Jacksonian democracy is anathema to his core beliefs.⁴

In *The Oregon Trail*, while Parkman works to literately and narratively disengage from the reality of western migration, his efforts at deflection, however, are conflicted and ambivalent ones. Even as he derides the emigrant’s motives, Parkman espouses his belief in territorial expansion and American exceptionalism in relation to, for example, the need for more troops to control Native populations on the western plains, as well as the rightness of the U.S. war against Mexico, which had been officially declared several weeks after his departure from St. Louis. With the signing of the Oregon Treaty that summer, and with that of the Treaty of Hidalgo Guadalupe two years away, the United States had already, and would in the not distant future, officially appropriate millions of acres of the continental west to the Pacific coast. In *The Oregon Trail*, the signs of the nation’s territorial aggrandizement are everywhere visible, not only through the migration of settler emigrants, but in the troops and “long trains of government wagons, laden with stores” for them, “crawling at a snail’s pace towards Santa Fé” (*OT* 334). But Parkman’s narrative also makes evident that the wide-ranging mobility he dismisses is not as unidirectional as his descriptions of wagons suggest; Mexico’s *Alta California* and the Oregon Country already sites of Anglo-American presence and reverse migratory practice.

For all its overt and mostly sustained focus on Indian encounters and the excitement of traveling through a “hunter’s paradise,” *The Oregon Trail* registers Parkman’s trepidation over a more far-reaching national expansion, an anxiety conveyed most prominently through his encounters with the emigrants who are moving throughout the western half of the country (*OT* 49). Yet, even as he fashions what in many ways reads as a kind of anti-emigration tract, echoing that movement’s rhetoric, Parkman narrates an ambivalent prejudice, one that not only undercuts his sardonic expressions towards “American wandering,” but that also reinforces the very ideology of a pioneering, and justly manifest, national imperialism that he works to disparage (*J* 416).

First serialized in *The Knickerbocker Magazine* from February 1847 to February 1849, Parkman’s *The Oregon Trail, or A Summer out of Bounds*, was subsequently published as *The California and Oregon Trail* by George Putnam in 1849, this first edition’s title having been chosen by Putnam to boost sales following the Gold Rush. Parkman would be frustrated that his book was reviewed, and perhaps sold alongside an increasing number of travel books and booster pamphlets about California and Oregon, complaining in a letter to his friend, Ephraim George (E.G.) Squier, that the “unfortunate *Trail* seems likely to be choked under a mass of California books. If you can give it a push, you will do it a favor.”⁵ As far as he was concerned, he had, after all, not written a guidebook for emigrant settlers to the west coast, but what reviewers called a “spirited narrative of prairie life and travel”; one filled with “graphic sketches of Indian life and character;” and containing “a good many picturesque and amusing sketches of wild adventure in the Far West.”⁶

The *Christian Examiner*, the primary mouthpiece for Boston’s liberal Unitarians, however, found fault with the fact that Parkman’s “modesty” did not allow him “to give more of

his own reflections upon the race which he had such rare opportunities of studying.”⁷ Though reviewed in the *Examiner*, the Unitarian Parkman would never be able to countenance the ideas of Ralph Waldo Emerson and other Transcendentalists who were published in the periodical or to its anti-slavery and philanthropic stance, and his “modesty” perhaps signals the editor’s awareness of his unprogressive social leanings.

Given that he traveled west in a summer that was not only marked by a relatively large migration, but one that also saw the movements of troops and trade caravans along the Santa Fé Trail, the sentiments espoused in the *Examiner* find equivalent expression among modern critics who have been variously perplexed or annoyed that Parkman seemed to miss the importance of what was transpiring around him. In 1942, Bernard DeVoto most notably complained that it “was Parkman’s fortune to witness and take part in one of the greatest national experiences...It is our misfortune that he did not understand the smallest part of it,” a theme that has been echoed by critics ever since.⁸

Bothered that Parkman failed to provide insight into the profundity of the moment, more recent scholars such as Elmer N. Feltskog have also found the author “obtuse,” adding that “had he known it,” Parkman met “almost all the people who bent the wilderness to the design of the American Empire,” a critical scholarship which itself unfortunately perpetuates a “winning of the west” historicism.⁹ Most critics argue further that Parkman’s supposed failure of analysis is due in large part to the prejudices and snobbery of his Boston Brahmin background.¹⁰ Along the same lines, apologists for Parkman, argue that he just “had no interest in such affairs” as the overland migration, an argument taken as corroborated by Parkman’s own expressed motives for traveling west.¹¹

That Parkman set out on his tour weighted with a New England patrician's belief in class, racial, and intellectual superiority is unquestioned. But, importantly, Parkman's regionally inflected social and political outlook is a deeply Anglo-centric one, shaped in large part by a view of Boston's aristocratic men as part of genealogy of "gentlemen leaders" in line with the British explorer-conquerors he plans to write about, and his own sense of the American west would, in large part, never really leave the rarified orbit of Boston and its Atlantic orientation.¹² At one point in his journal, Parkman makes clear his heritage, noting that the "western character" seems to be missing the "English reserve or 'offishness,'" adding with no hint of self-deprecation, "I observe this trait in myself."¹³ Parkman would not have understood the emigrant's motives because they were not his own; he is on a round-trip adventure tour, not an assumed one-way trip for the purpose of settlement or for ongoing trade. But, more significantly, while *The Oregon Trail* makes clear Parkman's imperialist stance towards territorialization, it is one siphoned through Boston's place in a historical, pre-national past, rather than through the American nationalism of the 1840s that helped drive the population west.

Nonetheless, Parkman understood very well the meaning of what, in the opening line of *The Oregon Trail*, he calls the "great western movement that was then taking place" and it is precisely through his efforts to disassociate from the representative forces of expansion, that he makes his awareness manifest (*OT* 10). Even as he works to circumvent any association with that "movement," Parkman's dismissal of emigrant's founding "empires," for example, exposes an ambivalent, yet underlying anxiety, and for an author who is presumably uninterested in the whole enterprise—who shrugs off the broad geographical sweep of a nation in motion—Parkman carefully documents, and elaborates on, his encounters with emigrants throughout *The Oregon Trail* (10, 65).

Parkman's trepidation was not lost on at least one contemporaneous reviewer. In praising their native son for a work of "pleasing and truthful sketches" of the west, the editors of the Whig *North American Review* also use the piece as a forum to air their distaste of, as well as alarm over, the "truant disposition" of the emigrants, who are hardly "pioneers of civilization."¹⁴ Mirroring not only views expressed by Parkman, but the rhetoric of other Whigs and mainly Eastern anti-emigrationists in general, the reviewer's add: "This want of local attachments, this insatiable thirst for wandering and adventure, is, we fear, the most striking trait in the character of the whole population of the Mississippi valley" (183).¹⁵

Yet, it is the same "thirst for wandering and adventure" which drives Parkman, a fact he makes clear early on in *The Oregon Trail*. Though he qualifies this desire as a symptom of youth and re-stresses his motive of objective research, that is "to pursue some inquiries relative to the character and usages of the remote Indian nations," Parkman admits to sharing the same "restlessness, the love of wilds and hatred of cities, natural perhaps in early years to every unpurged son of Adam" (*OT* 16). Along with other contemporaneous seekers of western adventure, such as Lewis H. Garrard, a young Cincinnati who travelled west in the same year, Parkman hoped to experience what was imagined by many as an authentic west, one ostensibly unsullied by contact with Anglo-American civilization.

This west was imagined as one marked by certain essential components, such as those Washington Irving delineated before setting out on his western tour in 1832. In a letter to his brother Peter, Irving writes about the tempting offer to go west: "I should have an opportunity of seeing the remnants of those great Indian Tribes, which are now about to disappear as independent nations, or to be amalgamated under some new form of government." Additionally, Irving would have the chance to see the west "while still in a state of pristine wildness," and

“behold herds of buffaloes scouring their native prairies, before they are driven beyond the reach of a civilized tourist.”¹⁶ Fourteen years later, having read Irving and Cooper, and with John C. Frémont’s highly popular reports of his western expeditions in hand—reports which inspired Garrard to head west—Parkman traveled with the same expectations in mind: to “see the wilderness where it was as yet uninvaded by the hand of man,” and to have “a taste of the half-savage kind of life” (*J* 1:31).

The immediate realities of what he experiences in the west, however, trouble these pre-conceptions and Parkman, like Irving and others before him, is forced to negotiate a landscape that does not always fit with, and people who do not represent or respond to, his expectations or motives, and he finds a west that is far from “uninvaded” (*J* 131). When not staying with the Sioux or within the environs of trading post culture, the portion of the Oregon Trail that Parkman travels is not only populated with emigrants in the summer of 1846, but had already been well traveled, particularly since the “great migration” of 1843. Though in many ways the nation’s present (and future) is laid out in front of him, throughout *The Oregon Trail* Parkman, having traveled west with “Injuns on the brain,” works to maintain the illusion of being able to locate a “primitive past,” one that embodies the attributes of his imagined forests and indigenous populations of an historical east.¹⁷

Any reading of Parkman comes with a certain amount of difficulty. As Mark Peterson remarks, “the mythology of the heroic historian gets in the way,” a legendary status helped along by Parkman’s biographers and fed by Parkman himself.¹⁸ The invincible persona he works to construct in *The Oregon Trail*, one that he would reel out throughout his life, seems difficult to shake. Parkman’s biographers lost no time in bolstering his heroic status, latching on to his life-long struggle with various ailments in particular—disorders all exacerbated, rather than

improved by his trip west—and his courage in pressing ahead with writing *The Oregon Trail* and later histories in the face of such daunting physical and mental distress.¹⁹ Charles Haight Farnham spoke for many when he wrote that the “main attraction of [Parkman] lies in his picturesque, manly character, his inspiring example of fortitude and perseverance, and his training, and achievement as a historian. As a man he was even more interesting than his work.”²⁰

This focus on Parkman the man has made it difficult for scholars to read his works in any way except through that biographical lens, a tendency that has served in part, to foster the sense that *The Oregon Trail* is not in conversation with the events of the day, or what Nicolas Lawrence calls its “cultural detachment.”²¹ In the past three decades, however, critics have widened their focus of attention, reading *The Oregon Trail* through such contexts as the U.S.-Mexican War, the environment, and anxieties over class and immigration in the urban setting.²² While the bulk of criticism still focuses on Parkman’s constructions and deconstructions of a manly heroic personae, whether in relation to *The Oregon Trail* or his historical writing in general, this scholarship is nonetheless framed within the broader contexts of recent work in gender and trauma studies.²³

Yet, even with this insightful and probing scholarship, the fact remains, why read Parkman at all? Or, as Mark Peterson pointedly remarks, how are we “to see Parkman as anything more than a bundle of racial prejudices wrapped in the lush romantic prose of a bygone era.”²⁴ In a number of ways, and for my purposes, Parkman’s *The Oregon Trail* may seem an unlikely source for an examination of a nation’s ambivalent anxieties towards greater territorial expansion. For one, at a time when the United States was pressing its imperial designs and power transnationally—the nation’s focus on the Oregon boundary dispute (and resolution) and

the U.S. invasion of Mexico—Parkman’s adventure narrative resonates with intra-national anxieties.

These anxieties, however, are not only a product of the nation’s ambitions, but are expressed through a generic form that propagated western mythologies that helped drive those territorialist initiatives. As Jimmy L. Bryan rightly notes, western adventure narratives impacted territorial expansion and the ideology of manifest destiny as “meaningfully as social, economic, and political imperatives.”²⁵ Sharing many of the conventions of adventure narratives written by male contemporaries such as George Wilkes Kendall, Josiah Gregg, and Garrard, though not their democratizing impulse, Parkman’s *Trail* nonetheless similarly participates in advancing the kinds of rhetoric common to the processes of territorialization, such as Anglo-American exceptionalism, the inevitability of conquest, and the disappearing Native.

In *The Oregon Trail*, Parkman presents the west as effectively over, one already lost to white encroachment, even as he “sought to catch the West,” in its pristine state.²⁶ As Nathaniel Lewis notes for “most of the nineteenth century the West appeared to be past its peak and, like the indigenous Indian cultures, doomed to vanish.”²⁷ For Parkman and others, narrating an already ill-fated, though imagined west, was a common rhetorical device, a form of what Renato Rosaldo terms “imperialist nostalgia,” and one that provided western travel writers (among others) a form of temporal and personal absolution from the immediate destructive forces of the nation, by lamenting the loss of “the irrevocable past” in the present.²⁸ For the Anglo-centric Parkman, however, this nostalgia will also be narrativized through visions of imperialist conquests and displacements that have already occurred in the North American west.

Works such as Parkman’s have been widely accepted as contributing to the invention of a paradigmatic literary west, one that continues to haunt, and narrating a nostalgically tinged

western environment is part of that invention. In calling out the west as already past its usefulness for what Irving called the “curious tourist,” authors like Parkman narrated this lost American West as a bounded space—an enclosed fantasy of picturesque indigenous populations, exotic wildlife, and unspoiled nature.²⁹ Rather than reading texts such as *The Oregon Trail*, however, as solely propaganda for an expansionist ideology, or viewing “imperialist nostalgia” from one angle, a nostalgia that was undergirded by anxiety, Parkman’s narrative suggests a complementary reading. Buffalo, indigenous populations, and the geophysical west were, of course, real. Yet, while fully cognizant that the west was clearly not the permanent haven for indigenous populations, the “panacea” of earlier generations, Parkman, as with other travel writers, fashions a western imaginary that serves in many ways as an Anglo-American safety valve.³⁰ That is, by framing, and reinforcing, the west as a set of presumably authentic components, particularly in the decade in which Parkman and others traveled, this process of invention acted as a narrative buffer not only against personal culpability, the forces of a destructive imperialism, and the implications of modernity, but also from the realities of the potential incorporation of the populations and lands of Texas, the Southwest, California, or other territories.

A “wild and enterprising region”: Parkman’s Frontier Pioneers and the Rhetoric(s) of Emigration

As Parkman travels through the west, he can’t seem to get away from the emigrants fast enough. Throughout *The Oregon Trail*, Parkman expresses a continued desire to “withdraw in all speed” from what at one point he calls their “invasion” (*OT* 103). Whether encountering “yellow-visaged Missourians,” or crowds of “[t]all awkward men, in brown homespun,” or “women with cadaverous faces and long lank figures,” every effort is made to leave them “far

behind” (*OT* 57,103). Given these types of expressions, it is no surprise that historian John D. Unruh, Jr. in his 1979 work on overland emigration from 1840-1860, remarks that Parkman “seemed to regret every contact” with those heading west.³¹ While most critics also acknowledge Parkman’s frequent derisive and racist comments regarding indigenous populations and non-whites, many have nonetheless continued to share opinions such as Unruh’s and James D. Hart’s from 1956 that it was the “emigrants whom he met by the hundreds that Parkman disliked most of all.”³²

Parkman’s tendency to focus on the outward appearance of the emigrants in *The Oregon Trail* figures heavily in his description of Tom, “an overgrown boy, some eighteen years old, with a head as round and about as large as a pumpkin” whose “fever-and ague fits had dyed his face of a corresponding color” (*OT* 73). Noting that his body was “short and stout, but his legs of disproportioned and appalling length,” Parkman adds that: “I observed him at sunset, breasting the hill with gigantic strides, and standing against the sky on the summit, like a colossal pair of tongs” (*OT* 73). Tom falls asleep while on guard, forcing Parkman and company to help the emigrants find their lost cattle. He also finds “much fault with our [emigrant] companions” that the punishment of walking behind one’s horse for the day, the “wholesome law of the prairie,” is not meted out on the derelict young man (*OT* 73,74). In his journal notes, Parkman merely writes, “Emigrants’ cattle all driven off by wolves for many miles—their guard having fallen asleep. This detained us” (*J* 434).

Parkman’s bizarre and vivid rendering in *The Oregon Trail* is all the more striking in how it evokes a similar passage in James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Prairie*, an author Parkman read and deeply admired, referring to him later in life as the “most marked and original of all American writers” and noting in *The Oregon Trail* that in the use of a rifle, his hunter-guide Henry

Chatillon “could fairly out-rival Leatherstocking” (*OT* 156).³³ Near the beginning of *The Prairie*, when the emigrating Bush family first encounter Natty Bumppo on the plains, the legendary frontiersman is also seen at sunset: “[i]n the centre of this flood of fiery light a human form appeared, drawn against the gilded background, as distinctly, and seemingly as palpable, as though it would come within the grasp of any extended hand”; the “figure was colossal...[b]ut embedded, as it was, in its setting of garish light, it was impossible to distinguish its just proportions or true character.”³⁴ Whether Parkman’s is an inadvertent or, I believe, purposeful nod towards Cooper, while for the Bush party, the vision of the unnatural monstrosity quickly dissolves into the figure of the harmless, old trapper—a fictional prairie mirage—in his reverse representation of the very real emigrant as a distorted and grasping tool, both Parkman’s disgust and barely-concealed anxiety are clearly evident.

Though Parkman’s unease shows itself most clearly in his descriptions of the emigrants themselves, painting portraits of a people, many of whom in his words were “some of the vilest outcasts in the country,” these expressions nonetheless register trepidation towards the nation’s territorial and societal expansion in general (*OT* 13). Parkman was certainly not alone; many eastern conservatives were anxious over the nation’s aggrandizement, particularly leading up to and after the 1845 annexation of the slaveholding Republic of Texas. As Thomas R. Hietala notes, after Polk’s election in 1844, the “partisan split over expansion became even more pronounced, with the Democrats urging rapid expansion and the Whigs counseling caution and consolidation.”³⁵ What underlay these anxieties were sociopolitical and commercial matters that were multiple, complex, and variable, and which were by no means universally or consistently held, either within a given political party, region, or individual.

Broadly, however, concerns among conservative Whigs revolved around issues of slavery; potential shifts in and control of commercial interests; and fears, especially for those in the Northeast, of losing elite status in the face of immigration in urban areas and the equally enlarging heterogeneous population spreading west. Perhaps most unsettling was the idea of the dissolution of the republic, one resulting from the dispersion of its population, a rhetorical argument which at base meant a loss of control, whether that be political, commercial, sociocultural, or regional. Writing to a fellow Kentuckian in 1843, Southern Whig, Henry Clay voiced the sentiments of many of his Northern counterparts when he declared that it “is much more important that we unite, harmonize, and improve what we have than attempt to acquire more.”³⁶ For New Englander, Daniel Webster, who was particularly alarmed over expansion in relation to national stability and the spread of slavery, he declared in 1847 that: “We want no extension of territory; we want no accession of new states. The country is already large enough,” famously stating that the nation was “rushing upon perils headlong, and with our eyes all open.”³⁷

Later in life Parkman would express his own views on the importance of national cohesion (as well as those on the issue of slavery) in language that brooks no ambiguity. In an 1850 letter to Charles Eliot Norton, Parkman writes:

Just now we are on the edge of an election—a great row about the Fugitive Slave Law, and an infinity of nonsense talked and acted upon the subject. A great union party is forming in opposition to the abolitionists and the Southern fanatics. I would see every slave knocked on the head before I would see the Union go to pieces, and I would include in the sacrifice as many abolitionists as could conveniently be brought together.³⁸

Parkman's opinions on a variety of social issues, in particular his desire to see a democracy shorn of popular rule, were undoubtedly reinforced and further shaped by his youthful experiences on the Great Plains, where he is forced to confront the reality that heterogeneous masses are heading to all the western peripheries of the nation and taking their political views and cultural apparatus with them. It is not just emigrants or migrants in general who Parkman finds unnerving, but those who show evidence of the "rustic breeding" of the "frontier counties," and though he claims the seeming futility of the enterprise, in his encounters with the "great western movement" not only are notions of national cohesion troubled, but who might make up that future constituency (*OT* 319, 10). For Parkman and other like-minded Whigs among the New England conservative elite, national unity could not include universal suffrage, an issue he railed against throughout his life. As he expressed in an 1875 letter to Abbé Henri-Raymond Casgrain, "I have always declared openly my detestation of the unchecked rule of the masses, that is to say of universal suffrage, and the corruption which is sure to follow in every large and heterogeneous community."³⁹

By the election of 1844, western emigration and the issues of resolving the Oregon boundary had become a point of focus for Democrats, with many calling for "the whole of Oregon."⁴⁰ As the "Oregon question" was debated, the slogan of "Fifty-Four Forty or Fight!" was eventually adopted by the more aggressive expansionists—who Thomas Hietala calls the "ultras of the Democratic party"—as a militant rallying cry for the U.S. to acquire Oregon up to the northernmost British-held boundary (the southern border of Russian Alaska), by any means.⁴¹ For many Democrats, however, particularly southern Democrats, while demanding the annexation of Texas, they were, as Hietala notes, less "committed to the acquisition of all of Oregon."⁴²

Most Whigs favored compromise, fully aware that British military forces well exceeded those of the United States. Far from being anti-imperialist, however, they were more interested in gaining territory for their own commercial interests than in providing arable land for emigrants, sharing with expansionist Democrats a desire to keep the Pacific coast out of the hands of foreign governments, but differing on the means of accomplishing that objective.⁴³ Howard I. Kushner notes, for example, that a number of Whigs, particularly those in Massachusetts, opposed the “whole of Oregon” movement on the grounds that conflict with Britain or Russia would “lead American commerce and whaling in the Pacific Northwest to destruction.”⁴⁴

As John D. Unruh suggests, anti-emigration rhetoric ramped up during the 1843 migration, when “approximately 1,000 prospective settlers actually reached Oregon” and demonstrated “that wagons could indeed perform the journey,” a result which deflated earlier arguments against the feasibility of overland travel.⁴⁵ Among prominent anti-emigrationists, Horace Greeley, an otherwise strong, Whig advocate for territorial expansion, wrote in his New York Daily *Tribune* that: “the whole enterprise wore ‘an aspect of insanity,’ adding that the settlers would “awake from their ‘cherished delusion’ only when it was too late.”⁴⁶ In *The Oregon Trail*, Parkman, whether inadvertently or not, positions himself within this camp, mirroring Greeley’s words in his comments on the emigrant’s motives, their “insane hope of a better condition in life” and that, once reaching the “land of promise,” “multitudes [will] bitterly repent the journey” (*OT* 13).

As emigrants continued to successfully make the journey, however, those in favor of overland migration began to emphasize the heroic qualities of the overlanders. Calling up “previous movements westward throughout American history,” papers such as the Democratically-leaning and pro-emigration Washington *Union* found in the emigrants the same

“spirit of enterprise” which had driven earlier pioneers across the Alleghenies.⁴⁷ Even in Congress, “legislators outdid themselves in finding new ways of depicting the adventurous bravery of the hardy overlanders.”⁴⁸ As Unruh further remarks, “it did not take long before these brave pioneers were characterized as America’s finest citizens.”⁴⁹

Not only were they boldly fulfilling the goal of spreading democracy, but the press also touted the respectability of the overlanders and, as the St. Louis *Daily Missouri Republican* notes, their “good standing in the communities in which they have heretofore lived.”⁵⁰ With the question of the Oregon Country boundary a hot-button issue, papers such as the Independence, Missouri *Western Expositor* reminded Congress of the courageous “pioneers who are risking their all, and taking their wives and children to Oregon” a fact which should therefore quickly force a settlement of the issue, but, if found necessary to fight the British for it, then “truer hearts or better soldiers never primed a rifle or drew a deadlier bead.”⁵¹ As launching points for overland travel, it is not surprising that the most strident rallying cries for emigration and the “all of Oregon” movement were from Missouri and other Midwestern states, and in *The Oregon Trail*, Parkman notes that it is the “people of Illinois and Missouri,” who composed by far the greater part of the emigrants he encountered (*OT* 39).⁵²

While Parkman makes clear his aversion towards these “brave pioneers,” his narrative nonetheless registers ambivalence towards emigrants, particularly in relation to their regional and literary-historical credentials. By and large, critics have made little comment on this marked ambivalence, though Wilbur R. Jacobs does note, “Parkman did esteem manly virtues when he found them, regardless of social position or education.”⁵³ Parkman qualifies his criteria for a grudging tolerance at one point, describing a group of emigrants as “all that could be desired, rude indeed in manners, but frank, manly and intelligent” (*OT* 58). He parses his admiration

carefully, however, as when coming upon another large group, of “some fifty [wagons] in number,” he remarks that “they were fine-looking fellows, with an air of frankness, generosity, and even courtesy, having come from one of the least barbarous of the frontier counties,” this last qualification clearly a factor for Parkman in dividing the savage from quasi-civilized (*OT* 88).

Parkman saves his most glowing comments for those emigrants who are (or seem to be) spawned from the same frontier genealogy whose stereotyped qualities were resurrected by advocates of overland migration. Early in *The Oregon Trail*, Parkman describes what he calls a “characteristic” scene on arriving at Independence. Establishing his racism and white superiority from the outset, he first makes note of “some thirty or forty dark slavish-looking Spaniards [Mexicans], gazing stupidly out from beneath their broad hats;” of a “group of Indians, belonging to a remote Mexican tribe,” who are “crouching over a smouldering fire;” and “[o]ne or two French hunters from the mountains, with their long hair and buckskin dresses” (10, 11).

Parkman ends the passage, however, with a description of three men sitting on a log with “rifles lying across their knees,” the “foremost of these, a tall, strong figure with a clear blue eye and an open, intelligent face” (*OT* 11). Practically lifting pro-emigration rhetoric off the page, Parkman adds that the man “might very well represent that race of restless and intrepid pioneers whose axes and rifles have opened a path from the Alleghanies to the western prairies,” adding that he “was on his way to Oregon, probably a more congenial field to him than any that now remained on this side of the great plain” (*OT* 11). For both Parkman and emigration boosters, allusions to frontier pioneers such as Daniel Boone were purposeful. Parkman would meet Boone’s grandsons several times during his travels, once in Westport and again at Fort Laramie, though here, while these “three tall men” had “clearly inherited the adventurous character of that prince of pioneers,” Parkman finds “no signs of the quiet and tranquil spirit that so remarkably

distinguished” the legendary and fictionalized Boone (*OT* 121). At Independence, though, what Parkman denotes as the “extreme frontier of Missouri,” and a “wild and enterprising region,” it is not difficult to imagine his Mexicans, Indians, and trappers as reflecting that region’s untamed wildness, while the “tall, strong figure” and his companions convey the hardiness and “spirit of enterprise” evoked in the *Union* (*OT* 11,42, 45).

At another point, Parkman finds himself sharing guard duty with one of the emigrants: “Morton, was my companion,” he writes, and “laying our rifles on the grass, we sat down together by the fire” (*OT* 80). But more importantly, “Morton was a Kentuckian, an athletic fellow, with a fine intelligent face, and in his manners and conversation he showed the essential characteristics of a gentleman. Our conversation turned on the pioneers of his gallant native state” (*OT* 80). Parkman clearly wants the reader to equate his own adventurousness with this exemplar of Kentucky; the reference to their rifles a key touch point. For Parkman, his “faithful friend, my rifle” is his badge of entry, and after several months in the west “a horse, a rifle and a knife seemed to make up the whole of life’s necessities” (*OT* 236, 256). Though Parkman’s clear intention is to draw parallels between this Kentuckian and himself, in remarking on their conversation of the pioneer past of this gentleman’s “gallant” state, he again evokes pro-emigration rhetoric, one that helped perpetuate the ideology of manifest destiny, even if his own view of the nation’s future arcs from the history of British imperialism in America and a destiny that does not include “an ignorant proletariat and a half-taught plutocracy.”⁵⁴

Later in the narrative, Parkman and party had hoped to travel with various “reinforcement[s]” for the return home along the Arkansas, men they had agreed to meet up with again at Bent’s Fort in Colorado (*OT* 255). One of these was “a young Kentuckian, of the true Kentucky blood, generous, impetuous, and a gentleman withal, [who] had come out to the

mountains with Russel's party of California emigrants" (*OT* 225). He had traveled west, but "[h]aving become disgusted with his emigrant associates," left them to return east (*OT* 255). Parkman relates that one of the "chief objects" this "gentleman" sought in heading west was "to kill an Indian, an exploit which he afterwards succeeded in achieving" as he passed through Pawnee country along the Arkansas (*OT* 255). Though Parkman expresses annoyance that this act might jeopardize his own and the parties' safety on their return trip, he seems untroubled with the Kentuckian's manly motive.

As with others who sought adventure in the west, Parkman hoped to acquire the traits that Washington Irving attaches to the experience of traveling into alien territories: "manliness, simplicity, and self-dependence most in unison with our political institutions."⁵⁵ This is to counter the idle effeminacy brought by sending "our youth abroad," a European tour Parkman had earlier enjoyed.⁵⁶ While Irving, having lived in Europe for so long, sought to re-establish himself as fully American through his western romp, in his hands, heading west on a gentleman's adventure is couched as a civic duty, and this model of the west as a forge for personal and national character building helped to spur more than a few to follow suit, though admittedly most thought little of civic obligations.

Jonathan Smith suggests that, perhaps more than anything else, Parkman sought to attain in the west "manliness, a nearly ineffable quality that combines the virtues of endurance, fortitude, courage, self-devotion, and competence (in the senses of ability and independent means of subsistence)."⁵⁷ Parkman, with his own visions of historical British and American "gentlemen" frontiersman in mind, wastes no small effort on showing his manly grit during various travails, making sure the reader knows that in the west: "each man lives by the strength of his arm and the valor of his heart" and that here "society is reduced to its original elements,

the whole fabric of art and conventionality is struck rudely to pieces, and men find themselves suddenly brought back to the wants and resources of their original natures” (*OT* 63).

For Kim Townsend, and not without good reason, this masculinity boils down to those three “strong, silent men who, with their best friends, their rifles, conquered the West,” and throughout western travel narratives, underneath the manly virtues of the enterprising adventurer, runs the undercurrent of potential, or actual, aggression and violence.⁵⁸ In Amy Greenberg’s masterful study of “martial” and “restrained” models of manhood, and the impact of these conceptions on continental territorial expansion and later foreign policy, she suggests that in “martial manhood,” a broad conception which held a particular appeal for Democrats in the 1840s, it is the “masculine qualities of strength, aggression, and even violence, [that] better defined a true man.”⁵⁹ Though imbued with Federalist-Whig and Anglo-centric sensibilities, Parkman’s chivalric gesturing—the “strength of his arm and the valor of his heart”—also appealed to those across party lines drawn towards a more martial masculinity and his reasons for traveling west, as well, mirrored those of adventure seekers from all regions of the country.⁶⁰

Just as Parkman hoped to “taste the half-savage kind of life,” for example, so did New Orleans *Picayune* editor George Wilkins Kendall, who decided to head west to “find new subjects upon which to write, as well as to participate in the wild-excitement of buffalo-hunting, and other sports of the border and prairie life.”⁶¹ In *The Oregon Trail*, while in the Black [Laramie] mountains and spotting elk, wolves, deer, and sheep, Parkman declares, “I was in the midst of a hunter’s paradise,” clearly relishing the opportunity for blood sport, while announcing to other like-minded travelers what the western environment has to offer (*OT* 227). Yet, as with Kendall, Irving, and others, it is Parkman’s reveling in the risk-taking practice of killing buffalo and professed abandonment of any self-restraint, which most overtly enacts a martial

masculinity, however subsumed beneath the benign umbrella of a gentleman's tour and one taken, in part, for scholarly "observation" as well (*OT* 111). Fashioning the west as a "hunter's paradise," however, Parkman and other 'sportsmen' are little different from the Kentucky "gentleman" whose goal heading west was "to kill an Indian" (*OT* 255).

While Parkman sees examples of masculine virtue (and martial strength) in the Kentucky men, he also projects onto them a frontier genealogy that undergirds expansionist discourse, even if, as in the case of Boone's grandsons, they fall short of a fictionalized ideal. These are the resolute pioneers in the vanguard of a wide-spreading territorial aggrandizement, and Parkman has no trouble seeing them settle in Oregon, or wherever a "more congenial field" can be found (*OT* 11). Parkman's views of the Kentuckians, and his expansionist visions, however, are routed through his Bostonian Anglo-centrism and his deep attraction to the imperialistic "patrician European soldier-explorer[s]" who "conquered" a pre-Revolutionary west, such as British Army officer and frontiersman, Major Robert Rogers who, as Wilbur R. Jacobs notes, was Parkman's "favorite boyhood role model."⁶² Mirroring the rhetoric of pro-expansionists, *The Oregon Trail* registers an American territorialist vision that reaches to the Pacific coast. But for Parkman that frontier marks the edge of a trajectory of territorial expansion begun a hundred years earlier.

Parkman's frontier boundaries, however, are conflicted ones. While the Kentuckians and others of their ilk serve to bolster his own masculine image, they represent in many ways a fantasy of aggrandizement, that is, one that does not include the "vilest outcasts" or even the general population of Midwesterners who make up the largest number of emigrants (*OT* 13). Yet, he will also find one group of emigrant "backwoodsmen," men of the same, brave stock as "the volunteers of Monterey and Buena Vista"—a good many of whom were from Kentucky—to be "the rudest and most ignorant of the frontier population" (*OT* 104). As with the ill-bred, and

“startled” horses who gather on the prairie, these men are utterly paralyzed with “extraordinary perplexity and indecision,” “bewildered and amazed, like a troop of schoolboys lost in the woods,” and “totally out of their element” (*OT* 103, 104). They convey a “high and bold spirit,” but Parkman declares: “the *forest* is the home of the backwoodsman. On the remote prairie he is totally at a loss” (*OT* 104,103, emphasis in original).

In *The Oregon Trail*, Parkman carves out the geophysical space between the edges of Missouri or other “frontier counties” and Fort Leavenworth several days away as his definition of what constitutes the frontier (*OT* 319). It is in this tightly circumscribed space, not the continent-spanning trajectory, where Parkman locates the origins of an emigrating populace who disrupt any notion of a viable, expanding nation. Even in those who ostensibly meet his criteria of pioneering credentials, a “high and bold spirit,” Parkman’s descriptions of emigrant’s lost in a state of utter chaos, not only registers his own anxious disfavor, but an undercurrent of unease felt by many that the nation was spreading out of control (*OT* 103).

True West: The Geophysical Landscape and the Ambiguity of (Romantic) Authenticity

The “authentic” west that Parkman hoped to experience and, along with other western travel narratives, helped to fashion, is one that never existed except in the literary imagination. While *The Oregon Trail* will impact perceptions of an American west in the cultural imagination, it is in many ways a west also filtered through fictive images of the Indian, French, and British frontiers of a colonial North American past. Yet, in his opening preface, Parkman makes clear his intention to provide the reader with a reliable account of the “manners and character of Indians,” asserting that he will only relate what he has observed first hand and adding that “[i]n justifying his claim to accuracy on this point, it is hardly necessary to advert to

the representations given by poets and novelists, which for the most part, are mere creations of fancy” (*OT*, n.p.). Claims of accuracy were particularly endemic to western travel narratives to such a degree that, as Nathaniel Lewis suggests, “if authenticity became the discourse of [authorial] legitimation, it also proved to be an implosive and crippling foundation for western literature.”⁶³ That is, as long as textual authority was grounded in “the figure of the reliable author,” then what should be conveyed to the reader “was the landscape and people, not the author’s creative vision.”⁶⁴

In the same *North American Review* that saw the editors admiring Parkman, they also reviewed Edwin Bryant’s 1849 emigrant guide, *What I Saw in California*. Though the editors find the book of “very inferior merit,” one which “would never have seen the light” except for the Gold Rush, Bryant’s preface serves as a typical example of prefatorial claims for accuracy found throughout similar western adventure narratives, assertions usually accompanied by a disclaimer that the author is not striving for any comparable literary merit:

In the succeeding pages, the author has endeavored to furnish a faithful sketch of the country through which he travelled—its capabilities, scenery, and population. He has carefully avoided such embellishment as would tend to impress the reader with a false or incorrect idea of what he saw and describes. He has invented nothing to make his narrative more dramatic and amusing than the truth may render it. His design has been to furnish a volume entertaining and instructive to the general reader, and reliable and useful to the traveller and emigrant to the Pacific.⁶⁵

Though Parkman applies his initial claims of credibility to his observations of Natives, *The Oregon Trail* registers a similar narrative move towards reliable reporting in the manner in which he works to disabuse the reader of any fantasies concerning the western environment. Early on, he remarks that “[s]hould any one of my readers ever be impelled to visit the prairies...I can assure him that he need not think to enter at once upon the paradise of his imagination. A dreary preliminary, protracted crossing of the threshold, awaits him before he finds himself fairly upon the verge of the ‘great American desert’” (OT 34). It is the fertile country before this, which “will probably answer tolerably well to his preconceived ideas of the prairie; for this it is from which picturesque tourists, painters, poets, and novelists, who have seldom penetrated farther, have derived their conceptions of the whole region” (OT 34). But Parkman doesn’t leave it there, making sure his readers learn that there will “be enough to damp his ardor” even in this locale (OT 34). In a long enumeration of potential woes, Parkman lists stuck wagons, runaway horses, mud for beds, broken harnesses, lean provisions, no game, “penetrating heat,” drenching thunderstorms, and a host of ‘varmits’ to add to the suffering—wolves, “badger holes,” “legions of frogs,” “a profusion of snakes,” and “unnumbered mosquitos” (OT 35).

Western adventure writers made an art out of expressing the misery (and sublimity) of the western environment, in large part to add exceptionalist merit to their ability to traverse and survive in such an intimidating terrain, and Parkman is no exception. This is not to suggest that Parkman or others didn’t actually suffer in their travels; they did. Yet, unlike writers such as Josiah Gregg, who make clear their intention to offer, as he does, practical advice “for the benefit of future travelers,” such as how “to make a secure shelter for cargo,” or what makes up the “kitchen and table-ware’ of the traders,” Parkman’s litany is not really intended to offer any

advice as such, but to bolster his image and add drama to his narrative.⁶⁶ In directly addressing the reader, however, and at this particular point in his narrative—what would be a traveller’s own “jumping off” place—Parkman’s language gestures toward the kind of dissuasive rhetoric used by opponents of overland migration.

As with critics past and present, the editor’s of the *North American Review* note that Parkman is “not interested in [the emigrant’s] undertaking,” yet he seems unable to curtail remarks on that very undertaking.⁶⁷ In his journal notes, Parkman writes: “We passed the recent grave of one of the Mormons, who had been buried near the road” (*J* 426). By *The Oregon Trail*, though, Parkman elaborates on finding “abundant and melancholy traces” of the emigrant’s progress, passing graves of those who “had sickened and died,” the “earth torn up” by wolves, while another is marked by a “a piece of plank” on which is burned, “Mary Ellis, Died May 7th, Aged Two Months” (*OT* 56). Continuing, Parkman relates: “nothing could speak more for the hardihood, or rather infatuation, of the adventurers, or the sufferings that await them on the journey,” stressing their foolish passion over their daring (*OT* 56).

The potential suffering for children constituted one of the many outcries the anti-emigrationists used to halt the flow to Oregon. The nationalist New York *Aurora* (briefly edited by Walt Whitman), for one, lamented that emigrant children were no more than “tender offerings to the mad ambition of their parents.”⁶⁸ Though Parkman is hardly writing a politically-oriented editorial, his focus on the deadly trials of the journey mirror opinion pieces such as that in the *Aurora*—however ironic given that periodical’s democratic bent—which also cautioned that the western environment “if suddenly and incautiously encountered, devours up the intruder, and leaves his bones to whiten in solitude and his fate untold forever.”⁶⁹

The Oregon Trail is filled with other encounters and images that sound an uneasy and cautionary note. Granted, while Parkman will travel later with two men who had “just come from California, with a large band of horses, which they had sold at Bent’s Fort”—most likely for the war effort—and meets trappers and traders returning from Fort Laramie or other locations heading back towards St. Louis, it is not surprising that he would meet very few emigrants coming the other direction who had successfully made the trip to Oregon (OT 336). Yet, Parkman seems compelled to relate the woes of emigrants, as with one group of “ill-looking fellows, thin and swarthy, with care-worn anxious faces, and lips rigidly compressed,” who had lost two members of their party, one killed by the Pawnee, had lost all their oxen, and had all their horses stolen by the Sioux; since “leaving the settlements, they had met with nothing but misfortune” (OT 82).

On meeting the entire caravan of this “unfortunate party,” Parkman finds them of “that fierce spirit which impelled their ancestors, scarce more lawless than themselves, from the German forests, to inundate Europe, and break to pieces the Roman empire” (OT 84). In his journal, Parkman is more direct in his representations, describing the “physique of the Pennsylvania country people” as “very fine,” but they are “brutish clods,” “dull and stupid,” while one of the stage-drivers “completely realized [his] idea of an Indian trader—bluff, boisterous, profane, and course,” pointedly adding that he finds it hard to believe he and they are of the same species (J 408). While, in *The Oregon Trail*, Parkman applauds their “hardy endurance,” these are not the sober, industrious and “honest Germans” as drawn a hundred years earlier by J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur as worthy “Americans”(OT 83).⁷⁰

For Parkman, these emigrants are little different from the Irish immigrants who he sees flooding Boston or the “yellow-visaged Missouriians” heading west (OT 57). As with these

groups, his derogatory and racist assessment of the “swarthy” Germans—a term he applies equally to Mexicans and French-Canadians as well in *The Oregon Trail*—serves to affirm his Anglo-Saxon whiteness and social superiority, yet also reinforces Parkman’s anxiety over who is heading to the peripheries (*OT* 84). Returning to the hazards of emigration, on meeting the “unfortunate party” again near Fort Laramie, and with little “to carry them upon their journey,” Parkman reminds the reader that “the most toilsome and hazardous part of [the journey] lay still before them” (*OT* 84). As if to press the point further, Parkman follows with a short passage on finding furniture and other material goods left behind by the “stern privations of the way,” so that the “cherished relic is soon flung out to scorch and crack upon the hot prairie” (*OT* 84).

Parkman’s narrative is interjected with passages such as these detailing the perils of heading west, ones that, while written with a heavy hand nonetheless make clear his sentiments towards the enterprise of emigration, and particularly, the emigrants he sees taking part in it. Yet, *The Oregon Trail* is also a “creation of fancy,” one drawn in similar fashion to those “picturesque tourists, painters, poets, and novelists” he claims distance from in his preface. As Lewis H. Garrard writes in *Wah-To-Yah*, a narrative of his tour to Colorado and into Mexico: “[a]nyone, in the Far West, is romantically inclined.”⁷¹ As with this and other western travel narratives, Parkman’s narrative is filled as well with romantic representations of the western landscape: clouds “like light piles of cotton;” “the smooth prairie gracefully rising in ocean-like swells on every side;” and thunder which bursts with a “terrific crash” and roars “over the boundless waste of the prairie, seeming to roll around the whole circle of the firmament with a peculiar and awful reverberation” (*OT* 44, 46, 55). Among the many examples, one finds, to our ears, the painfully overwrought “the night was chill, dank, and dark, the dank grass bending over

the icy dew-drops,” and the common comparison of land and sea, a “pale blue prairie...stretching to the farthest horizon, like a serene and tranquil ocean” (*OT* 61, 238).

At one point Parkman remarks on “a rich a gorgeous sunset—an American sunset,” a rare expression of nationalism, and perhaps another reference to Cooper, whose dying trapper in *The Prairie* faces the “glorious tints of an American sunset” (*OT* 40).⁷² Even on reaching the “long-expected valley of the Platte,” which has “not one picturesque or beautiful feature; nor had it any of the features of grandeur,” Parkman manages to imbue the site with attributes which provide both a sense of awe-filling magnitude and the “stern and wild associations” which reduce men to “their original natures”; a view that in “its vast extent, its solitude and its wildness” is “striking to the imagination” (*OT* 63).

Along with his contemporaries, Parkman also makes continuous references to a dull and dry environment, with little to relieve the “monotony of the waste;” a “country arid, broken, and so parched by sun that none of the plants familiar to our more favored soil would flourish upon it” (*OT* 113). Western travel narratives are riddled with expressions such as these, as in Garrard’s narrative where the “heat glimmering up from the parched ground dazzled the eye, and we rode as if on the ocean—so shut up were we by the plain stretching away on all sides, no object to break the monotonous view except a stray bison or antelope.”⁷³ Without question, the Great Plains can be hot and dry, and even now, some vistas in the western States can be remarkably free of human presence or artifacts. In the 1830s and 1840s, however, romantic representations of the geophysical environment contributed to a collective imaginary that reduced the geophysical west to a catalog of ubiquitous attributes (heat, thunderstorms, vastness) and accompanying sensations (monotony, awe), which helped further encode the larger, imaginary West.

In some of his descriptions, however, Parkman not only makes clear his own edgy apprehension at being in the wilderness, but his opinion of emigrants also filters through. Parkman finds a particular dislike for cacti, which for him take on a poisonous, almost satanic edge. At one point he notes that “cacti were hanging like reptiles at the edges of every ravine;” at another he is “surrounded by tall bare hills, overspread from top to bottom with prickly-pears and other cacti, they seemed like clinging reptiles” (*OT* 113, 151). As though imagining the vulgar, unrefined emigrants, Parkman notes the appearance of “various uncouth plants, conspicuous among which appeared the reptile-like prickly-pear” growing in a ravine (*OT* 68). This is a more realized, fear-inducing west for Parkman himself, but it is also one in which his trepidation towards emigrants—the “uncouth figures, shivering in the drizzling rain”—and the implications of their migration for the nation’s future, finds expression, however subtle (*OT* 66).

Travelling aboard the steamboat *Radnor* from St. Louis to Kansas, MO, Parkman makes note in his journal of a group of “Kanza or Caw [Kaw] Indians,” whose “gravity seem[s] to me rather *vacant* than *dignified*” (*J* 416, emphasis in original). The “wretched Caw Indians on board were hired, for a pint of whiskey, to sing;” when “playing cards on the deck,” they “have a paper for begging” (*J* 416). In *The Oregon Trail*, Parkman only remarks on “a party of Kansas Indians” aboard the *Radnor*, but later writes: “[w]e overtook on the way [to Westport] our late fellow-travelers, the Kansas Indians, who, adorned with all their finery, were proceeding homeward at a round pace; and whatever they might have seemed on board the boat, they made a very striking and picturesque feature in the forest landscape” (*OT* 11).

Parkman’s shift from describing the “wretched” Caw on board the *Radnor* and that same group transformed into a “picturesque” snapshot, is not only an editorial move, but exemplifies

what, in *The Oregon Trail*, becomes for Parkman a difficult dance between several “wests.” By freezing a romantic image of the Caw and blending them into the scenic background, Parkman pushes against his racial disgust and denies their actual presence by suggesting that “whatever they might have seemed” is somehow less genuine than the forest portrait. At the same time, he encodes a nostalgic vision of the west in the present, while further positioning this indigenous population in the same temporal frame as the “history of the American forest” he plans to write. Throughout *The Oregon Trail*, Parkman’s romantic representations of the geophysical west function as emblematic, however much that west is directly experienced. Parkman’s attempts to enclose and elide the reality of west—it’s populations and landscape—is, however, untenable, and as with the Caw, the presence of the emigrants infiltrate his representations, forming a counter-narrative to his western imaginary that resonates instead with an anxious authenticity.

“Hunting Indians:” Territorial Expansion and the Nostalgic West

In *The Oregon Trail*, Parkman works to neutralize the immediate and troubling presence of emigrants and other signs of aggrandizement, in part, by fashioning the west—the land and its indigenous populations—as an environment already, or soon to be, relegated to a primitive past. Noting that “[g]reat changes are at hand in that region,” Parkman points to the “stream of emigration to Oregon and California” as the source which will not only cause the depletion of the buffalo, but force the Natives to “scatter” over the plains (*OT* 177). Parkman sets the emigrants alongside the Natives to strike the point home: “a long train of emigrant wagons...passed the encampment of a people whom they and their descendants, in the space of a century, are to sweep from the face of the earth” (*OT* 90). He adds that the “Indians will soon be corrupted by the example of the whites, abased by whiskey and overawed by military posts” (*OT* 177).

Envisioning (incorrectly) that in “a few years the traveller may pass in tolerable security through Sioux country,” Parkman laments that the west’s “danger and its charm will have disappeared together” (*OT* 177). In a later preface to *The Oregon Trail*, Parkman would again blame the emigrants, and hence territorial expansion, for having “blighted the charm” of the West.⁷⁴

As noted earlier, this disingenuous move of “imperialist nostalgia”—what Renato Rosaldo defines as a nostalgia “where people mourn the passing of what they themselves have transformed”—was common to western travel narratives, especially from the 1830s on.⁷⁵ For Parkman and other tourist-adventurers wandering the west, this rhetoric allowed for a false stance of neutrality, of non-engagement with the processes by which the “danger” and “charm” will disappear. This rhetoric, one which readers of Parkman’s narrative would have found familiar, was then re-circulated and reinforced through reviews. In the Congregationalist and anti-slavery New York *Independent*, for example, the editors attest that *The Oregon Trail* “will be preserved among the historical mementoes of a race which having been borne onward to the Rocky Mountains by the tide of civilization from the Atlantic coast, is destined ere long to be overwhelmed by that rushing in from the Pacific,” corroborating and adding to a discourse of Anglo-American exceptionalism and the inevitability of conquest over Native populations.⁷⁶

But Parkman also blames the Natives in the form of the Oglala Sioux. By living a life he sees as unchanged from “immemorial time;” whose “manners” or “ideas” have not been changed by “contact with civilization;” and who know “nothing of the power and real character of the white men,” the Oglala, and by proxy, other indigenous populations of the Great Plains region, forecast their own destruction. Essentially, Parkman derides the very presumed authenticity, the living Native past that he went looking for, as being *too* “primitive” (*OT* 111). Others, such as John C. Frémont, would also place the blame squarely with Native populations for their own and

the buffalo's imminent demise, while similarly bemoaning that like "the Indians themselves, [the buffalo] have been a characteristic of the Great West" and "like them, they are visibly diminishing."⁷⁷ Even as Frémont points to the trade in buffalo skins at American posts as one reason for the buffalo's lagging numbers, it is the Natives who are at fault. Not only do they use skins every year to make "new lodgings," but where the "Indians derive their entire support" from the buffalo, they "slaughter them with a thoughtless and abominable abundance."⁷⁸

As Nathaniel Lewis remarks, "Parkman, like so many others, hoped in his book to fix, in that word's many meanings, the authentic, doomed region," though any notion of an "authentic" west was debated then as now.⁷⁹ Nonetheless, the western imaginary that Parkman and other western travel writers encode plays two ways. Even as the nostalgic "fix" is an attempt to relegate the ramifications of expansion outside the realities of temporal immediacy, that same rhetoric helped to press territorial expansion forward in the present into a still "boundless" west, one where Parkman, employing the ubiquitous rhetoric of explorers, at one point exclaims that "[n]o civilized eye but mine had ever looked upon the waste" (*OT* 210).

While Parkman attempts to throw off censure, positioning himself at one point in the unlikely "posture of armed neutrality," his nostalgic ruminations run alongside representations of Natives that belie his prefatorial claim of "accuracy" (*OT* 221). Parkman flatters himself that "having been domesticated for several weeks among one of the wildest of the wild hordes that roam over the remote prairies," that he has drawn a "faithful picture of the scenes that passed daily before my eyes" (*OT* 176). Among these "thorough savages," Parkman acknowledges that the Oglala have a different "manner of life" than eastern tribes (*OT* 176). Yet, in regard to "the mental features of the Indians," Parkman cannot move beyond a mindset that relegates all indigenous populations to the same camp, "the same picture, slightly changed in shade and

coloring,” that “would serve with very few exceptions for all the tribes that lie north of the Mexican territories” (*OT* 176).

In relation to perceptions of warlike temperament and perceived danger, Parkman applies a similar uniformity, even as he specifies particular tribes. The Delaware are “now the most adventurous and dreaded warriors upon the prairies [...] sending out their little war parties as far as the Rocky Mountains, and into the Mexican territories (*OT* 24). The Pawnee are “a treacherous, cowardly banditti, who by a thousand acts of pillage and murder, have deserved summary chastisement at the hands of government” (*OT* 62). The Arapahoe are “ferocious barbarians,” “wolfish, sinister, and malignant,” and if not for General Kearny, traveling with his Army of the West toward Bent’s Fort, and “renewing his threats of the previous year” of “extermination,” Parkman would feel less confident in visiting one of their villages on the return home. As to Kearney’s earlier encounter with the Arapahoe, Parkman writes that in the face of the “white warriors,” the Arapahoe must surely have been “lost in astonishment” and “confounded in awe” (*OT* 215, 288, 215, 216, 290). In stressing uniformity among the Natives of the Great Plains, a population whose “reason moves in [its] beaten track,” and whose “soul is dormant;” who acquiesce to the power of the whites, yet are dangerous and powerful, Parkman adds to a discourse which foregrounds the reason’s for the Native’s inevitable demise. Yet, this same rhetoric also conveniently allowed the more aggressive proponents of territorial expansion and legislators of Indian policy to apply the same or similar ‘rules’ in their treatment of very different indigenous populations (*OT* 99).

Witnessing the interactions of emigrants and Natives at Fort Laramie, Parkman repeats his view that the Oglala and other tribes have not altered their ancient ways through contact with “civilization” (*OT* 176). Parkman’s idea of civilization, of course, is an Anglo-centric one, one

that is profoundly ignorant of, and frankly uncaring towards, any conception of Sioux history as anything more than what can be observed in a “faithful picture of scenes,” an irony not lost given Parkman’s historical purpose for “studying” them in the first place (*OT* 176). As Jeffrey Ostler notes: the “Sioux had traded with the French, British, and Spanish traders” for decades before Lewis and Clark had their “unprecedented engagement with [these] unfamiliar people”⁸⁰ Furthermore, as with all indigenous populations, the Sioux adopted various “adaptive strategies to resist total assimilation into a dominant social system and a loss of cultural integrity.”⁸¹ For Parkman, the “cultural integrity” of the Oglala merely signals a stubborn resistance to adopting the culture of white civilization, or rather elite, New England civilization. For this Bostonian, Parkman’s notion of what constitutes Native requirements for attaining a civilized state is tightly circumscribed, claiming of the Oglala that “[n]ot one of them can speak an [*sic*] European tongue, or has ever visited an American settlement,” where, ironically, to follow Parkman’s narrative, they would most likely find some of the nation’s “vilest outcasts” (*OT* 105, 13).

As Parkman continues his exegesis of Oglala history, he adds that their “wonder is giving way to indignation; and the result, unless vigilantly guarded against may be lamentable in the extreme” (*OT* 105). For this, Parkman feels a “military force and military law are urgently called for in that perilous region; and unless troops are speedily stationed at Fort Laramie, or elsewhere in the neighborhood, both the emigrants and other travellers will be exposed to most imminent risks” (*OT* 105). Parkman’s militant stance finds equivalent expression in his views that the American Fur Company not only holds a monopoly on the “Indian trade of this whole region” and that their officials “rule with an absolute sway,” but that the “arm of the United States has little force; for when we were there, the extreme outposts of her troops were about seven hundred miles to the eastward” (*OT* 97).⁸²

While Parkman's opinion on Indian policy may stem largely from an ingrained racism, as well as his awareness, and temporal projection of, Native resistance in the French and British conflict a century earlier, his expressions should not be treated as unhinged from contemporaneous national affairs. Once emigration was well underway, military protection was one of the main issues that pro-emigrationists rallied for. For Parkman as well, who ominously titles one chapter "Hunting Indians," control of indigenous populations is ultimately military control, which he clearly advocates. In doing so, he also belies any nostalgic notion that indigenous populations are diminishing; instead, the implication is that of an increased threat for emigrants and others travelling through Native country. Parkman also makes note at various points in the narrative of the size of the Native presence, where they "assembled in great numbers," albeit here they are gathered for potential warfare (*OT* 152). But even when traveling with the single Oglala band led by Whirlwind, in witnessing the migration of the camp to other hunting grounds, he is taken by the sight of the plain "swarming with the moving multitude," a "disorderly march," that scatters across the prairie "often to the width of full half mile" (*OT* 149, 165).

For today's readers of western adventure narratives, Parkman's rhetoric is not unexpected, nor would it have surprised any of his readers. Yet, *The Oregon Trail* not only registers Parkman's ambivalence towards territorial expansion, but also the difficulty in narrating the west nostalgically in the face of present realities. As he advocates for military strength in the region and points to the size of the indigenous population, these are the same Natives he laments will be "overawed by military posts" and essentially disappear (*OT* 177). At the same time, Parkman, who blames the emigrants for the imminent destruction of his west of "danger" and "charm," calls for a military force to protect them, even as he anxiously watches this same

population heading to the periphery. However much Parkman works to fashion a west that is already closed, and remove his own culpability in doing so, he ultimately cannot square his trepidation over emigration with a militant “restlessness” to speed up the demise of Natives who have not progressed beyond the “primitive” (*OT* 16, 11).

“Out of Bounds”: *The Oregon Trail* in a Transnational Context

On June 18, 1846, the Treaty with Oregon was ratified by Congress, ending the joint occupation with Britain of what Americans called the Oregon Country and setting the boundary line between the two nation-states at the forty-ninth parallel. In a summer that also saw the U.S. invasion of Mexico, President Polk managed to appease the pro- and anti-expansionists in this country, as well as the British, and averted fighting a war on two fronts. Having declared in his 1845 inaugural speech that “[o]ur title to the country of Oregon is clear and unquestionable,” with the resolution of the Oregon question, Polk’s own ambitions for more land to the ports of the Pacific were secured, and the future states of Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and the areas of Montana and Wyoming on the western side of the continental divide, were added to the nation’s map.⁸³

While the Oregon boundary dispute was being resolved in Washington, Parkman arrived at Fort Bernard, a run-down trading post seven miles from Fort Laramie in what is now eastern Wyoming. While it is unlikely that he would have heard about the boundary resolution itself, particularly since he never made it as far as the Oregon Territory, Parkman would certainly have been aware of what was referred to as the “Oregon question.” Though he makes no reference to the issue in *The Oregon Trail*, in his journal notes for June 1, 1846, he records that “[o]ne fellow

had inscribed his wagon “54° 48/,” adding that these emigrants were “a mean set, chiefly from the east,” a rare derisive note towards Easterners (*J* 432).

Parkman’s eastern emigrants might have learned of the treaty ratification on arriving in Oregon, though news traveled slowly and circuitously. In the December 10th issue of the *Oregon Spectator*, for example, the Governor of the Oregon Territory announced that “there is every reason to believe [the boundary question] is finally settled,” news he garnered from the Honolulu paper, *The Polynesian*, which printed the announcement on August 29th from news they received that day through a June 19th copy of the *New York Gazette and Times*.⁸⁴ If Parkman gleaned information of the treaty ratification itself, or the many debates leading up to it at one of the Forts or elsewhere, he makes no mention of it. Nonetheless, the fact that he bothers to record the wagon’s (incorrect) slogan, along with his comment on the emigrant’s character, attests to both his awareness of the “question” and opinion of these particular representatives of expansionist fervor.

Echoing other critics regarding Parkman’s reticence, Kris Fresonke suggests that his silence in *The Oregon Trail* on the “recent (difficult) border settlement, nor the vast British territories north of Oregon” is due to his lack of concern in affairs of state, being interested instead in the “chivalric excitement of buffalo hunts” and Indians as “colorful but doomed inhabitants of the last frontier.”⁸⁵ As a lead-in to her study of William Emory’s southwestern border surveys following the Mexican War, Fresonke adds further that the “politics in *The Oregon Trail* take place strictly inside U.S. boundaries and that “[s]uch notions of tranquil isolation were not an option along the thirty-second parallel.”⁸⁶ Fresonke’s point is well taken that Parkman traveled west with both adventure and Natives foremost on his mind. At the same

time, Parkman's silence on Oregon, as suggested, may be due in part to his stopping well short of the Oregon Country and to delays in the spread of news.

Yet, very little in *The Oregon Trail* registers an environment of "tranquil isolation," and while theoretically the politics in the narrative take place "strictly inside U.S. boundaries," the pressures of external politics and shifts in sociocultural configurations, are in evidence throughout the text. Certainly, Parkman narrates moments of physical isolation in *The Oregon Trail*, as when he is briefly lost, though even here he turns the occasion into an opportunity for exercising his "woodcraft" (*OT* 78). At other moments, Parkman chronicles his party's temporary separation from the emigrant's caravans: "[w]e are now at the end of our solitary journeyings [*sic*] along the St. Joseph trail...For eight days we had not encountered a human being;" or, when stopped to make repairs, "it was a full week before we overtook" an emigrant train (*OT* 57, 60).

In the chapter, "The Lonely Journey," an account of the party's travels from Fort Laramie and along the Front Range in Colorado to Pueblo, of the sixteen-day trip, they do travel alone for eleven days. Descriptions of the geophysical environment, of "boundless desolation" also convey the sense of remoteness which travelling on the plains induced, however heavy-handed Parkman's prose (*OT* 252). Seeing several men approach, Parkman notes: "we watched them with curiosity and interest that, upon the solitude of the plains, such an encounter always excites" (*OT* 63). Yet, those points in which no others are encountered are the exception.

At this juncture, western American scholarship has made clear that the west in the 1830s and 1840s was as much subject to the intersecting routes of politics and commerce that transcended boundaries of nation-states as other regions of the continental U.S. Western travel narratives evidenced this in part by continually pointing to the "motley" mix of diverse

populations they encountered, mentioned in large part to show the extent of the authors' engagement with the alien west.⁸⁷ While *The Oregon Trail* registers Parkman's anxieties in relation to territorial expansion via cross-continental emigration to Oregon and California, through the many direct and indirect references to the U.S. invasion of Mexico, and less sweeping, but no less salient interjections that reveal the impact of, or issues surrounding, that conflict, the narrative crosses into and out of his bounded western imaginary.

When Parkman and company arrive at the dilapidated Fort Bernard, "a little trading fort belonging to two private traders," he first sees "one old squaw," and "three or four stout young pups" (*OT* 93). They are then greeted by French-Canadian fur trader, John (Jean-Baptiste) Richard, who Parkman describes as a "little, swarthy, black-eyed Frenchman" (*OT* 93). His frame, though, was in the "highest degree athletic and vigorous" and "the whole man wore an air of mingled hardihood and buoyancy," the very qualities Parkman works to emulate (*OT* 93). As with the "swarthy" German emigrants, Parkman registers here both his anti-French sentiments and tightly bound definition of what constitutes 'whiteness,' while similarly admiring Richard's physical hardiness, as he did the with the Pennsylvanian's "hardy endurance" (*OT* 83).

As Elmer Feltskog notes, Richard was a trader in more than furs, having been widely known to smuggle "Taos Lightning" into the Laramie region.⁸⁸ In *Wah-To-Yah*, Garrard makes reference to *aguardiente de Taos*—a cheap, strong, locally produced whiskey, favored by mountain men and the Taos population in general.⁸⁹ Richard smuggled the whiskey in efforts to aid the trading company of Pratte & Carbonne against the competition of the American Fur Company by offering it to the local indigenous populations in barter.⁹⁰ While it is unclear whether he was still engaged in the practice when Parkman arrived, Henry Chatillon, the party's

hunter-guide, already knew Richard, and as Parkman notes, introduces him to the rest of the party.

Of the others who take part in Richard's requisite invitation for pipe-smoking, Parkman notes a "half-breed with his hair glued in masses upon each temple and saturated with vermilion" and "lolling" on a rough couch;" several "mountain men" sitting on the floor; and "a naked Indian boy of sixteen, with a handsome face, and light, active proportions," who appeared frozen in place, moving neither eye or muscle (*OT* 100, 101). That is, Parkman renders a languid and titillating "scene" which answers to all of the visions of a western gathering of "motley" characters that readers anticipated. When they first arrive, however, Richard's cross-border activities are made very clear. As Parkman notes, Richard "committed our horses to a Navaho slave, a mean-looking fellow, taken prisoner on the Mexican frontier" (*OT* 93). The circumstances of when or how Richard 'acquired' this Navaho, whether it was by force or barter, is left ambiguous. The Navaho were still living in *Nuevo Mexico* when Parkman arrived at Fort Bernard, where, since the 1830s they, along with Comanche, Kiowa, and Apache had waged a raiding war against the Mexicans, who in turn had effected their own counter-raids. On both sides, slaves were often taken.⁹¹

While Kearney's Army of the West would invade Mexico a month after Parkman's visit to the Fort, the Navaho would consider the United States equally intrusive on their sovereignty. Parkman makes no mention of the Navajo slave in his journal notes and perhaps included him in *The Oregon Trail* to enliven the narrative with more exotic and 'foreign' Natives (*OT* 439). At one point, Parkman states that he prefers the "national designation" of "Dahcotah" to the "unmeaning French name, Sioux," his emphasis on "national" incorporating a sovereign nation within the parameters of the United States, while again making clear his opinion of the French

(OT 136).⁹² By contrast, that he understood the Navaho as foreign is suggested in his reference to the uniformity of Great Plains Natives that “would serve with very few exceptions for all the tribes that lie north of the Mexican territories” and in his reference to seeing the “group of Indians, belonging to a remote Mexican tribe” in Independence (OT 176). Yet, in this brief interjection at Fort Bernard, the Navaho slave not only foregrounds displacement of indigenous populations in general while revealing the trajectory of movement between nation-states, but also the impact of U.S. trading culture on Native sovereignties on both sides of a borderline they rightly refused to recognize.

Slavery finds its way into *The Oregon Trail* at another point in the narrative. Parkman abruptly interrupts his descriptions of life in the Oglala camp to relate the arrival on July 4th of several natives who enter camp “leading with them a mule, on whose back was a wretched negro” (142). The man had run away a year earlier to join an emigrating party and had later become separated from them during a storm. Parkman goes on to note that his “cheeks were withered and shrunken in the hollow of his jaws; his eyes were unnaturally dilated, and his lips seemed shrivelled and drawn back from his teeth like those of a corpse” (OT 142). Starving, the man had wandered alone for thirty-three days, unarmed, and barely clothed, and “as he sat there, with the Indians gazing silently on him, his haggard face and glazed eye were disgusting to look upon” (OT 143). As Parkman relates it, the man tells the assembled group that he dreamed often of the “broth and corn-cake he used to eat under his old master’s shed in Missouri” (OT 143). Surviving his ordeal, Parkman notes in a later encounter that the enslaved man “was otherwise in tolerable health” and that the man “expressed his firm conviction that nothing could ever kill him” (OT 144).

In Parkman's narration of this encounter, he enacts a form of racist nostalgia that undermines the reality of the enslaved man's escape and condition in the present. In his journal Parkman notes that the man was "wretchedly emaciated," could barely speak, and that the Native's thought his survival "miraculous" (J 451). By *The Oregon Trail*, however, the reader learns of the man dreaming about the 'comforts' of "broth and corn-cake" taken beneath his master's shed (OT 143). As he does with the Caw, Parkman elides the "disgusting" and unsettling man in front of him in favor of drawing a romantic portrait, one in which the white man is in firm control and the slaves are content, not effectively free on the prairie and ultimately strong.

Parkman's journal ends with a similar fantasy. Nearing home, and with the steamboat temporarily stuck on a sandbar, he witnesses a "gang of slaves" on the lower deck (J 483). Parkman makes note of two men chained together, one "beating the banjo," while "a dance is going on with the utmost merriment" (J 483). None were more "gay and active" than these two; they "seem never to have known a care. Nothing is on their faces but careless, thoughtless enjoyment. Is it not safe to conclude them to be an inferior race?" (J 483). Though Parkman narrates this scene as well through the rhetoric of white supremacy and paternalism, the reality of the black man's unchained presence in Wyoming, however, not only disrupts Parkman's racial stereotypes and racialized nostalgia, but also interrupts the western imaginary he works to build in *The Oregon Trail*.

While the Missouri black's singular presence and ability to wander freely through the west and survive foregrounds the tensions that, by 1850, will see the Fugitive Slave Law enacted under the Missouri Compromise, he is also representative of an issue that impacted American policy across nation-state boundaries. That the issue of slavery was a flashpoint in debates and

public opinion regarding the U.S.-Mexican War has been well documented. The urgency of the issue found one expression through the Wilmot Proviso, a rider attached to an Aug. 8, 1847 bill in which Polk asked Congress to offer “two million dollars to negotiate a settlement with Mexico.”⁹³ Brought before the House by Pennsylvania Democrat, David Wilmot, the rider, which called for a ban on slavery in “any lands taken from Mexico,” passed both houses in February, though it was never adopted.⁹⁴ Wilmot’s issue was slavery, not territorial expansion per se. On the question of Oregon, for example, he argued in favor of aggrandizement in that direction, telling the House in 1846, that the United States “could either obtain all of Oregon and better access to Asia or could surrender Oregon and forfeit 'commercial ascendancy' to Britain.”⁹⁵ But in Oregon, settlers had raised the issue of excluding slavery in that territory as early as 1845.⁹⁶ Though the “Oregon question” and the U.S.-Mexican War are often viewed separately in historical scholarship, the former as a commercial issue, the latter as one of slavery and race, slavery impacted the debates on Oregon (as commerce did in relation to the war). As Thomas R. Hietala explains, Southern Democrats, such as South Carolina Senator, John Calhoun, for example, worried “that a war over Oregon would destroy southern planters and imperil slavery,” which caused Calhoun to advise the Senate to adopt a strategy of “wise and masterly inactivity.”⁹⁷

In the first months following Polk’s declaration of war against Mexico, most Americans would have agreed with Parkman that the “summer of 1846 was a season of much warlike excitement” (*OT* 111). Parkman, however, was not referring to the conflict in Mexico or of the battles that already been fought. Instead, his excitement was due to the fact that “all the western bands of the Dahcotah” were contemplating war with the Snakes (*OT* 111). Parkman was so enthralled by the prospect of being able to witness the “formidable ceremonies of war,” that he

grew anxious that the conflict might not happen, forcing him to “lose so admirable an opportunity of seeing the Indian under his most fearful and characteristic aspect” (*OT* 123, 124). Any interruptions to the plans for engagement cause Parkman to be “vexed by the delay in the accomplishment of my designs” (*OT* 117). Not only do the Sioux cause delays, but also to his great annoyance, the traders are understandably “vehemently opposed to the war, from the serious injury that it must occasion to their interests,” yet another instance where Parkman’s focus on witnessing the ‘past’ runs up against the realities of the present (*OT* 122). Parkman would be disappointed; after three weeks of traveling with, or trying to catch up with various bands of Sioux hopefully on the warpath, he is never a witness to any conflict.

Parkman finds himself equally outside the action of the U.S.-Mexican War, at one point literally going against the flow of troops on his way home down the Santa Fe Trail. When he first arrives at Fort Leavenworth, and meets the soon-to-be General Kearny, “no rumors of war had yet disturbed its tranquility” (*OT* 25). By the time he arrives at Bent’s Fort, the “army was gone, the life and bustle passed away,” and again, “the fort was a scene of dull and lazy tranquility” (*OT* 276). Parkman vents his frustration at missing the excitement, by describing the difficulty in securing provisions for the return trip, as the “grass for miles around was cropped close by the horses of General Kearney’s soldiery,” as though a “swarm of locusts had invaded the country” (*OT* 276).

Yet, along with these near misses, the narrative is punctuated with reminders of the conflict. Early in their travels, with the party having taken the wrong track to the Platte, Parkman notes, “we saw a confused crowd of horsemen riding through the water; and among the dingy habiliments of our party glittered the uniforms of four dragoons” (*OT* 38). These picturesque dragoons (cavalry) were deserters from Fort Leavenworth. After giving directions, the deserters,

“whose case admitted of no delay, rode rapidly forward” (*OT* 38). As Amy Greenberg notes, the war “had the highest desertion rate of any American war,” and Parkman’s dragoons are barely out of town.⁹⁸

Dragoons were enlisted men and generally “poor, uneducated, and unskilled,” whereas the bulk of the military force came from volunteers, who were generally higher up in society, a fact which would have appealed to Parkman’s belief in white, aristocratic superiority.⁹⁹ Until volunteers began to perpetrate aggressions during the war, the public “venerated the volunteer ethos as particularly admirable and trustworthy.”¹⁰⁰ In *The Oregon Trail*, Parkman mirrors this latter sentiment. When he and the party encounter one group of Colonel Sterling Price’s Missouri regiment along the Arkansas, Parkman states: “No men ever embarked upon a military expedition with a greater love for the work before them than the Missourians,” marking a clear distinction between these manly, militant Missourians and the emigrants he encounters on the trail (*OT* 317). Though Parkman’s lack of further comment on the deserters is, for him typical, the news of their presence (or their need to quickly depart) would not have been particularly odd to his readers. But the image of the deserters, however helpful to Parkman’s party, also strengthens the perception of uncontrolled, “truant” American’s wandering through the west.¹⁰¹

For Parkman, news of the war comes piecemeal and through different sources; Natives, traders and, in one case, “a dingy newspaper, containing an account of the battles of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma,” two battles carried out under the Whig General Zachary Taylor’s command prior to Polk’s declaration of war (*OT* 27, 273). At one point, a Cheyenne relates the story of a battle on the Arkansas between Americans and Mexicans, from which Parkman writes, “we could only infer...that war had been declared with Mexico” (*OT* 261). On arriving at

Pueblo, near Bent's Fort, Parkman learns of "General Kearney's march up the Arkansas, and of General Taylor's victories at Matamoras" (OT 261). Retrospectively, Parkman will write lengthy, glowing accounts of Alexander Doniphan and his volunteer's battle in Sacramento. These volunteers, Parkman writes, "fought under every disadvantage," until "an eagle flew over the Americans, and a deep murmur rose along their lines;" "Forward boys! cried a private from the ranks; and the Americans rushing like tigers upon the enemy, bound over the breastwork" (OT 317). That Parkman is a staunch proponent of the war is made clear throughout *The Oregon Trail*, as here. Yet, this war, as many Americans hoped, would garner those millions of acres for the United States, sending even more emigrants to the Pacific coast and land in between, an outcome for which Parkman conveys a deep unease.

The potential impact of the conflict resonates in another way in *The Oregon Trail*. In Parkman scholarship, taking note of his denigration of Mexicans throughout the narrative has, in itself, become ubiquitous and not without good reason. Images of "slavish" Mexicans "gazing stupidly out from beneath their broad hats;" of "swarthy, ignoble Mexicans" and their "brutish faces;" of "squalid Mexicans;" or at Pueblo, where the lazy Mexican's are as "mean and miserable as the place itself," all attest to Parkman's xenophobic racism, though these stereotypes were widely circulated before and during the war, in large part as justification for U.S. actions (OT 11, 72, 272). Arriving at Bent's Fort, Parkman notably states that the "human race in this part of the world is divided into three divisions, arranged in the order of their merits: white men, Indians, and Mexicans; to the latter of whom the honorable title of 'whites' is by no means conceded" (OT 274, 275). While others such as Josiah Gregg would refer to Spanish-Mexicans as whites or "white creoles," the issue of racial designation would heavily impact the entire Mexican population following the signing of the Treaty of Hidalgo Guadalupe in 1848 and

their involuntary incorporation into American national space.¹⁰² While Parkman is expressing his racially encoded opinion, one shared by many, in his representations of Mexican ethnicity, he nonetheless points directly to a primary source of the nation's anxieties attendant to territorial expansion.

“Romance in America” and the Western Imaginary

In the contentious election year of 1844, one that would see the aggressive expansionist James K. Polk land in the White House, Francis Parkman delivered the commencement oration at his Harvard graduation in which he called on historians to write with a more romantic hand. In his address Parkman laments that in the histories of “our fathers’ wars,” the “dullest plainest prose has fixed its home,” and that “when we look at the actors, we find the same cool-blooded, reasoning, unyielding men who dwell among us this day—the very antipodes of the hero of romance.” For Parkman, “the charm is broken now.”¹⁰³

When he traveled west several years later, Parkman carried these sentiments with him, using the same language in *The Oregon Trail* to decry that the west's “danger and its charm” will disappear through the immediate realities of emigration and the forces of territorial expansion, its “danger” part of the adventure writer's topos (*OT* 177). Parkman's imperialist nostalgia, while a convention shared by other western travel writers is, as has been suggested, one drawn from a particular regional and sociopolitical perspective. When he refers to “our fathers’ wars” in his Harvard address, for example, Parkman is thinking of a history that begins with the British conflicts with France in North America, not one that necessarily starts with the American Revolution. Yet, for all his desire to romanticize it, this same focus on a deeper imperialist past and its players, also informs his ambivalence towards the processes of territorialization in 1846.

In relation to Parkman's later histories, Mark Peterson makes the cogent point that by insisting on the "relevance of the Anglo-French conflict for America's ongoing history," essentially skipping over the Revolution, Parkman was able to make "Anglo-American dominance of the continent seem inevitable," and to "connect Manifest Destiny with British sensibilities."¹⁰⁴ In his tour west, however, Parkman runs up against the dichotomy of a nation fully invested in territorial expansion and his deep anxiety over the inevitability of Anglo-Saxon ascendance.

In *The Oregon Trail*, Parkman fashions a western imaginary that not only resists the forces of emigration, but that of a wider incorporation. Parkman's ambivalent stance, however, as in his support for a war of aggrandizement, problematizes and interrupts the romanticized adventure narrative he set out to write. At the same time, while Parkman's reticence to elaborate on topical issues has worked to cast an apolitical aura around the narrative, even his biases point to larger national tensions. Parkman's rollicking, buffalo-hunting, Indian chasing west is the one his readers remembered, and even now, many still do. Yet, *The Oregon Trail* registers in complex ways, the reality of a nation in transition and what he called the "constantly-shifting frontier" (93).

Adventure travel narratives such as Parkman's enclosed the west within the parameters of a few recognizable attributes, creating a fantasy of the west that worked to side step the realities playing out in the region, even as they reinforced the discourses underpinning territorial expansion. Along with the rhetoric of imperialist nostalgia that served to strengthen the perception of a closed frontier, this totalizing impulse is one of the hallmarks of the genre. As such, one might return to the question of Parkman's relevance posed slightly differently; why read *The Oregon Trail*, except as one of the prime examples of that genre? Rather than merely

relegating his narrative to the romantic western book pile, however, uncovering some of the reasons Parkman and others fashioned the west as they did, apart from borrowing and shaping narrative conventions in order to spin a good yarn, is worth attending to. In enclosing the west within the parameters of a romantic adventure, Parkman paradoxically conveys not only his own anxieties, but also those of many others as to where the nation was heading.

In a year which saw the nation incorporate Oregon and move towards the acquisition of the entire continent, western imaginaries such as Parkman's normalized a fantasy of a west that, while nostalgically 'closed,' created a buffer against the unsettling realities of the region in the present; a vision of an American West that continues to function for many in the same fashion. At the same time, it is not enough to acknowledge Parkman's prejudices as a reflection of his background and time, but rather to recognize the myriad ways in which those biases affected policy in the non-literary world.

Notes

¹ Francis Parkman, *The Journals of Francis Parkman*, ed. Mason Wade (New York: Klaus Reprint Co., 1969), 416 (hereafter cited in text as *J*).

² Francis Parkman, *Francis Parkman: The Oregon Trail, The Conspiracy of Pontiac*, Notes William R. Taylor (New York: Library of America, 1991), 259 (hereafter cited in text as *OT*).

³ Francis Parkman, *Letters of Francis Parkman*, 2 vols., ed. Wilbur R. Jacobs (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960), 1:184.

⁴ Parkman to Abbé Henri-Raymond Casgrain, Jamaica Plain, 23 May, 1873, in Jacobs, *Letters*, 2:69.

⁵ Parkman to E.G. [Ephraim George] Squier, Boston, March 15, 1849, in Don C. Seitz, *Letters from Francis Parkman to E.G. Squier* (Cedar Rapids, Iowa: The Torch Press, 1911), 20-21.

⁶ "The California and Oregon Trail; being Sketches of Prairie and Rocky Mountain Life," *American Review: A Whig Journal of Politics, Literature, Art & Science*, April 1, 1849, 436; "A Tour of Duty in California/Oregon and California in 1848/The California and Oregon Trail," *Independent*, March 22, 1849, 64; "The California and Oregon Trail," *Holden's Dollar Magazine of Criticisms, Biographies, Sketches, Essays, Tales, Reviews, Poetry, etc.*, May 1, 1849, 312.

⁷ "The California and Oregon Trail: Being Sketches of Prairie and Rocky-Mountain Life," *Christian Examiner & Religious Miscellany*, May 1, 1849, 509.

⁸ Bernard DeVoto, *The Year of Decision: 1846* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1942), 115.

⁹ E.N. Feltskog, ed. and introduction to *The Oregon Trail* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 36a, 31a.

¹⁰ Mason Wade notes that by "force of environment and heredity he was blind to the profound social forces at work in the West; by tradition and taste he was contemptuous of the masses," *Journals*, 403. Mirroring Wade, for James D. Hart, Parkman's patrician upbringing assured that "he had no sense of the social forces that were sending these people West, and he simply scorned them as uncouth and unpleasant." James D. Hart, "Patrician Among the Savages: Francis Parkman's "The Oregon Trail," *The Georgia Review* 10, no.1 (Spring 1956): 73. In reference to his entire corpus, historian Francis Jennings flatly states, "his biases are poison." Francis Jennings, "A Brahmin among Untouchables," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (July 1985): 306.

¹¹ Hart, "Patrician Among the Savages," 70.

¹² Wilbur R. Jacobs, *Francis Parkman, Historian as Hero: The Formative Years* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), 123. Mark Peterson makes a similar observation: "[b]oth sets of interests, Europe and the American west pulled Parkman away from Boston, but in a curious way, his work remained centered there." Mark Peterson, "How (and Why) to Read Francis Parkman I and II," *Common-Place* 3, no.1 (October 2002), www.commonplace.org.

¹³ Parkman, *Journals*, 409.

¹⁴ "1. The California and Oregon Trail; being Sketches of Prairie and Rocky Mountain Life. 2. What I saw in California; being the Journal of a Tour, by the Emigrant Route and South Pass of the Rocky Mountains, across the Continent of North America, the Great Desert Basin, and through California, in the Years 1846-7. 3. The Works of Washington Irving; a New Edition, revised," *North American Review* (July 1, 1845), 177.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 183.

¹⁶ Irving to Peter Irving, Washington City, Dec. 18, 1832, in *Washington Irving: Letters*, ed. Ralph M. Aderman, Herbert Kleinfield, and Jenifer S. Banks (Boston: Twayne, 1978): 2: 733.

¹⁷ Remark by one of Parkman's "intimates," quoted in Howard Doughty, *Francis Parkman* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 23.

¹⁸ Peterson, "How (and Why) to Read Francis Parkman."

¹⁹ At this point, Parkman's illnesses are generally believed to be a form of psychoneurosis, though there is no definitive diagnosis. As Kim Townsend notes, "Parkman's illness has never been named with any certainty, but not surprisingly, the more recent the naming the more likely it is to be psychological" (101). Townsend, "Francis Parkman and the Male Tradition," *American Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (Spring, 1986): 97-113.

²⁰ Charles Haight Farnham, *A Life of Francis Parkman* (Boston: Little Brown & Co. 1900, 1901), vii.

²¹ Nicolas Lawrence, "Francis Parkman's *The Oregon Trail* and the US-Mexican War: Appropriations of Counter-Imperial Dissent," *Western American Literature* 43, no. 4 (Winter 2009), 379.

²² See Nicolas Lawrence, "Francis Parkman's *The Oregon Trail*; Wilbur R. Jacobs, "Francis Parkman: Naturalist-Environmentalist Savant," *Pacific Historical Review* 61 (1992): 341-356;

and David Wall, "Francis Parkman's Grotesque Body: Disease, Disgust and Desire in *The Oregon Trail*," *European Journal of American Culture* 27 (2008): 29-42.

²³ For a discussion of Parkman's histories in relation to trauma, see Kathleen Kennedy, "War and Trauma: Francis Parkman and the Challenge of Writing the Pain of the Other," in *The Martial Imagination: Cultural Aspects of American Warfare*, ed. Jimmy L. Bryan (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2013), 36-52. For *The Oregon Trail* and formulations of masculinity and a masculine ideal, see Townsend, "Francis Parkman and the Male Tradition;" and Jonathan M. Smith, "Moral Maps and Moral Places in the Work of Francis Parkman," in *Textures in Place: Exploring Humanist Geographies*, ed. Steven D. Hoelscher, Paul C. Adams, and Karen F. Till (Minneapolis, 2001), 300-316. For violence and adventure as forms of masculine renewal, see Jimmy L. Bryan Jr., *The American Elsewhere: Adventures and Manliness in the Age of Expansion* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2017); Jeffrey Gross, "Boyish Play and Manifest Destiny: The Transition from Civilizer to Killer in America and Abroad," *South Atlantic Review* 73, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 59-80; and Frank M. Meola, "A passage through "Indians"; masculinity and violence in Francis Parkman's *The Oregon Trail*," *ATQ* 13, no.1 (March 1999): 5-25.

²⁴ Peterson, "How (and Why) to Read Francis Parkman."

²⁵ Bryan, *The American Elsewhere*, 6.

²⁶ Nathaniel Lewis, *Unsettling the Literary West: Authenticity and Authorship* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 117.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Renato Rosaldo, *Culture & Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1993), chapter 3 "Imperialist Nostalgia," esp. 68-74; Parkman, *Oregon Trail*, preface, n.p.

²⁹ Irving to Peter Irving, *Letters*, 2:733.

³⁰ Thomas R. Hietala, *Manifest Design: American Exceptionalism & Empire*, rev. ed. (1985; rpt., Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 138.

³¹ John D. Unruh, Jr., *The Plains Across: The Overland Emigrants and the Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-60* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979), 12

³² Hart, "Patrician Among the Savages," 73. Echoing Hart, Bernard Devoto states that the emigrants were people "whom Parkman could not love," while E.N. Feltskog suggests that by all indication, Parkman thought the emigrants "nothing more than ignorant, even faintly ridiculous malcontents whom "the States" were well rid of." See Devoto, *Year of Decision*, 144; Feltskog, *The Oregon Trail*, 37a.

³³ Parkman on Cooper quoted in Jacobs, *Historian as Hero*, 49.

³⁴ James Fenimore Cooper, *The Prairie*, ed. James P. Elliot (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 14, 15.

³⁵ Hietala, *Manifest Design*, 6.

³⁶ Henry Clay to John J. Crittenden, Dec. 5, 1843, *Papers of Henry Clay*, ed. Robert Seager II (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1988), 9: 898.

³⁷ Daniel Webster quote in Hietala, *Manifest Design*, 187.

³⁸ Parkman to Charles Eliot Norton, Nov. 10, 1850, quoted in Howard Doughty, *Francis Parkman* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1983), 400.

³⁹ Parkman to Abbé Henri-Raymond Casgrain, Jamaica Plain, Mass., 9, May 1875, in Jacobs, *Letters*, 2:82. Parkman most fully expresses his opinion on democracy in "The Failure of

Universal Suffrage,” a piece he wrote for the *North American Review* 127, no. 263 (Jul-Aug, 1878): 1-20.

⁴⁰ Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 711.

⁴¹ Hietala, *Manifest Design*, 75.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴³ Daniel Walker Howe also notes that “unwilling to risk a confrontation with Britain most Whigs, who wanted British investment capital, allied with many southern Democrats, led by Calhoun, who placed a higher value on Britain as a customer for cotton than they did on extra acreage in the Pacific Northwest inhospitable to plantation slavery,” *What Hath God Wrought*, 719.

⁴⁴ Howard I. Kushner, “The Oregon Question Is...A Massachusetts Question,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 75, no. 4 (1974), 320, 317.

⁴⁵ Unruh, *The Plains Across*, 32.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, Horace Greeley quoted in, 38.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, Unruh, and Washington *Union* quote in, 45.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, St. Louis *Daily Missouri Republican* quote in, 58.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, Independence, MO *Western Expositor* quote in, 58, 59.

⁵² Hietala suggests that while “anglophobia and an exaggerated sense of frontier nationalism disposed these western legislators toward aggrandizement whatever the price,” as representatives of “productive agricultural states,” they also sought to broaden export markets to avoid “economic stagnation at home” and “depressed prices” from surplus commodities, *Manifest Design*, 71.

⁵³ Jacobs, *Francis Parkman, Historian as Hero*, 124.

⁵⁴ Parkman, “Universal Suffrage,” 4.

⁵⁵ Washington Irving, *Three Western Narratives: A Tour on the Prairies, Astoria, The Adventures of Captain Bonneville* (New York: Penguin, Library of American Series, 2004), 44.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Smith, “Moral Maps and Moral Places,” 309.

⁵⁸ Townsend, “Francis Parkman and the Male Tradition,” 106.

⁵⁹ Amy S. Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 12.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ George Wilkins Kendall, *Narrative of the Texan Santa Fé Expedition* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1844), iii.

⁶² Jacobs, *Historian as Hero*, 122.

⁶³ Lewis, *Unsettling the Literary West*, 30. Lewis also adds the important point that “as western writing leaned harder on exaggerated romance, it also affirmed its reliability more vociferously” (30).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁶⁵ “The California and Oregon Trail,” *North American Review*, 177-9; Edwin Bryant, preface to *What I Saw in California: Being the Journal of a Tour, by the emigrant route and South Pass of the Rocky Mountains, across the continent of North American, the Great Desert Basin, and*

through California, in the years 1846, 1847 (New York: D. Appleton & Company; Philadelphia: Geo. S. Appleton, 1849), n.p.

⁶⁶ Josiah Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies*, ed. Max L. Moorhead, forward Marc Simmons (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954), 27, 39.

⁶⁷ *North American Review*, 177.

⁶⁸ Quoted in Unruh, *The Plains Across*, 38.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer and Sketches of Eighteenth-Century America* (New York: Penguin, 1986), 84.

⁷¹ Lewis H. Garrard, *Wah-To-Yah and the Taos Trail; or Prairie Travel and Scalp Dances, with a Look at Los Rancheros from Muleback and the Rocky Mountain Campfire* (Cincinnati, H.W. Derby & Co., 1850), 40.

⁷² James Fenimore Cooper, *The Prairie: A Tale*, ed. James P. Elliott (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 385.

⁷³ Garrard, *Wah-To-Yah*, 33.

⁷⁴ Parkman, *The Oregon Trail* (Library of America), Notes, 939.

⁷⁵ Rosaldo, *Culture & Truth*, 69.

⁷⁶ "A tour of duty in California/Oregon and California in 1848/The California and Oregon Trail," *Independent*, March 22, 1849, 64.

⁷⁷ John C. Frémont, *The Expeditions of John Charles Frémont, Vol. 1, Travels from 1838 to 1844*, ed. Donald Jackson and Mary Lee Spence (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970), 490.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Lewis, *Unsettling the Literary West*, 9.

⁸⁰ Jeffrey Ostler, *The Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism from Lewis and Clark to Wounded Knee* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 81. Though Ostler also rightly notes that the "fur trade probably had its greatest impact through its contribution to subsequent phases of American capitalist expansion;" "new phases" which the Sioux began to feel in the 1840s and 1850s with emigration to Oregon and California (8).

⁸¹ Beatrice (Bea) Medicine quote in Ostler, *The Plains Sioux*, 7.

⁸² While Parkman is fairly accurate in the distance from Fort Laramie to Fort Leavenworth, about 628 miles, most regular and volunteer troops at that time were 600 miles south to Santa Fe or other areas of Mexico.

⁸³ James K. Polk quote in Greenberg, *A Wicked War*, 62.

⁸⁴ "Message of the Governor of Oregon Territory," *Oregon Spectator* (Oregon City, Oregon Terr.), 1, no. 23, December 10, 1846, n.p.; "Highly Important News!," *The Polynesian* (Honolulu), 3, August 29, 1846, 61.

⁸⁵ Kris Fresonke, *West of Emerson: The Design of Manifest Destiny* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 74.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 73,74.

⁸⁷ Gregg, *Commerce on the Prairies*, 33.

⁸⁸ E.N. Feltskog, *The Oregon Trail* (Lincoln), n. 32, p. 509.

⁸⁹ On first entering Taos, Hector Lewis Garrard writes: "The first house we passed was a distillery, where the "mountain dew" of New Mexico—*aguardiente de Taos*, is made; and such

is the demand, it is imbibed before attaining a very drinkable age, by both foreigners and residents, with great avidity.” *Wah-To-Yah and the Taos Trail*, 191-2.

⁹⁰ E.N. Feltskog, *The Oregon Trail* (Lincoln), n. 32, p. 510.

⁹¹ For more on this see Brian DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the U.S. Mexican War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), especially xvii, 61-70, 90-95, and 167.

⁹² As Jeffrey Ostler notes, the French first referred to the Natives they met as “Nadouessioux,” eventually shortened to “Sioux” and that “[d]espite its external imposition, it remains the least confusing umbrella term for all Sioux people.” *The Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism from Lewis and Clark to Wounded Knee* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 21.

⁹³ Greenberg, *A Wicked War*, 196.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Hietala, *Manifest Design*, 73.

⁹⁶ See R. Alton Lee, “Slavery and the Oregon Territorial Issue: Prelude to the Compromise of 1850,” *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 64, no. 3 (July 1973): 112.

⁹⁷ Hietala, *Manifest Design*, 80 (Calhoun quote in).

⁹⁸ Greenberg, *A Wicked War*, xvii.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 130.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 131.

¹⁰¹ *North American Review*, 177.

¹⁰² Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies*, 106.

¹⁰³ Francis Parkman, “Romance in America,” in Jacobs, *Historian as Hero*, Appendix, 171, 172.

¹⁰⁴ Peterson, “How (and Why) to Read Francis Parkman.”

Chapter Three

Unsettling Territorial Geographies: *Travels in Mexico, Commencing June 1846: El Diario de Doña Susanita Magoffin*¹

Introduction

Over the past five decades, critics within a number of areas of scholarship, from New Western criticism and critical regionalism, to Latino/Chicano/a/x and hemispheric studies, to Americanist studies, broadly conceived, have formulated, grappled with, and periodically re-cast the conceptualization of American borders and borderlands. In part, these efforts have allowed for corrective readings of nationalist narratives through alternative perspectives. As against Anglo-centric narratives, which represent interactions with populations in borderland territories through a single-stranded discourse of empire-building, scholars have reconfigured these geophysical, conceptual, and discursive regions as temporally asymmetric, multi-directional, heterotopic, and provisional spaces marked by ever-shifting alliances.¹ As Pekka Hämäläinen and Samuel Truett rightfully state “[w]e now find borderlands everywhere.”² In the nineteenth century, as now, the types of interactions typically found in borderlands, which as Kirstin Silva Gruesz and Rodrigo Lazo suggest take the form of “economic relations, technological exchanges, transculturation, and language interactions,” all served, in Eliza H. Gould’s words, to “entangle[d]” the histories of multiple sovereignties.³ When viewed in relation to the U.S.

¹ This is Magoffin’s title for her journal. The original manuscript is held in the Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library (WA, MSS S-867). The only published version of the journal is editor Stella Drumm’s *Down the Santa Fe Trail and into Mexico: The Diary of Susan Shelby Magoffin 1846-1847*, published in 1926 as part of the Yale Western American Paperbound series; rpt. 1962, 1982. For this study, I use the third edition, forward by Howard R. Lamar (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), hereafter cited in text as *T*. Note: all italicized words are original to the Drumm edition, italicized in the MS. While Magoffin uses the word *diario* in her title, she refers to her writing throughout as her journal. I take the lead from her, also using the word journal instead of diary throughout this chapter, as in our modern culture the word diary tends to be gendered and infantilizing, and as the word *diario* in Spanish also means “daily” or “journal,” which she was clearly aware of.

invasion into Mexico's northern borderlands in the 1840s, these entanglements would problematize both the ideology of manifest destiny and U.S. visions of an 'American' Southwest and its future population.

For many scholars, the still-amorphous boundary between Mexico and the United States has acted as primary catalyst for, and continued source of interest in borderlands scholarship.⁴ In what many scholars now re-view as a Latino nineteenth century, the alternative histories and narratives of non-Anglo and indigenous populations in Mexico's own frontier peripheries have served to reveal processes of "shifting accommodations—rather than one of expansion."⁵ Current criticism has made clear that in working outside of a nation-based framework, the dominant Anglo-centric narratives of indigenous dispossession or territorialist mandates become destabilized.⁶

Given these recent trends, one might rightly question the relevance of focusing critical attention on the mid-nineteenth century journal of an Anglo-American patrician woman traveling through Mexico during the first year of the U.S. invasion of that country. In a text which reverberates with the undercurrents of the ideology of manifest destiny, how might Magoffin's journal fit within a framework of scholarship that has not only profoundly altered our conceptions of borderlands, especially those in the Latinx West, but that also seeks to de-center exceptionalist narratives of American territorialization?

While *Travels in Mexico* inherently registers the forces of expansion, it is, however, also a text that reveals the complexity of long-standing "intertwined influences and relationships" between Mexican, Native, and Anglo populations.⁷ These entanglements, which reach beyond the geophysical boundaries between nations and the temporal frame of what Bernard DeVoto nationalistically called America's "year of decision," are made palpable in Magoffin's narrative.⁸

Clearly, the Mexican-American war is a historical reality. Yet, Magoffin's wartime journal pivots as well around different histories and alliances that are both separate from and constitutive of the actual workings of American territorial expansion.

Scholarship on American imperialism in the nineteenth-century has also been impacted by the work of critics who explore how the role of women and the domestic are entwined with both the discourse and implementation of territorial expansion—what in her groundbreaking essay by the same name, Amy Kaplan calls “manifest domesticity.”⁹ Not only a means of distinguishing national policies between the domestic and the foreign, Kaplan broadens the definition of domestic as both the “space of the nation and of the familial household.”¹⁰ For Kaplan, who focused in her essay on the 1830s through the 1850s, in equating the nation with home, both middle to upper-class white men and women became “allies against the alien,” with the “racial demarcations of otherness,” forming the “determining division” for inclusion in a national identity, rather than gender distinctions.¹¹

Given this work, it is perhaps not surprising that nineteenth-century travel narratives of the West and, in particular, the diaries, letters, and other textual materials written by ‘westerling’ women, have received attention in relation to how these women’s transient and settler domesticity is implicated in the process and rhetoric of nation-building. Though initially searching for a corrective to male narratives of conquest and possession, critics have often found instead that, even as women might take on postures of “presumed innocence and detachment” or have different motivations for emigration or land acquisition, these texts are equally charged with assertions of racial and cultural authority.¹²

For Kaplan and others, however, a desire to “nationalize and domesticate foreign territories and peoples” under a domestic versus alien paradigm, creates its own problematics.¹³

Though Anglo-Americans would apply a designation of foreign-ness to populations living within national boundaries, such as blacks or Natives, thereby curtailing inclusion, in proceedings such as *Cherokee Nation v. the State of Georgia*, as Kaplan notes, by declaring the Cherokee a “domestic dependent nation,” that is, neither “foreign nationals nor United States citizens,” the Supreme Court created an “ambiguous third realm between the national and the foreign.”¹⁴ While these kinds of designations undermined conceptions of nation as home—conceptions based on a shaky racialized and class binary—the “entanglement of the domestic and the foreign” was especially fraught in relation to America’s aggrandizement through annexation or cession of Spanish or Mexican-held territories.¹⁵

If the goal was to promulgate a unified national home by maintaining a rhetorical, and thereby actual, distinction between domestic and alien, certainly by 1848 and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, this distinction breaks down. As José F. Aranda Jr. rightly suggests, Americans would apply the term “Mexican” as a racial index for “noncitizen, not American” with the incorporation of Mexican populations following the Mexican-American war.¹⁶ While a rhetorical ploy for effecting governmental policy towards its new ‘citizens,’ Anglo-Americans were nonetheless suddenly faced with the nation’s internalization of the very racial and cultural sources of nativist anxiety which the discourse of domestic versus foreign was meant to provide a barrier against in the first place.

Situated within these discourses, Magoffin’s *Travels in Mexico* is found to be more than just another Anglo-American narrative of expansion or the record of female subjectivity that reinforces the naturalization of the domestic as empire. While this is clearly evident, her interactions with Mexican, Puebloan, and other indigenous domesticities articulate the kinds of “entanglements,” which borderlands scholarship seeks to recover. As she chronicles her

experiences, Magoffin's journal enacts and foregrounds the racial and cultural anxieties, that will attend the incorporation of New Mexico's Spanish *criollos*, mestizos, and Pueblo and other Native populations into the nation following the war's end. Yet, when viewed from an alternate perspective, Magoffin's journal also reveals the anxieties of New Mexican populations towards their own uncertain future, while exposing, either overtly or inadvertently, moments of resentment, resistance, and "shifting accommodations."¹⁷

The Arkansas River

I am now entirely out of "The States," into a new country. The crossing of the Arkansas was an event in my life, I have never met before; the separating me from my own dear native land. That which I love and honour as truly as any whole-souled son or daughter of the fair and happy America (for the U.S. are considered to possess that bright name above) ever did. Perhaps I have left it for not only the first, but the last time. Maybe I am never to behold its bright and sunny landscape, its happy people, my countrymen again. (*T* 72)

When Kentuckian Susan Shelby Magoffin penned these tremulous and patriotic sentiments, she was only six miles from Bent's Fort and the "States." On July 27, 1846, the young newlywed, along with her husband, long time Santa Fé trader Samuel Magoffin, arrived at Bent and St. Vrain & Co.'s trading post in what is now southeastern Colorado. Meant as both a business trip and a continuation of their honeymoon, "from the city of New York to the Plains of Mexico," as she begins her journal, the Magoffins were traveling with a large caravan of trade goods down the Santa Fé Trail, having left Independence, Missouri in the early part of June (*T*

1). Describing the layout of the fort in detail, an adobe structure that “fills [her] idea of an ancient castle,” Magoffin writes: “at present they have quite a number of boarders. The traders and soldiers chiefly, with a few *lofers* from the States, come out because they can’t live at home” (*T* 60, 61). The Fort, though, soon becomes a site of high action: “crowded to overflowing. Col. Kearny has arrived and it seems the world is coming with him” (*T* 67).

After deliberately provoking Mexico into taking military action on the eastern shores of the Rio Grande, and on land claimed by them, President Polk declared war on May 13, 1846, making what was already a conflict-in-progress with that nation, official. In reality, the war had begun a decade earlier in the ongoing boundary disputes and skirmishes between Mexico and the Republic of Texas. Anyone paying attention on either side of the conflict saw it for what it was, a duplicitous and aggressive land-grab. Stephen Watts Kearny, having barely received his new orders when he arrived at Bent’s from Fort Leavenworth, was instructed to gather his so-named Army of the West in preparation for marching into and occupying New Mexico.¹⁸ In what would become one of the most lucrative trading years into Mexico’s northern provinces, traders such as Samuel Magoffin and his brother’s James and William, alternately frustrated by or grateful for the military protection they received, were urged to stay behind at Bent’s, as they had at other points on the Santa Fé Trail, and will again as they move farther south into New Mexico and Chihuahua, until the army could presumably secure the territory ahead of them.¹⁹

For all her trepidation on crossing the Arkansas, Magoffin was also not sorry to leave Bent’s. By the time the troops depart, leaving only sick and dying soldiers behind, she finds the fort “quite desolate” (*T* 69). Having suffered a late-term miscarriage on her arrival, and that in the midst of all the din of the troops, she looks forward to being on the road, admitting: “it is quite strange, and indeed a treat to think of starting” (*T* 70). Pressed to stay at Bent’s by the

forces of nation building and her own health, Magoffin notes that the “little romance” in her life was being “taken prisoner” and “*confined* in a Fort” (T 70). While this will not be the last time Magoffin will feel herself held captive by her own country and forces beyond her control, she is grateful that her “life of adventures and sight-seeings is beginning again” (T 73).

On reaching an occupied Santa Fé, Magoffin effectively finds herself in the “States” again, proudly declaring that: “I have entered a city in a year that will always be remembered by my countrymen; and under the ‘Star-spangled banner’ too, the first American lady, who has come under such auspices” (T 102). From here, though, the Magoffins would travel farther south into contested Mexican territory much less ostensibly secured than Santa Fé, continuously buffeted by conflicting reports of the war’s progress, reports that affected their own safety and progress down the Trail. While the Magoffins managed to stay within the orbit of the U.S. occupied areas of Mexico, what Susan would come to deem the “American portion of the Republic,” there were no guarantees of permanent control, and more than once Magoffin will “wonder what tomorrow will bring forth” (T 179,177).

In this ever-shifting terrain, Magoffin’s journal reveals the complex nature of her particular subject position, as her encounters with the places and people of New Mexico run up against the immediate realities of the U.S. invasion of Mexico and a mobile nation-state. Though a landscape of conflict in 1846, Mexico’s northern provinces were home to a long-standing, transnational and global culture of trade and of intercultural and ethnic exchange, one that Magoffin had just married into. More importantly, these territories were home to established Mexican and Native populations, whose presence far pre-dated the expansionist dreams of Polk and others. Yet, the “world” that follows Kearny into Bent’s Fort, however, positions

Magoffin's journal as a chronicle of U.S. imperialism and one written within the broader context of what the conflict was ultimately designed to achieve, that is territorial expansion.

The Northern Mexican territories were Polk's geopolitical stepping-stones to the Pacific, with New Mexico "second only to California in importance as an object of President Polk's war," and for a number of Americans, the early months of the war merely set in motion what was envisioned to be a victorious, and inevitable, outcome of the nation's manifest destiny.²⁰ With the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, the United States would appropriate over half a million square miles of Mexican territory, allowing the already settled Mexican citizens the dubious choice to go or stay, their land claims and rights as de facto American citizens ostensibly secure, while the independent Natives of the territory would feel the same pressures towards subjugation already visited on so many tribes in the United States.²¹

Immersed in the movements of the nation's press into Mexico, Magoffin's journal registers both the exceptionalist and ambivalent views of Anglo-Americans towards a geographic west that in several years would become, along with its people, part of the American map. Over fifteen months, as she travels from Independence, through the Mexican states of New Mexico, Chihuahua, Durango, and Coahuila before arriving at Matamoras for the journey home, Magoffin is by turns appalled by, admiring towards, or suspicious of the Mexican populations she encounters. As she negotiates a diverse population, Magoffin grows to be more tolerant of the Mexican people and their culture, in part due to her husband's associations, but also out of her own natural curiosity and desire for friendships. Nonetheless, her journal conveys anxieties toward, and racial and cultural buffers against, a population that, while under occupation during her travels, will in several years become involuntarily internalized within American national space.

Magoffin's journal is also a traveler's account of the geographic west, and like other western narratives, such as Parkman's—who arrived at Bent's a month after Magoffin—it is one which reverberates with the rhetoric of expansion. Yet, in Magoffin's west, manifest destiny wears a different face. Impacted as much from the Gulf South, circum-Caribbean, and Latin America as from Independence, Missouri and points eastward, the west Magoffin travels through is not only geophysically, but also in many ways, ideologically a *southwest*, embodying Anglo-American tensions which arc back to the annexation of Louisiana and the anxieties at that time towards the incorporation of Spanish Creoles and other populations as exemplified in Cooper's *The Prairie*. Though situated within a cartographic space in which American territorialization presses inexorably east to west, Magoffin's west is also one troubled by a *Latinidad* south pressing upward.

As she travels along the Santa Fé Trail and into Mexico, Magoffin's descriptions of the geophysical environment both map, and resist, any divide between these contiguous spaces. The west she travels through and articulates, however, is also one framed by deeply rooted, racialized attitudes towards its Mexican populations. Unlike the western imaginary established in the minds of many Americans, that is, the romanticized, frontier 'buffalo west' as narrated by writers such as Cooper, Washington Irving, or Parkman, Magoffin travels a west that is not only impacted by, but in a very real sense will be *created* by the incorporation of those same Mexican populations. That is, Magoffin narrates a west, but not necessarily the western imaginary that Anglo-Americans would, by and large, embrace and cling to in cultural memory—a difference in perception that would have contemporaneous and long-term consequences for the populations of New Mexico and other southwest environments. Yet, in order to justify their actions, Anglo-Americans would tap into the same rhetoric towards the Mexicans, as they had, and continued to

do, with Native Americans in the United States, many hoping that the Mexican populations would be “made ready for democracy or disappear, with the Vanishing Hispanic going the way of the Vanishing Indian.”²²

Magoffin’s journal not only complicates contemporaneous notions of American exceptionalism or conceptions of the West, but also troubles notions of national loyalty. Though the war was politically divisive from the beginning, in the summer of 1846, American’s perceived the war as “going brilliantly” and the national “mood verged on the light-hearted.”²³ As it dragged on, however, anti-war sentiments increased, as the number of casualties, physical sufferings of the soldiers, and reports of atrocities committed by American volunteers became more widely known. Added to this was the growing sense that pro-slavery advocates had perpetuated the war; similar fears raised by those who had opposed the annexation of Texas in 1845. As the ramifications and implications of the war become more directly felt or witnessed, Magoffin betrays ambivalence towards the conflict that will come to mark many Anglo-American’s feelings about the war as it progresses. At the same time, through her engagement with a variety of Mexican populations, and with the fluid trading and borderer culture they are a part of, even physical and symbolic demarcations between nations, such as the Arkansas, are rendered unstable and ambiguous.

In early reviews of *Travels into Mexico*, critical appraisals reflect both the gendered and nationalist tenor of the 1920s. Robert Redfield, for example, finds *Travels* “a naïve chronicle of a lady” and a “first-hand account of life in the Southwest when North American trade and culture were penetrating that country and saving General Kearny the trouble of fighting to take it away from Mexico.” James Alexander Robertson is more forgiving of the author, concluding that Magoffin’s journal is “written with a spontaneity and naturalness that are charming, often naïve,

and never dull.” *Travels* went out of print until 1962, reviews at that time focusing on the value of Magoffin’s journal as a “classic of the Southwestern frontier.”²⁴ It is in the past three decades, however, that the journal has found increased, and more nuanced, critical interest for both its historical content and as a woman’s narrative of western travel. Though in many ways a conventional travel journal, that is a record of sights seen and people met, because of the events and personal encounters she recorded, Magoffin’s journal has been mined for excerpts by a number of historians of the Mexican-American war.²⁵ Offering a depth of detail into the war’s progress and inside looks into some of the most prominent players in the war, *Travels in Mexico* offers a unique perspective beyond what can be found in the journals and letters written by soldiers or in official military records.

In scholarship devoted to the journal itself, with few exceptions, the critical focus tends to revolve around how Magoffin negotiates (and often revels in) a transient domesticity, her journal framed within the context of other women’s diaries of western, overland travel.²⁶ Virginia Scharff maintains that Magoffin “tried to draw domestic circles around her life, to create an American geography of comfort” as a buffer against all that was strange or frightening.²⁷ For Andrea Tinnemeyer, who reads the text within the genre of the “family romance,” Magoffin’s “efforts to recreate the domestic in the Southwest,” provides a frame through which she is able to interact with Mexican women.²⁸ By and large, most readings circle around Magoffin’s interiority, what Deborah Lawrence calls “her own changing self,” as she negotiates the pressures of travelling.²⁹ Also read as a penitential narrative, Andrew Menard, for example, finds Magoffin’s journal to be the “the record of a soul aroused and disillusioned by the course of these [Mexican War] events,” with the trail becoming a “kind of interior that she identifies as a site of penitence and sustained self-doubt.”³⁰

While I am indebted to this important scholarship, and though I do not ignore Magoffin's domestic practice or her movements through different domestic spaces, my interest instead is on how Magoffin's journal registers a nation unsettling itself in the very process of a territorialist expansion, one envisioned as uniting the continental United States. In this interstitial historical space before Mexican incorporation, Magoffin's negotiations with the national and the transnational articulate the ambivalence and anxieties that mark, and will continue to undergird, the appropriation of this land and its people. But, importantly, Magoffin's journal also conveys undercurrents of resistance and trepidation on the part of Mexicans and Native Americans faced with the U.S. invasion and occupation of their own sovereign nations, undercurrents that in many ways efface Anglo-American exceptionalism or attempts to deny or ignore the ramifications of the war.

Itinerant Allegiance: Manifest Destiny in a Transnational World

From the viewpoint of Americans living in the Gulf States and the newly annexed Texas, the eastern two-thirds of *Nuevo Mexico*, along with the northern coastal states of Mexico, had long been spaces of cross-cultural community as well as contention, particularly in the decades following Mexican Independence in 1821. Among the traders, merchants, trappers, and others, who settled in or moved through this porous environment, intermarriage was common, and the family that Magoffin marries into reflects that reality. Susan herself was raised in comfort in an august Kentucky family. Her father was Isaac Shelby, Jr.; her grandfather, Isaac Shelby (1750-1826), a distinguished Revolutionary War hero, who became Kentucky's first Governor. Susan's great-grandfather, Evan Shelby (1719-94), was a Great Lakes fur trader, Indian fighter, and Tennessee pioneer. The Magoffins were an equally patrician family. Samuel's father, Beriah, another wealthy Kentucky pioneer, also went on to be Governor of Kentucky. Perhaps not

surprisingly, both the Shelbys and the Magoffins were slave owners and while not noted, Susan's "attendant" during her travels, Jane, may also have been a slave.³¹

The three Magoffin brothers, who opted to stake their futures elsewhere, were not only traders, popular with Mexicans of all classes, but were politically connected as well. While Samuel and William were comparatively new to the trade, Susan's brother-in-law, long-time trader James Wiley Magoffin (known in the Mexican border provinces as Don Santiago), was also engaged in U.S.-Mexican politics, and served as United States consul in Saltillo, Coahuila from 1825 to 1831.³² James was married to San Antonian María Gertrudis Valdez de Veramendi, whose cousin, Manuel Armijo, was the Governor of New Mexico. The Valdez's were among the powerful elite in Chihuahua, and Gabriel Valdez, James's brother-in-law, would travel with the Magoffins from Santa Fé onward.

Given his engagement in New Mexican commerce and politics, along with his knowledge of Spanish and the culture of Mexico, at the behest of Polk, James was involved in negotiations to persuade Armijo to retreat ahead of the U.S. troops, granting Kearny his oft-named "bloodless conquest" of Santa Fé and the rest of New Mexico. Susan, who refers to her brother-in-law as the "agent of Kearny," references the meeting with Armijo in the following entry: "a negotiation is being carried on between the two generals through brother James, who has the confidence of the Mexican Gen. so completely, we may look for pleasant results" (*T* 84). Magoffin writes further that "if any thing should go wrong we will be rather the first to receive a warning if is necessary to remain from Santa Fé, and though we are behind it now, if it is necessary to return to the U.S., we will be first," a reference to their being the last of the wave of traders to leave Bent's Fort behind Kearny (*T* 84). In this early part of her travels, Magoffin

betrays not only an optimistic confidence bred of a privileged insider's position, but to a certain degree the nation's sentiments at the beginning of the war as well (T 1).

James would have less luck in Chihuahua. There he was thrown in jail as a spy after found with Secretary of War Marcy's letter to Kearny, which introduces James as someone who given his "knowledge of the country and the people" might render "important services to you in regard to your military movements." Marcy adds further that considering "his credit with the people and his business capacity, it is believed he will give important information and make arrangements to furnish your troops with abundant supplies in New Mexico."³³ James's status would become a source of high anxiety for the Magoffins, exacerbating their own tenuous position after they leave Santa Fé. Following a report that Apaches had robbed him of everything comes news that James is "on *trial for his life*" (T 169). These reports are followed by those that James has been sent to Durango, or maybe Mexico City; then that he is actually in prison in Chihuahua; then that he as been assassinated. Only after ten months of worry do they learn he is safe.

During the conflict, the commercial-political alliances of traders such as James provoked Bernard DeVoto to argue, "in this area Manifest Destiny took the shape of a large-scale freight operation," while Daniel Walker Howe similarly notes that "Chihuahua would 'buy American' at gunpoint."³⁴ It is this same notion of commerce as the forerunner or agent of territorial expansion that inflects readings of Magoffin's domestic presence as harbinger of empire as well, someone who, as Randi Lynn Tanglen suggests, was to "some extent... aware of her role in the politics of this "contact zone."³⁵ Virginia Scharff is more explicit, viewing Magoffin as an "agent of the American empire, charged with the job of domesticating a series of strange places"

in advance of future Anglo-American settlement; adding that as both “ingénue and invader,” she is essentially “keeping house for Manifest Destiny.”³⁶

It is unlikely, however, that Magoffin consciously viewed the sharing of American knitting techniques or dress patterns as engaging in the project of territorial expansion. Yet, when she writes from Santa Fé that General Kearny “delights in reminding me of my Calafornia [*sic*] tour, says he will write and give me the required information resting the sight for my house, and I must let him have my word that I will go”—however much her comments may be drawn from flattery or a presumed naiveté—it is difficult to ignore the subtext of empire-building wrapped as domestic settlement (*T* 139). That Magoffin also assumes that the conquest of Alta California is assured evinces an exceptionalist undercurrent as well.

While Magoffin will express similar sentiments that betray a belief in the ideology of manifest destiny, since she is writing within the context of war, it is often difficult to discern how many of those expressions reflect nothing more than a fervent hope for the conflict to be over. What is clear, however, is that national loyalty allows Magoffin to maintain a sense of connection and continuity with her “dear native land” and as a hedge against the unfamiliar environment of Mexico (*T* 72). Visits from American soldiers in Santa Fé, for example, are appreciated in “this foreign land where there are so few manners and customs similar to ours, or in short anything to correspond with our *national* feelings and *fireside* friendships.”³⁷ Noting the “sympathetic feelings” created by being in “similar situations—the separations from friends and relations,” she feels the company “quite desirable to be sought after” (*T* 126).

Yet, as she witnesses the war’s effects on her husband’s Mexican friends and business partners, on Mexican towns, and on her brother-in-law James, the demarcations of national loyalty become less stable. This is further complicated by her increasing engagement with a

variety of New Mexican populations—wealthy *Dons* and their families, mestizos, Pueblo and Navaho Indians, and long-established Americans—some of whom are naturalized Mexican citizens “well initiated [*sic*] in the *manners of living and ways of*” that country (*T* 127). In many of these encounters, Magoffin will directly and indirectly witness the “*national feelings*” of Mexicans. This is not to suggest that Magoffin fails to distinguish her own American-ness from these populations. As the country becomes less alien, however, Magoffin finds herself, as Brigitte Georgi-Findlay remarks, “oscillating between national loyalty and the privileging of personal relations,” and it is the ability to engage in the transnational, commercial world of her husband, that allows for those direct and personable encounters with a population her country is at war with.³⁸

Whether with conscious intention or not, as the war continues to intrude, Magoffin frames the traders as separate from the military apparatus, and by proxy, with the larger goal of territorial expansion. Learning that some of the traders have taken Mexicans as prisoners if they are suspected as spies, Magoffin finds it “a rather bold step for peaceable traders to take” (*T* 161). With the border pass into Chihuahua presumably blocked by Mexican troops, she seems equally put off by traders “determined to play the same game” as the Mexicans by letting no one cross through their camps (*T* 161). At another point, she relates that General Wool has joined Taylor, both companies marching to San Luis Potosi “there to meet Gen. Santa Anna, and I suppose to determine by one great battle the fate of the traders *here*, as well as many other things resting the Republic” (*T* 179). Even in the face of James’s involvement and Samuel’s frequent interchanges with the military, ones in which he paves the way for “‘protection’ and polite treatment from all the chief men,” Magoffin nonetheless draws the “peaceable” traders, such as

themselves, as pawns in the clash between nation-states, continuously stuck in a holding pattern “expecting something that will either continue us on our journey or turn us back” (*T* 179).

As the Magoffins travel closer to El Paso, waiting for Colonel Alexander Doniphan and his Missouri volunteers to secure Chihuahua, rumors fly quickly: a large force is coming to “carry us off prisoners and to *retake* New Mexico;” General Wool is to join Taylor to fight off Santa Anna; Taylor may already be defeated, and they will have to return to “Santa Fé and enter [newly-built] Fort Marcy for safety” (*T* 170). Suspicions build as fast as the news, and Magoffin finds her own suspicions aroused by the men coming to trade with Samuel. As for one, by “his looks and whole demeanor I should say would not hesitate to do a ‘deed in the dark!,’” while she suspects another because of “*his flattering talk of the Americans* and abuse of his own people” (*T* 193). Seeming almost surprised, she writes that her “knowledge of these people has been extended very much in one day. There are among them some of the greatest villains, smooth-faced assassins and some good people too” (*T* 192). Though Magoffin is unwilling to jettison all feelings of goodwill, foremost on her mind is that the Mexicans are out to “murder all the Americans in the country” without distinction (*T* 192).

What the varying reports begin to generate is a far cry from the assured sense of American superiority and ease of occupation felt in Santa Fé. Now the fear is of a Mexican victory inspiring “this fickle people” with enough confidence to rise “en mass” and “murder us without regard” (*T* 170-1). As though catching herself again, Magoffin adds: “this is rather a dark picture to be painting” (*T* 170-1). News of the Taos uprising, a combined Mexican/Puebloan insurrection, adds fuel to anxieties of an uncontrollable and unpredictable people. Kearny, who felt confident that the people of northern New Mexico posed little threat, had left trader and Taos-resident Charles Bent in charge as territorial Governor, perhaps thinking his familiarity

with the people, as well as his marriage to Ignacia, a New Mexican, would be sufficient.³⁹ As Magoffin relates with little exaggeration, the insurgents have “murdered every American citizen in Taos including the Gov;” “it is a perfect revolution there” (T 191).⁴⁰

But of more immediate concern for Magoffin is that the troops have been ordered back to Santa Fé, leaving the Magoffins at the mercy of “a reckless mob,” an “awful thing to peaceful citizens” (T 215). At one point some “*friends* (for we have a few here),” notify them that a Mexican victory will bring a mob, where “we may be seized and murdered in a moment for we are Americans, and though disposed to be peaceable, are here entirely against our own will, judgment, and inclination” (T 215). In her continued separation of the traders, and even their Mexican “*friends*,” as unwitting captives of either American or Mexican forces, Magoffin sidesteps any implication of her own or the trading culture’s involvement in what is unfolding, while through her frequent references to the trader’s peaceful nature, she works to deny the violence around her.

In the early months of the war, however, troops moving towards Santa Fé had reasons to wonder about the allegiance of the traders. While still in the United States, Magoffin makes note of a “company of U.S. Dragoons, who have been ordered out for the protection of the traders to Santa Fé... There are some 70 in number, passed on before us and camped about half mile ahead” (T 10). Protection, perhaps, but as Stella Drumm notes, this company was “sent to overtake [Prussian-born] Albert Speyers’ caravan, carrying arms and ammunition to the Mexicans” (T 10). Even on first meeting Kearny, Magoffin writes that: “he says as he is the Gov. now I must come under his government, and at the same time he places himself at my command, to serve me when I wish will be his pleasure &c.” (T 107). Magoffin is flattered, writing, “*United States General*

No.1 entirely at my disposal,” seeming to miss Kearny’s peculiar language which betrays an initial hesitation regarding where her allegiance lies (*T* 132).

Magoffin’s separation of the traders from the forces of expansion may be disingenuous, yet as she experiences it on a daily basis, the New Mexican trading culture in many ways seems a world apart. It is one where the local women are as excited as children by Samuel’s bales of calico, or where his renown as a “skillful medico” brings people in for remedies, returning the favor with grateful gifts of food (*T* 183). It is one in which his knowledge of the people and country, “perhaps more” than any other traders, allows for better decisions, faster dispatches, and decent accommodations (*T* 172). For Magoffin, a great source of pride is when she can declare: “I am merchant today,” positioning herself within a multifaceted social and cultural system (*T* 173). Entries such as these express the longevity of the trade, essentially framing the “complex localism” of this culture outside the temporal range of the conflict swirling immediately around her.⁴¹ These are different kinds of alliances, ones that had traditionally been based on mutual understandings that the commerce was for everyone’s benefit.⁴²

But it is this very longevity, as Howard Lamar states, and other critics mirror, that “prepared the way for the political as well as economic conquest” of Mexico’s northern provinces.⁴³ While James, and perhaps other traders played a part in certain political outcomes, and the traders did supply American troops with supplies during the conflict, the notion that American commerce paved the way for the ‘successful’ U.S. invasion is, of course, one that can only be made in hindsight, and one which perpetuates a one-sided, exceptionalist view of both the borderer region and the trading culture it supported. That is, these readings enact a historical erasure of the Mexican half of the commerce and the transnational nature of even Magoffin’s

own family, in favor of a narrative that stresses the inevitability of American territorial expansion.

‘Sinking our wheels’: Mr. Polk’s War and the Fine Art of Denial

As their travels continue, Magoffin cannot ignore the impact of the war. In the early months of the conflict, with victory following victory, it seemed the war might be over quickly. Polk had pinned his hopes on that.⁴⁴ Zachary Taylor was “also sure the war was now over” after his bloody victory at Monterrey in September of 1846, one that forced the surrender of Mexican General Ampudia.⁴⁵ As Amy Greenberg notes, “[h]ad the war been about the Mexico-Texas boundary, it would have been over.”⁴⁶ In reference to a report of an upcoming battle, Magoffin also writes that: “Our presumption is, if the American arms are successful, the war is at an end, without further say” (*T* 179).

As the Magoffins leave the relative safety, hospitality, and for Magoffin, female companionship of the El Paso region, and begin their travels into Chihuahua, it becomes less and less clear that the war is winding down, while the effects of the war also become more visible. In one long entry, Magoffin sardonically describes their arrival into the city of Chihuahua:

We arrived at Chi on the 4th of April; here we found Col. Doniphan’s command occupying the city, and a beautiful sight they have made of it in some respects. Instead of seeing it in its original beauty as I thought to have done twelve months since, I saw it filled with Missouri volunteers who though good to fight are not careful at all how much they soil the property of a friend much less an enemy. The good citizens of Chi had never dreamed I dare say that their loved homes would be turned into quarters for common soldiers, their fine houses many of them turned into stables, the rooves made

kitchens of, their public *pila* [drinking fountain] used as a bathing trough, the fine trees of their beautiful *alamador* [*alamdeda*-public walk] barked and forever spoiled, these and a hundred other deprivations equal to any of these, but yet all has been done. (*T* 228-9, Drumm's translations)

Even before leaving Bent's Fort, Magoffin wryly notes that the departing volunteers, "made a grand show, at least *in numbers*" (*T* 69). As they travel farther south from Chihuahua, other disturbing scenes will intervene, as when they pass the "*bones* of murdered countrymen, remains of burned wagons, all destroyed by Mexicans" (*T* 259). Finding "brackish water" at one campsite, they send for well water from the "burned town of Marine" three miles away (*T* 259). In Monterrey, while the Magoffins are plied with cake and champagne by Zachary Taylor, who she is "agreeably disappointed" with, having expected an uncouth, old "rough and ready," she notes that the cities' homes and other buildings are "perforated with cannon ball" and gunshot (*T* 254). Near the end of her journal, exhausted and pregnant again, Magoffin finds herself in Mier, a town "in confusion" over a robbery, and the "seat of so many country-men's wrongs, the most miserable hole imaginable" (*T* 259). Faced with these immediate realities, the spread of republican democracy through "bloodless" conquest, which Magoffin extols in Santa Fé, must have now seemed a doubtful enterprise.

It is the folly of the war, and the hubris of men fighting it, that Magoffin seems to take the most offense and notice of. Recovering from her physical trials at Bent's Fort, Magoffin finds herself "free to meditate, on the follies and wickedness of man! ... sinking himself to the level of beasts, waging warfare with his fellow man, even as the dumb brute" (*T* 69). Much later, on learning of the death of their friend Col. Owens, she comments on the pointlessness of

striving for military glory in the face of a higher calling. While he was “interred with military honours in Chi. and has left a name behind not soon to fade from the annals of our country,” she asks, “what does that name profit him now? Has it brought him a crown in Heaven? ... if not, it may be that name has ruined him” (*T* 223).

In a less pious, but no less biting tone, Magoffin notes that as soon as the artillery arrives at El Paso, “we are told that Col. D will leave for Chihuahua, anxious I suppose to reap if possible the glory of taking it himself before Gen. Wool’s arrival” (*T* 186). Magoffin is also saddened to see a company of young Virginians, headed to Buena Vista, all “determined and eager,” who “have left homes and friends many of them destined never to return” (*T* 235). Perhaps thinking of her own predicament, one man stands out, a ring on his hand “placed there perhaps by a fond and only sister—or it may be the pledge of a maiden of his youthful heart, whose love he now wishes to make himself more worthy of by some brave deed” (*T* 236).

In referring to western narratives written by traders, trappers, and others engaged with the west, Stephanie LeMenager makes the pertinent suggestion that the inland commercial networks did not “automatically implement loyalties to the U.S. nation-state” or provide “a consistent moral tone or satisfying commitment to conflict.”⁴⁷ Magoffin’s journal registers a similar form of inconsistency as to her nation’s imperialist project. Parallel to her expressions of the darker aspects of the war, as well as her form of denial regarding the trader’s involvement, Magoffin writes entries where she revels in the military might of the United States. On her visit to the building-in-progress of Fort Marcy at Santa Fé, Magoffin comments: “It is the most perfect view I ever saw. Not only every house in the city can be torn by artillery to atoms [*sic*], but the wide plain beyond is exposed to the fullest view” (*T* 140). On another occasion, she refers to the bloody battle of Brazito as a “nice little skirmish” (*T* 181). Even in the face of homes blasted by

cannonball, Magoffin finds a nearby American-occupied Mexican fort, to be in “fine order for a siege” (*T* 254). More striking are those moments where Magoffin treats the war as just another novelty of her tourist travels, picking up “as trophies” off a battlefield “two cartridges one Mexican the other Amer[ican]” as easily as she gathered flowers and other “[p]rairie curiosities” earlier (*T* 202, 11).

In many ways, Magoffin’s continual shifting of perception and reaction is contingent on immediate circumstance, present company, and degree of anxiety. Yet this soon-to-be re-mapped nation harbors a settled people whose blasted towns or direct comments press on the political and moral justification of the U.S. invasion, putting into question just exactly what Magoffin’s dreams of a California home really signify. In the home of Don Ygnacio Rouquia, Magoffin finds a pleasant man who not only looks like George Washington, but is also “a great admirer of the man whose name is ever dear to hearts of Americans” (*T* 211). But Don Rouquia has more to say, that “the course Mr. Polk is pursuing is entirely against the principles” of the revered Washington, that is, to “remain at home, encourage all home improvements, to defend our rights *there* against the incroachments [*sic*] of others, and never to invade the territory of an other nation” (*T* 211). Tellingly, Magoffin offers no written response, instead moving immediately to recording a visit from the nasty Doña Refugio, who tries to convince her that Samuel is off with “his other Senorita” (*T* 211-12).

Critics have read Magoffin’s silence as either a lack of concern for Rouquia’s criticism or as evidence of her unwillingness to express loyalty to either party in the conflict. Deborah Lawrence, for example, remarks that “Susan was not disturbed by such gentle political criticism,” finding Refugio’s suggestion of Samuel’s infidelity as “far more upsetting” to her.⁴⁸ Drawing on Magoffin’s own words—“Never could I wish to harm or exult over the other party,

if I were able I would have all peace,” Brigitte Georgi-Findlay finds Magoffin’s lack of a response as evidence that she “seems to have found it increasingly difficult to take sides in the Mexican-American conflict.”⁴⁹

While, at various points in the journal, Magoffin expresses her empathy for the plight of individual Mexicans who are affected by the war, primarily friends of her husband who they stay with, given her willingness to be both critical and applauding of her nation’s territorialist quest, it is unlikely that she would have no opinion on Rouquia’s pointed criticism. Her emphasis on the word “there” makes clear that she is fully aware of the point Rouquia is drawing concerning the “rights” of his own people to defend themselves against invasion. It also points to her subject position as being ‘here’ in Mexico, with all that entails. Given that she chooses to record this moment at all, Magoffin’s reticence gestures towards a form of denial, a posture often taken by Anglo-Americans to assuage conflicted feelings about the realities brought forth by an aggressive territorialization and strident rhetoric of American exceptionalism. Yet, at the same time, whether with conscious intent or not, Magoffin’s silence downplays the importance of what this Mexican simulacrum of George Washington has to say, while erasing his nation’s own history of struggle for independence.

“It is a strange people this”: Mexican Encounters and Counter-realities

In the mid-1840’s, for most Anglo-Americans, particularly those living far from the borderer spaces between Mexico and the United States, their picture of the Mexican people and the southwest was shaped by politicians, the press, and in popular works such as George Wilkins Kendall’s *Narrative of the Texan Santa Fé Expedition* (1844) and Josiah Gregg’s *Commerce of the Prairies* (1844).⁵⁰ Kendall, a journalist and editor of the *New-Orleans Picayune*, traveled

with the Texans in 1841-2 in what turned out to be a filibustering attempt to draw New Mexico territory into allegiance with the Republic of Texas. Captured along with the Texans near Santa Fé and marched to and imprisoned in Mexico City, Kendall stresses the brutality of the Mexican military, a “semi-civilized enemy—cruel, relentless, and treacherous,” with leaders such as Captain Dimasio Salazar nothing more than “bloodthirsty savage[s]”—a not atypical, rhetorical conflation of Anglo-American conceptions of Mexican and Indian identities.⁵¹ Reading Kendall’s work, one would have to agree, at least, on his assessment of Salazar. Yet, over nine hundred pages, it was less the names, than the descriptions that stuck with readers. The editors of the Philadelphia-based *Graham’s Lady’s & Gentleman’s Magazine*, for example, find Kendall’s narrative useful for providing even more evidence of the cruelty of the “physically and mentally degenerate” Mexicans.⁵²

While Mexican men were depicted as morally depraved, cunning and “bloodthirsty savages,” they were also portrayed as lazy, poor, swarthy, stupid, and incapable of raising their country out of its uncivilized state. Josiah Gregg comments at one point on the “idleness and stagnation” of Santa Fé while making note that Mexican agriculture, “like almost everything else in New Mexico, is in a very primitive and unimproved state,” though he is willing to grant “these ignorant people,” two “glowing virtues—gratitude and hospitality.”⁵³

As far as the Mexican women, Kendall helped to codify one picture that would provide exotic and racist fodder for the post-war novelettes of writers such as Ned Buntline: “The more striking beauties of Northern Mexico” have “dark and lustrous eyes,” perfectly white teeth, and “hair of that rich and jetty blackness peculiar to the Creole girls of Louisiana and some of the West India islands.” But he also found Mexican women of all classes to be kind and filled with “tender sympathies.”⁵⁴ For Kendall, as for other writers, Mexican women were also portrayed as

coquettish, immoral sirens or dark-skinned, dirty, and barely removed from Indians. Before and during the Mexican-American war, these relentlessly employed images, would help convince Americans that these weak and ineffectual, Catholic, postcolonial citizens were in dire need of rescue and democratic rehabilitation or, barring that, annihilation.

Though her experiences in Mexico brought her into contact with a wider range of the population and, most significantly women, Magoffin was no stranger to the Mexican people even before crossing the Arkansas, given that they were in her husband's employ as drivers, stock tenders, and personal servants. Among them, Magoffin mentions their three Mexican "tent servants;" "Roman, the old Mexican who attended the loose stock;" and "José, our principal Mexican about the camp" (T 4, 32, 66). Magoffin takes these Mexican's presence as a given—albeit one that is a new experience for her—in the same way as she does her "maid Jane" (T 66). When the Magoffin's tent is flooded and falls apart, even while she lauds "their faithful exertions to shield us from any exposure," and "depriving themselves in a measure," by giving up their "*blankets*," Magoffin nonetheless conveys a sense of her expectations of service and of where these people fit within her world and experience—their sacrifice of "*blankets*" appreciated, but not unexpected (T 56).

Beyond the hired help, the Mexicans merchants who also travel alongside the Magoffins reveal a trading culture that in many ways exists outside of the forces pitting one nation against another. Since Mexican independence in 1821, New Mexican and Chihuahuan merchants had engaged in the international trade as vigorously as Americans, if not more so in some cases. Often manning their own caravans to eastern suppliers in New York and Philadelphia, not a few traveled on to Europe to procure goods in London or Paris.⁵⁵ Less than a month after Polk declared war, the Magoffins are found camping alongside the wagons of "a Spaniard Armigo

(Don Raphael Armijo) (*T* 4, 7). The Magoffin's would visit Armijo's store south of Santa Fé, where "while they were counting some money *mi alma* was receiving," she took admiring note of the "little fixings, dry goods, groceries, hard-ware &c," which filled the space (*T* 152). With his own trading wagons, James's brother-in-law, Gabriel Valdez, also travels in the caravan. The trade was an international affair, not necessarily apolitical, but made up of players with a long-standing willingness to maintain amity for gain.

For Magoffin, the Mexican men, as with the companies of troops who are spread out on the trail with them, are an important, though for the most part, removed presence, and except for their swearing, which Magoffin finds "disagreeable," the men traveling in her company are not an affront to her refined Anglo-American sensibility (*T* 2). Magoffin does make clear her sense of racial distinction, as she does in describing the caravans as representing "a strange compound of Americans, Mexicans and negroes; Horses, mules and oxen" (*T* 20). Yet in her brief and mostly unadorned descriptions of the Mexican men on the trail, whether servants or merchants, while they represented a foreign culture speaking a language she will work hard to learn, she does not express any view of them as foreigners from the "other country" (*T* 20).

This perception changes dramatically once she reaches Bent's Fort and encounters Mexicans of her own gender, "*las señoritas*," the wives of George Bent and Dr. Eugene Leitsendorfer, one of whom applied oil to her hair to such a degree that Magoffin states: "I never would have believed it greese [*sic*], but that she had been washing her head" (*T* 62). Unlike Kendall's Mexican women, she finds this vision anything but exotic or alluring. Instead, Magoffin's almost grotesque image serves to allay anxiety while maintaining racial and cultural distance. Once in Mexico, Magoffin will be taken aback even more. Entering the first New Mexican town on the trail, "*Mora creek and settlement*," Magoffin describes the "*casa grande*"

“a little hovel, a fit match for some of the genteel pig stys in the States—it is made of sticks;” for the other, even smaller homes, she has “no comparison” (T 90). She suspects the little food they have will not be “palitable” [*sic*], even though the traders rely on the rancheros for provisions. While Magoffin will acknowledge that “they say my opinion is formed too hastily”—most likely Samuel—in these first views of Mexico she mirrors the stereotypical perceptions of most Anglo-Americans of a dirty, uncivilized, essentially savage people (T 91). On the trail, Mexicans were one thing. Here, in their homeland, quite another.

In the town of [Las] Vegas, greeted by a crowd of curious children, Magoffin self-mockingly refers to herself as a potentially lucrative “*monkey show*,” with *mujeres* and *hombres* also swarming about her “like bees” (T 92). Samuel knew the townspeople and the Magoffins are treated to a town dinner, where she makes note of the women’s *rebozos* and their “little cigarritas;” the dirty napkins and lack of silverware, and the inedible food (T 95). Apart from their familiarity with the Magoffin family, the people of Las Vegas may have had another reason to be especially hospitable. It is here that several weeks earlier, and two days after the Navajo had raided that town, that Kearny had read his proclamation announcing the U.S. occupation of Mexico, part of which reads:

We come among you as friends—not as enemies; as protectors not as conquerors. We come among you for your benefit—not for your injury...I am your governor...those who remain peaceably at home...shall be protected by me, in their property, their persons, and their religion...From the Mexican government you have never received protection. The Apaches and the Navojoes [*sic*] come down from the mountains and carry off your sheep,

and even your women, whenever they please. My government will correct all this. It will keep off the Indians... There goes my army...resistance is useless.⁵⁶

Perhaps not surprisingly, the cities' *alcade*, or major, took the oath of allegiance, a process that would be repeated throughout New Mexico.

As Brian DeLay indicates, the “invaders styled themselves saviors and liberators rather than conquerors,” essentially convincing themselves that they were saving Mexicans not only from raiding Indians, but from their own ineptitude.⁵⁷ Hampton Sides also notes that “perhaps to dignify the nakedness of Polk’s land lust,” Americans adopted a discourse of bringing republican government to a country whose “feudal customs and Popish superstitions, stood squarely in the way of Progress. To conquer Mexico, in other words, would be to do it a favor.”⁵⁸ While there were perhaps some in the crowd who were grateful for anyone claiming to stop the raids by the Navajo or, farther south, the Mescalero Apache, the duplicitous rhetoric of “protection” would ring familiar to anyone aware of the American treatment of Native Americans in general and the language for treaties in particular. The logic of Kearny’s proclamation, however, essentially that ‘the enemy of my enemy is my friend,’ would have been baffling to Mexicans and Natives alike. Just who was fighting whom?

For Magoffin, coming on the heels of these proclamations and still mostly removed from the ramifications of the conflict, she is more concerned with the exposed upper bodies of Mexican women that shakes her modesty, and with the “perfectly naked” children, which she finds “repulsive,” than with politics, though her racial bias is clear (*T* 95). Once in Santa Fé, though, she borrows on Kearny’s words, expressing the view that while he “has come and taken entire possession, seated himself in the former Governor’s chair, raised the American flag and

holds Santa Fé as a part of the United States, still he has not molested the habits, religion &c. of the people, who so far are well pleased with their truly republican governor” (T 103).

Given her own patriotic moment on arriving in Santa Fé, here Magoffin nonetheless manages to succinctly enumerate the insults heaped upon the people of that city. Insulated by the elite circles she moves in, Magoffin can only see a grateful populace, unlike Lieutenant Elliott who arrived with Kearny and records the women of the city reacting with “unstifled screams of sorrow and anguish” and “a wail of grief [that] rose from the depths of the gloomy buildings on every hand.”⁵⁹ At a dinner party, Magoffin records Kearny’s toast: “The U.S. and Mexico—They are now united, may no one ever think of separating,” and the response of the “Mexican gentlemen” who “cried out “*viva*” “*viva*” (T 133, 135). In this atmosphere of presumed congeniality and acceptance of the U.S. occupation, Magoffin may have responded to this pseudo-egalitarian, but imperialist pronouncement with the same exceptionalist sense as other Anglo-Americans, that democracy was being brought to the country, while either missing or ignoring Kearny’s underlying threat (T 133, 135).

In Santa Fé, even as war news begins to intrude on a daily basis, Magoffin is anxious to get down to the “general business of house-keepers” and perhaps to prove to some unnamed critics back home of her aptitude (T 112). At one point, settled into Samuel’s house, she writes with seeming frustration: “how I would like for *some* of them to see me now how very happy and contented I am, how I am delighted with this new country, its people, my new house, or rather my *first* house, which ‘*twas supposed* I should not be capable of managing” (T 114). Apart from a slowly diminishing language barrier, Magoffin’s interactions with New Mexicans in Santa Fé mirror in many ways that of any wealthy Kentucky household in the late 1840s. In training their Mexican help, she finds that the “great virtue of these servants is their ever pleasant faces,”

grateful that they “remain submissive” (T 111). She also receives visits from “Mexican ladies” such as “Dona Juliana, a woman poor in the goods of this world, a great friend to the Americans and especially to the Magoffins whom she calls *muy bien famile* [muy buena familia]--very good family” (T 107, Drumm's translation). Another woman “speaks in favour of the foreigners, and without hesitation says Gen A[r]mijo is a *ladrón* [thief] and coward,” not an uncommon view among New Mexicans, particularly those living in Santa Fé (T 109).

The dual position of the Magoffins as familiar traders and as citizens of the invading country, however, adds an undercurrent of tension to these conversations. Seemingly unaware of the deeply unsettling situation the residents of the city are put in by the occupation, Magoffin finds much to admire: “What a polite people these Mexicans are, altho’ they are looked upon as a half barbarous set by the generality of people;” they are an “inquisitive, quick people” (T 131, 115). She is taken by a market girl, who “excites her sympathies” and who she calls her “little protege,” adding that just “to see the true politeness and ease displayed by that child is truly [amazing], ‘twould put many a mother in the U.S. to the blush” (T 131, Drumm’s insertion). While Magoffin’s prejudice is tempered by these encounters, these are controlled and intimate exchanges, ones where it was in Magoffin’s, but especially the Mexican’s, favor to be either accommodating or maintain the decorum of the trade.

Confronted with Mexicans in larger groups, and on their own turf, however, Magoffin finds much to denigrate. Invited to a Spanish ball for American officers and traders, she paints a portrait of an antiquated, post-colonial, licentious, and barbarous culture. Against the backdrop of the U.S. occupation—the walls “decorated with the ‘stripes and stars’—Magoffin remarks on the incessant smoking, the gaudy jewelry, and “fashions adapted to the reign of King Henry VIII, or of the great queen Elizabeth” (T 118). She meets the famed casino owner, Doña Tula, who

the pious Magoffin pictures luring “wayward, inexperienced youth to the hall of final ruin,” and wonders at a “dark-eyed Senora with a human footstool; in other words with her servant under her feet” (*T* 120-1, 123).

The specter of the Catholic religion is also raised, reflecting one of the driving forces of Anglo-American enmity towards Mexican and other Latin populations. Though she will later gratefully enter a Mexican church, in attending her first Catholic mass in Santa Fé, Magoffin disparagingly records that there are no pews; the women just “kneeled all over the floor,” there was “dancing music;” and the priest “repeated some latin neither understood by himself or his hearers” (*T* 137,138). Magoffin makes note of “some defaced pictures hanging about the Altar, the designs of which, for the numberless scratches and fingerprints, I could not unravel” (*T* 138). It does not enter her mind that the damage might have been caused by some of Kearney’s men, even though it might be one reason she finds the parishioners whispering “to the next neighbor and giving a sly glance to the American spectators” (*T* 138).

Near the end of their stay in Santa Fé, a visit from a drunk soldier does cause Magoffin to remark: “I do think some of my countrymen are disgracing themselves here” and it is perhaps not surprising that Doña Julienne wants the pattern to Magoffin’s high-necked cape, as there are “so many *Americanos*” in the plaza (*T* 149, 131). The citizens of Santa Fé had other concerns as well. As Magoffin relates it, a rumor that Armijo had assembled a large force outside of town, “sends panic among many of his former followers, and whole families are fleeing,” in fear of being found guilty of treason (*T* 110). But Magoffin is responding to the soldiers’ behavior towards herself, and in her own house, not to the affronts waged on the people of the city by her own nation, or Armijo’s flight.

Later in their travels, and stopped in San Gabriel by the conflict, Magoffin finds herself once again settled in comfortable circumstances. Even as war news comes daily, she learns how to make tortillas from the wife and daughter of Don José, the owner of the home they are staying in, and several times makes note of wanting to create a recipe book. She tends to William's fever and finds the Mexican method of "giving a sweat" to be "both a simple and good one" (*T* 173-4). She states that the "home folks would think me a great favorite if they could see how the good people of the village" bring her cheese, sweets, and tortillas (*T* 173). Here in the "American portion of the Republic," if they are forced to stay, Magoffin looks forward to learning "a good many of the Mexican ways of living" (*T* 164). It is these kinds of entries that signal a certain willingness on Magoffin's part to entertain a different perspective of the Mexican people and culture, clearly not a relinquishment of Anglo-American superiority, but a receptiveness to accept, and even acquire, cultural difference. But these moments also make clear that these women have no intention of suddenly doing away with their own cultural heritage.

Farther south, near the border pass (El Paso) between New Mexico and Chihuahua, the Magoffins will again find accommodations with Samuel's acquaintances, elite citizens of the Rio Abajo who had assured him that they could come without fear, as they have "always been friendly" to him (*T* 202). Even with their long-standing relationships, these Mexicans are understandably anxious, as Doniphan took some of the influential citizens as hostages to ensure their good behavior towards traders; a move Magoffin feels is "quite a proper [*sic*] step" (*T* 202). She will soon learn that Reverend Ramon Ortiz, whose home they are staying in, is one of these men, and with James's welfare in doubt, Magoffin offers the following: "our situations are truly singular; we have a brother prisoner in Chi., while they have

one *el Senor Cura* held hostage by our army for his safety, and we are here in the same house and as I trust, friends” (T 215).

Magoffin’s switch from seeing the hostages as a protection for traders, to one where it is for the Mexican’s safety, is evidence of the convoluted and unsettling atmosphere in which she travels. In this home she feels anxiety, concerned that friends of the hostages harbor ill will towards them and felt compelled to add a footnote, that “in the critical situation we were in I never wrote all I might have done, for fear of my journal being seized had things gone with us differently” (T 216). Yet, she also focuses attention on her hosts. Finding herself so taken by the hospitality, empathy, intelligence, and sincerity of “*mi alma’s* old friend Don Agipita,” she declares him “a man ever to be beloved” (T 205). His twenty-two year old daughter, Doña Josefita is “lady-like...affable, perfectly easy in her manners” (T 205).

In the home of Ortiz, Magoffin finds his two sisters, Maria and Rosalita, and Rosalita’s children to be also “exceedingly kind and attentive” and again hints that Americans could do better in raising their own children (T 208). Detailing the house, the garden, and the food—all to her liking—Magoffin effuses “they are so kind and attentive, so desirous to make us easy, so anxious for our welfare in the disturbances of the country, I can’t help loving them” (T 207). In her continual litany of Mexican kindness, one has to wonder, however, how much Magoffin is trying to convince herself that the Mexican hospitality is in effect a genuine friendship or, instead, a mutual amity based on shared business concerns.

Similarly, while the hospitality of both families is undoubtedly sincere, their generous spirit would have been enhanced by concerns for their own safety. If they are “anxious” for the Magoffin’s welfare, they would clearly be more concerned for their own. Conversely, while she will feel sympathy for a tearful Ygnacio Rouquia, who as “a Mexican,” was “pained...to the

heart” to learn that the American’s had won the battle of Sacramento and taken possession of Chihuahua, she is understandably “delighted with the news” (T 217, 218). However empathic, in the context of war, he is still a “Mexican” first.

What Rouquia and the Ortiz family do represent, however, is the right ‘sort’ of Mexican. Not surprisingly, Magoffin is most comfortable and willing to learn and interact with men, and particularly women, of her own class, not those “with their faces awfully painted, some with red which shines like greese [*sic*], and others daubed over with flour-paste,” or the “Spanish beauty,” who is “fixed off with red paint which I first thought was blood” (T 150, 102). Perhaps most offensive are the “women washing in the creeks that “slap about with their arms and necks bare, perhaps their bosoms exposed (and they are none of the prettiest or whitest)” (T 95). Of the men, they “stand off with crossed arms, and all look with as much wonder as if they were not people themselves” (T 150). With the more elite citizens, the ‘white’ Creoles, Magoffin does not need to assert her race or whiteness through disparagement. But, she is also not reminded of it. In these households, she is not the object of curiosity, molested by the “constant stare of these wild looking strangers!” (T 95).

Even in the early part of her time in Mexico, however, Magoffin is willing to acknowledge her prejudice. Hearing a village woman pronounce her a “bonita muchachita” [pretty little girl],” she playfully declares the Mexicans a “very *quick and intelligent people*,” rather than her admitted perception that they were “void of refinement, judgement &c. as the dumb animals” (T 98). Her admission, though self-satisfyingly humorous, conveys at least a slight shift in worldview. As Deborah Lawrence has suggested, Magoffin’s “assessment of Mexican people remains balanced.”⁶⁰ Stephanie LeMenager as well finds Magoffin’s observations “generally sensitive, romantic at worst.”⁶¹ Magoffin’s opportunity to engage with a

wide spectrum of society, and under different circumstances than most of her male peers, does allow her to move slightly past some of the coded stereotypes of even lower-class Mexicans.

But changes in her perceptions of the Mexican people are still primarily formed through her interactions with men and women who fit her class. In referring to one of the cosmopolitan children she meets in El Paso, Magoffin writes: “I think if some of the foreigners who have come into this country, and judged of the whole population from what they have seen—on the frontiers, would, to see her a little time, be entirely satisfied of his error in regard to the refinement of the people, although I have not judged so rashly as most persons, I confess I am surprised a little” (*T* 205). Magoffin’s self-congratulatory tone, yet need to qualify her own surprise at finding “refinement,” though, is the balancing act of someone whose own experience disrupts set notions, yet is unwilling to forgo Anglo-American superiority.

Significantly, Magoffin also positions herself here as another “foreigner,” a tourist merely remarking on the people and culture of “this country,” rather than as an American, a citizen of a nation very much in the process of attempting to conquer that country (*T* 205). Clearly, at this point, Magoffin could have no idea that the people she is writing about will, in several years, be incorporated into the United States, the northern frontier of Mexico becoming the southern frontier of her country. But her ambivalent views of Mexicans reflect a xenophobic tension regarding these bordering populations who trouble conceptions of American identity, an anxiety Magoffin conveys in expressions of whiteness. Earlier in her journal, on one of her many “rambles,” Magoffin remarks: “I am covered with dust till instead of being black any longer, I am brown changing back to white again” (*T* 79). While the berries she had just collected cause Magoffin’s “blackness,” her transformation from brown to white, enacts what

will be a grateful exit from Mexico, however much she had absorbed the culture or felt she had befriended the country's people.

Near the end of their travels, Magoffin looks forward to meeting Mrs. Hunt, "a *lady*," "who was bold enough to follow her husband to the wars," but who has "seen quite enough of the elephant."⁶² In Saltillo, as Magoffin relates, Mrs. Hunt "called soon after breakfast, being quite as anxious to see a "white woman" as I am," and "I can well say that two women meeting after an entire sepperation [*sic*] of twelve months from female society, are certainly a curiosity" (*T* 250, 251). They lose no time, their tongues "incessantly in motion as the bell clappers in Mexico, telling of our adventures in travel, anxiety to reach home, the wishes of our friends &c &c" (*T* 251). As Deborah Lawrence comments, Magoffin gestures to her own status as "anomaly" in Mexico by placing the phrase white woman in quotes, just as the two women are also presented as a "curiosity."⁶³

Yet, more importantly, even as she affirms her whiteness by these gestures, and repositions herself as just a traveler, she also reaffirms Anglo-American separateness through her comment that she has been "twelve months from female society" (*T* 251). Just who then were all those women she spent time with and, on many occasions, admired and learned from? While meant to convey a sentiment that those back home would understand, Magoffin's act of erasure nonetheless registers not only the limits of accommodation towards Mexicans, but her nation's anxiety towards their very presence.

Mexico and the Unsettling of the Indigenous West

Though it was not the only trade route between New Mexico, the United States, and Europe, the Santa Fé Trail had been an active thoroughfare of trade since Mexican Independence in 1821, one enlivened for Americans through works such as Gregg's popular *Commerce of the*

Prairies—a text which Magoffin borrows from, cites, and compares her own experiences to (often at Gregg’s expense) particularly in the early part of the journal. Through this and similar texts, the geographic landmarks of the Trail—such as Council Grove, Pawnee Rock, and Wagon Mound—were increasingly familiarized, along with the prairie landscapes of what is now Kansas, southeast Colorado, and the Oklahoma panhandle. Before arriving at the Arkansas River, Magoffin had made another symbolic crossing, however amorphous, at Council Grove, “the great rendezvous of all the traders,” which, as Magoffin continues, “may be considered the dividing ridge between the civilized and barbarous, for now we may look out for hostile Indians” (*T* 16). A dividing line, whether at this spot or elsewhere between “civilized” and “savage” was an established trope of literatures of the west, one that for authors was also a signal to their readers of entry into a world of adventure and danger. But the divide was also coded with the racial binary between white and red, one that as Brian DeLay notes, “enabled fractious and diverse frontier communities to surmount their internal differences and cooperate in war.”⁶⁴

Not just a commercial pathway, the trail was also an important conduit for news, and even more so in 1846 as the Army of the West spread out for miles along its length. Early on, the Magoffins meet up with an Indian trader, accompanied by a “Negro woman,” returning from Bent’s with a large cargo of skins (*T* 8). Engaging in a long conversation, they learn about the condition of the road, war news, and that the Indians “are pretty bad about Pawnee Fork” (*T* 8). Borrowing directly from Gregg that the Pawnee are “the most treacherous and troublesome to the traders,” Magoffin hurriedly scratches her name into the iconic Pawnee Rock on July 4th, a gesture, which as Deborah Lawrence suggests, “articulates her national origin, her geographical mobility, and her bodily presence” (*T* 40).⁶⁵ But Magoffin’s entry also places her among a

genealogy of military personnel, traders, or others, who have passed along the trail, as “among the many hundreds inscribed on the rock,” she adds: “many of whom I knew” (*T* 40).

For all her fears of “some wily savage or hungry wolf” always lurking and ready to pounce, Magoffin’s encounters with Native populations on the Plains do not match her premonitions of attack. Before arriving at Bent’s, the Magoffins receive one visit from a warrior from the Kaw (Kansas) tribe, there to enjoy dinner with them, a not uncommon practice on the trail. Dressed only in a “breach clout,” he smokes his pipe, watching the dinner preparations with a “scrutinizing eye” (*T* 14). She is most taken by how exceedingly silent he is. “I did not hear him speak but two words, and they were telling his name,” one she doesn’t record (*T* 14). As for the report of potential problems at Pawnee Fork, nothing transpires, an outcome in her view due to the “sight of so many military coats,” being “quite sufficient to frighten all the Indians entirely out of the country,” not to mention the traders with their “seventy-five or eighty wagons of merchandise” (*T* 43).

The U.S. invasion of Mexico and the relationship of that to the involvement of native populations, however, begin to intrude at Bent’s Fort. While the Mexican-American War has long been historicized as a conflict between two nation-states, the actions of independent nations of Apache, Comanche, and Navajo not only provided fodder for Americans to convince themselves that the Mexicans needed rescuing, but were primary players in the war.⁶⁶ On several occasions, Arapahoe who arrive at the Fort are thought to be spies, though in Magoffin’s view “they come rather with the appearance of trading” (*T* 67). She comments on George Bent’s offer to show them the soldier’s camp: “They hesitate rather saying they have ‘two hearts on the subject; one of which says go! And the other says don’t go!’ They are a cunning people, and no doubt ‘twould be a rich treat to hear, on their returning to their tribe, their graphic account of the

American Army ‘the white faced Warriors’ (T 67). Magoffin seems little troubled by these Native’s presence, or of the part they play in the conflict.

It will be an Indian woman who will provide a more lasting impression. Giving birth at around the same time as Magoffin suffered her miscarriage, she learns that the woman and her healthy baby took a bath in the river, “and [have] continued each day since” (T 68). Astonished at the custom, and given her own weakened state, Magoffin takes aim at the “too careful treatments during child-birth” to the ruin of many “ladies in civilized life” (T 68). While the Indian’s custom is not “disadvantageous,” it is a “*heathenish custom*,” Magoffin thereby rebalancing the status quo (T 68). But this scene of reverse dominance must have shaken her pre-conceived biases.

On reaching Santa Fé, Magoffin comes face to face with a Native American, but under very different circumstances than with the Kaw; “I had a visit from an Indian chief too, but what is his name? Well at any rate his tribe is known as the Comanche. He speaks quite good English and some Spanish...he was bearing a letter to Gen. Kearny (and showed it to me) from some of the officers here. I suppose something of a treaty” (T 113). At another point, Magoffin notes that the “Gen. came in and sat half hour with us—in the mean time an ambassador from the Comanche Indians called with his staff of treaty, and as this was a business to be transacted at home he left for “The Palace” with his Indian friends” (T 142).⁶⁷

Kearny, along with Doniphan, was busy attempting to make good on his promise to the New Mexicans to bring the various tribes under U.S. control, particularly the Navajo and Utes. Sending runners out to different Indian communities, Kearny soon had “delegations of Utes and Jicarilla Apaches” coming in promising not to “harm Mexicans or molest their property.”⁶⁸ The Navaho were not interested. In fact, on Kearney’s departure from Santa Fé, their raids

increased.⁶⁹ Eventually, however, in negotiations with Doniphan, the Navajo overcame “the maddening contradictions of the Americans’ quarrel with Mexico,” Doniphan convincing them in the backwards logic of the war, that since New Mexico, and the Mexicans, were now part of the United States, any affront to Mexicans was an affront to the U.S.⁷⁰ The Navajo signed the treaty and Magoffin records the moment: “We learn today that Col. Donaphan [*sic*], the officer left in command by Gen. Kearny has returned from the Navijoe [*sic*] country, where he has for some time been engaged in making a treaty (*T* 172).

Magoffin also makes note of a Navajo raid prior to Kearny’s arrival, that left some families in states of “mourning and lamentations, for friends they may never again see on earth” (*T* 110). But she is convinced that the Navajo will succumb “thro’ fear, as they deem the Gen. something almost superhuman since he has walked in so quietly and taken possession of the palace of the great A[r]mijo, their former fear” (*T* 111). Magoffin’s star-struck view of Kearny and his mission does not allow for any thought that it might be Armijo who feared the Navajo or of the underlying resistance of the sovereign Navajo and the Comanchería to the American occupation.

Traveling on the road with her husband, however, Magoffin’s engagement with the Comanche exposes both a gap and convergence between Indian involvement in the affairs of nations and her own experiences with them as part of a trading family. Passing through one small town south of Santa Fé, the Magoffin’s carriage is stopped by a Comanche chief, “*my* Indian friend—the one who called to see me in Santa Fé,” who had “been expecting and preparing for us” (*T* 151). Pressed for time, they accept some grapes, while he and his family watch “with pleased faces” (*T* 151). That the chief knew and had been expecting them marks a longer association with the traders than with the invading American’s army. But as with the ever-

hospitable Mexicans, this family too, must have been concerned about the Magoffin's allegiance and the ramifications of the occupation.

More striking is Magoffin's appropriation of the chief as *her* Indian friend, particularly since she apparently still cannot remember his name. Granted, she may simply want to impress family or friends back home with what would be seen as a unique relationship, or to feel that she is making her own friends in Mexico. Magoffin expresses this sentiment again outright, when, after Samuel's friend, Don Agapita gives them both a "hearty welcome," she adds "(I hope though he will like me for myself by and by)" (T 205). Her expressions of Indian possession, however, even if innocently conveyed, articulate both the expansionist reach of the war, while foregrounding the eventual displacement of Navajo, Comanche, Apache and other independent tribes, an outcome that will prove far more difficult to effect than imagined.

South of Santa Fé, the Magoffins enter a region, the Rio Abajo, or the lower Rio Grande river district, a territory of Pueblo Indians, mestizos, established *criollos*, and, increasingly, Apaches. Having earlier toured the Pueblo ruins at Pecos, Magoffin expresses her sadness in "riding almost heedlessly over the work of these once mighty people" who if "uncivilized or half-civilized as we generally believe them, they at least had an idea of grandure" (T 99). As for the living Puebloans, Magoffin, borrowing again from Gregg, states: "these are the Pueblos or descendants of the original inhabitants—the principal cultivators of the soil—supplying the Mexican inhabitants with fruits and vegetables &c. (T 151).⁷¹ For Kearny, convinced that the long-settled farming and, at least outwardly Catholic, Pueblo Indians, were no threat, and looking instead for trouble from other independent tribes, did not see the hostility simmering under his nose and was stunned by the Taos revolt.

What is clear, however, is that the Puebloans are not the inevitably disappearing Indians of Cooper's or Parkman's Great Plains. The seeming lack of cultivation and settlement among the nomadic Plains Indians, which Anglo-Americans used as part of their argument for an aggressive dispossession of Native land rights and to absolve themselves of any wrongdoing, becomes a harder sell in New Mexico. As independent inhabitants of a foreign nation, living outside of the expansionist rhetoric that erases Native presence by sheer act of will, Magoffin's journal narrates a landscape where that presence is not only "lurking" but also everywhere visible. While this area of what would become an immense territorial prize was not one that, at this point, many Americans envisioned for settlement, for a nation convinced of the rule of property as possession, the very existence of the Pueblo Indians not only problematized one of the central tenets of territorial expansion, but brought to the surface an unexpected pocket of resistance.

In her intimate exchanges with mestizos and Pueblo Indians, Magoffin seems unconcerned with the wider politics of the region, instead relishing again feelings of friendship. Convincing her husband to give an old squaw a bottle, something she states was a prized item of trade, "it pleased her so much she called me "*comadre*" all the time, and on separating we parted almost like old friends. She *presented* me with some *tortillas*. I warrant if I should see her ten years hence she would recollect her "[c]omadre" and the *black bottle* (T 154).⁷² At another point, chatting with a "half Indian, half Mexican," Magoffin relates that they "talked of all family concerns from the children down to the dogs" (T 150). While she often seems to express an overblown sense of self-importance as to her impact on these women, these one-on-one exchanges nonetheless convey a willing attempt to forge and maintain trading culture relationships. This is not to suggest that Magoffin advocates a generalized egalitarian

perspective, and more than one entry makes clear her assumption of racial and class superiority, as when, again borrowing from Gregg, she comments on the pigeon-toes, knock-knees, and odd facial and guttural gestures shared by Indians and Mexicans “of the lower class,” but that in these more personal encounters, she seems comfortable with her engagement with that “lower class” (*T* 156).

Entering Apache territory, however, the fears of the “savage red man” and “blood thirsty Indians” reappear, Magoffin tapping back into the familiar rhetoric of the western narrative (*T* 204, 70). Unseen, but present, the Apache take the place of the Pawnee as Magoffin’s new source of Indian anxiety and a civilized/savage binary. The fact that James escapes from the robbery with his life is nothing short of a “miracle,” as the Apaches “always want the *scalps*, the principal part of the business” (*T* 151). More unsettling is that, unlike Magoffin’s sense of security brought on by the “sight of so many military coats” at Pawnee Fork, here the American presence is ineffectual, the Apache “driving off stock, and killing the inhabitants if they have the opportunity, notwithstanding the troops now among them” (*T* 149).

Though Kearny had offered to assist the Apache “in their war against bounty hunters and Mexicans,” attempting as with other tribes to either make use of or tamp down on indigenous populations during the conflict, nonetheless as Brian DeLay succinctly puts it, before Americans had even arrived, “everyone in the Mexican north, it seemed, was at war with someone.”⁷³ But from where Magoffin was sitting, these long-standing conflicts between independent tribes, and between these tribes and the Mexicans, nor the offers of trade made by Kearny, made little difference.

While Magoffin’s journal registers the presence and fear of a barbarous Indian population that her nation seems incapable of containing or scaring off, the Mexican troops equate as no

different from the Apache. As Magoffin writes of the “Indians all around us; coming into the soliders’ camp...and killing the men in front of them,” she also notes that “smooth-faced” Mexican assassins are approaching ready to cut the Americans to “pieces” (*T* 178). Regardless of the rhetoric Kearny and other military and government officials used to frame the Mexicans as helpless against the Indian raids as one means of exonerating themselves for invading Mexico, here the “savage” foes are both “red” and “brown” (*T* 204, 79).

Yet, while conflating Mexicans with American Native populations was a commonplace, as a large majority of the Mexican population were in her words “half Indian, half Mexican,” the taut racial binary mapped onto the American west would be further disrupted (*T* 150). While “half-breeds” certainly populated the American west and western narratives, they were often presented, at the most, as nomadic, French-Native helpmates in the nation’s territorial expansion or at the least, colorful, bit players easily written out of the larger territorialist narrative. What Magoffin narrates, is a complex region of *criollos*, long-established Puebloans, mestizo, and independent tribes of Apache, Comanche, and Navajo, that on a surface level ‘looks’ like the American west. Yet, not only did the populations of this vast territory historically *not* play by the same binary rules as Americans, but these “entangled histories” problematized the discourse of a white/red dichotomy that fueled western expansion and the ideology of manifest destiny. With the incorporation of these populations, then, Americans would appropriate a vast western territory, but it will not be one that fits neatly within the frontier imaginary of nationalist narratives.

“But now something of what my own eyes have witnessed”: Travels in Mexico

As they set out on the Santa Fé Trail, Magoffin’s journal gives little hint of the difficulties to come, expressing similar excitement for adventure and freedom as her male

counterparts, a freedom more treasured perhaps for a woman bound by the strictures of proscribed gender roles in the 1840s. Magoffin clearly revels in it: “Oh, this is the life I would not exchange for a good deal! There is such independence, so much free, uncontaminated air, which impregnates the mind, the feeling, nay every thought, with purity. I breathe free without that oppression and uneasiness felt in the gossiping circles of settled home,” a sentiment that will stay with her for most of her journey (*T* 10). Magoffin will also relish her mobility and more than once will happily express that “Lo, we are camping again!” (*T* 149).

Well aware of her patrician status and the comparative luxury she traveled in, Magoffin works to dispel the notion that she is merely along for the ride and makes a point to convey her fortitude in the face of hardship and danger, a well-worked trope in western travel narratives. Several times, she balances her experience to her own intrepid, pioneering grandmother: “This is truly exiting times! I doubt if my honoured Grandmother ever saw or heard of more to excite, in the War she was in [1812], than I have here” (*T* 181). Getting through a bad thunderstorm, she feels “fit for one of the *Oregon pioneers*” and announces, “women are venturesome creatures” (*T* 23). Deep in Apache country, Magoffin evinces her bravado: “Notwithstanding the many reports of Indians stealing animals and murdering people about here, I have been bold enough to climb up and down these beautiful and rugged cliffs both yesterday and today,” though she feels compelled to add that she will be “more careful hereafter” (*T* 200). She takes pleasure in reminding the “civilized” women back home of the novelty of her experiences and her willingness to engage in them, and particularly that she is capable of making a temporary home anywhere: “Well after super at *my own table* and in *my own house*,—and I can say what few women in civilized life ever could, that the first house of his own to which my husband took me to after our marriage was a *tent*” (*T* 6).

As she travels towards Bent's Fort, Magoffin narrates a west that would be familiar to contemporaneous readers of western frontier narratives, "a real buffalo and Prairie dog and rattle snake region" (T 47). There is no shortage of descriptions of heat, water shortages, thunderstorms, mosquitoes, and other, by-then familiar hallmarks of the genre, nor of the "wide expanse of Prairie," or the sublimity of "truly magnificent scenery" (T 17, 18). As observer, rather than player, Magoffin skips the typical descriptions of thrilling danger and gore that accompany the buffalo chase scenes found in Irving or Parkman, but when buffalo are available, as in the early part of her travels, she can still extol the "hump ribs" for which she never ate its equal in "the best hotels of N.Y. and Philad" (T 43). Adding further that, "the sweetest butter and most delicate oil I ever tasted tis not surpassed by the marrow taken from the thigh bone," Magoffin declares, "if one cannot live and grow fat here, he must be a strange creature" (T 43).

At times, Magoffin's descriptions parody the exaggerated descriptions of her male counterparts, as with a "rattle-snake fracas," where two or three were run over, not the "*hundreds* killed tho', as Mr. Gregg had to do" (T 50). Yet, she can be equally self-mocking. Frightened by the movement of a snake, she writes: "of course I screamed and ran off, and like a ninny came back when the snake had been frightened by me as much as it had me" (T 27). Freed from having to do any chores, Magoffin has plenty of time to observe and comment: "One flower to which, for want of a better one, I have given the name of the "hour glass" from its peculiar shape;" "I have found some wild onions...very *strong*, rather gluey and grows pretty deep in the ground. The flower and seeds resemble the *cultivated* root" (T 11).

As Magoffin crosses the Arkansas into the "new country," the same geophysical west follows her. This is not surprising as the environments are contiguous, an "ecological whole" existing outside of the nebulous boundaries set by nation-states.⁷⁴ The "little Prairie dogs" she

sees near the “Pass” (El Paso) are no different than those seen in Kansas (*T* 198). Crossing Raton Pass near Pueblo, CO, she also finds no shortage of “magnificent scenery” (*T* 78). Not twenty-four miles from Bent’s and into the “other country,” she makes note of a “little scrubby bush resembling in some respects the current bush of the States” (*T* 72). Larger pines have “much the shape and appearance of those found in the U.S,” along with a common wild cherry (*T* 79).

She finds sublimity in the Mexican environment, the “picturesque mountains, a relief to the eye when one is accustomed to behold nothing save the wide plain stretched far on all sides meeting the edges of the bright blue sky and appearing more like water than land” (*T* 85).

Testing her own observations against other writers, she mirrors their rhetoric: “The Hole in the Rock I found pretty much the same as described: the scenery around is quite romantic...It is quite the place in which to build a lover’s castle and plant his gardens &c” (*T* 76). In other cases, the environment disrupts her preconceptions: the “‘table-planes of Mexico,’ of which from my youngest school-girl days, I have heard so much” are different than expected (*T* 150). As the Magoffins travel further south and war news begins to cram the pages of her journal, circumstances inflect her perception of the surroundings, as they do in other travel journals. Approaching the *Jornada*, a day’s journey with no water and through Apache territory, Magoffin focuses on prayer, rather than sightseeing. Hills start to appear “bleak” and the surroundings “gloomy” (*T* 195-6). Yet she still describes in detail the sweet, “grama-grass” so favored by the animals (*T* 200).

By and large, Magoffin’s descriptions of this contiguous, geophysical western region, work against conceptions of ‘nation’ and ‘foreign.’ At the same time, Magoffin’s descriptions of the natural world generally avoid the rhetoric of an environment in need of Anglo-American improvement that marks those of her male counterparts such as Gregg. As LeMenager notes

“the claims she makes upon the New Mexican landscape are gentle.”⁷⁵ For the most part this is true, but a nationalistic rhetoric does not necessarily need to be expressed as securing land-use for agriculture, mining, lumber, or other common desires for territorial acquisition. Other, less instrumentalist reactions to the environment can also enact a form of appropriation.

The Rio Grande

In 1846, the rivers of the southwest from the Sabine to the Arkansas to the Red, had been waterways of contention between the U.S. and Mexico for decades. Infused with national significance on both sides of their shores, their names were invoked in numerous rallying or battle cries. As physical, yet fluid, boundaries, they were also rhetorical touchstones for saber-rattling nation-states. For Magoffin, it is the Arkansas that forms her initial feelings of separation from first Kentucky, and then her nation. Three hundred miles from Independence, Magoffin writes, “Our camp is on the bank of the Arkansas tonight. Its dark waters remind me of the Mississippi—It makes me sad to look upon it—I am reminded of home. Though the Mississippi is a vast distance from here—it seems to me a near neighbor, compared with the distance I am from it” (*T* 39). Here the similarities of the two rivers cause homesickness, but are not touched with any symbolic significance. This changes when she crosses the Arkansas into New Mexico, a move between nations “separating me from my own dear native land” (*T* 72).

Once in Mexico, however, rivers adopt a different cast. In a description that removes all but geophysical significance, the Red River is, “a picturesque little stream winding its way from the mountains, to the great Arkansas, of which it is generally termed the ‘Canadian Fork’” (*T* 85). Near Sandia Pueblo, Magoffin finds the Rio Grande also resembling the Mississippi, “muddy and dark, the banks are low, with no trees—we are buying wood every day—a small arm-full for

un real" (T 151). Not only does Magoffin's lack of nostalgia mark a difference from her view of the Arkansas-as-Mississippi while still in the United States, she also draws in the local population by commenting on the practical need for purchasing wood and the Magoffins' dependency on them for acquiring it.

In another reference to the Rio Grande, sandwiched between an entry relating a report that the Mexican army is coming from Chihuahua with a large force to "take us," and one where a trader friend is so "frightened at the news," that he is "about to cash his goods" and return to Santa Fé," Magoffin writes a long passage about her "desire through curiosity only to get onto a sand-bar in the (Rio Grande) River" (T 162). After several tries negotiating the slippery banks, she finally finds herself on a sandbar, with the "wide Rio Grande curling its dark waters around me. There is something wildly sublime in the wild deep murmur of a mighty river, as it rolls by us with stately pride, its course pending to the fearful Ocean" (T 162).

Strikingly, here in the most contentious river of the day, Magoffin plays. Her picturesque description is romantic, and the means of getting on to the bar, difficult. The ocean is more anxiety producing than the conflict around her. Seen in one light, Magoffin's movement is an act of resistance, a form of denying the war and returning to the role of tourist and intrepid adventurer. The sense of geophysical contiguity across nations is also maintained. As Patricia Limerick remarks, even after the Treaty of Hidalgo, "the resulting division did not ratify any plan of nature," and even the borderline between nations, the Rio Grande, "was a river that ran through but did not really divide continuous terrain."⁷⁶ This was a terrain that was so convoluted and with a river that was so changeable, it would take the survey commission decades to map the boundary. Yet, standing in the middle of the Rio del Norte, as she did at Pawnee Rock, Magoffin is effectively making her mark, and there is something disingenuous about her need to

qualify her action as “through curiosity only” (*T* 162). As a form of Anglo-American possession, Magoffin’s gesture at the Rio Grande—a river like the others she describes as flowing into and out of U.S. land—marks Mexico as already appropriated within her nation’s territorialist project.

Conclusion

As Amy Greenberg notes, the year 1848 “marked the first time that the fear of incorporating supposedly “inferior races” into the United States limited the nation’s territorial expansion.”⁷⁷ Polk and other expansionists had hoped to annex an even larger part of Mexico than the vast acreage wrested from that nation through the Treaty of Hidalgo Guadalupe, but public opposition to even that annexation, driven by racism, concerns that slave-holders would increase their territorial holdings, or feelings that “Mexican land wasn’t worth the sacrifice of American blood and money,” curtailed those plans.⁷⁸

That Magoffin’s journal foregrounds the racial and cultural anxieties of the anti-annexationists is clear, yet her trepidations are also problematized by her subject position. Magoffin’s own dual-language title, one designed to highlight, as she does throughout the journal, the exotic, romantic nature of her travels, nonetheless positions her squarely within the transnational world inhabited by her husband and his relations and, significantly, she frames the journey in English; her authorship in Spanish. In several ways, her title embodies the ambiguity expressed in her journal. On the one hand, by giving both nations equal weight, her title signifies a movement away from racialized demarcations of nation and foreign. Read differently, however, while Magoffin did not know the ultimate outcome of the war, she knew very well its purpose, and though her title conveys the two nations as equal and united, it is the disingenuous

“unity” voiced in Kearney’s speech, that is, one that would only come at the price of Mexico’s loss.

In scholarship on Magoffin’s journal, critics as a whole note that, in comparison to her male counterparts, she exhibits an “overall openness and positive attitude towards New Mexican society.”⁷⁹ In part, it is the mixed world of the trading culture and her own personality, which inculcates a desire to secure her own friendships with both Mexicans and independent Indians, though during the war, the Magoffins, along with other traders, also had a “vested interest in protecting ‘the trade,’ which meant, among other things, not offering undue offence to Mexicans.”⁸⁰ Entering Mexico, and mostly leaving it with the same racial biases she came with, Magoffin nonetheless pushes at times against the standard representations of the Mexican population. The mobility that allows her to experience freedom from the confines of her nation’s social mores for women, also allows her to foster relationships that at times disrupt her nation’s racialized stereotypes.

Magoffin’s various gestures towards the possibilities of compatibility and mutual exchange between heterogeneous populations as viable outcomes of territorial expansion, however, are undercut by her denials of culpability and erasures of Mexican presence and agency. When Magoffin begins one entry, for example, by writing: “Let me see what has transpired today within the little circle of my vision,” self-mockingly positioning herself outside of the larger forces around her, she enacts a domestic posture of innocent denial that runs throughout the journal (*T* 112). Within the context of the Mexican-American war, one she either seeks to detach herself from or enthusiastically supports from the sidelines, Magoffin’s record of her interactions with Mexican populations are equally marked by shifting postures of accommodation.

While some critics, such as Andrea Tinnemeyer, suggest that Magoffin's journal was written strictly as a "private diary," others are willing to acknowledge, as Howard Lamar does, that while it is "apparent" that Magoffin "did not contemplate publication, she did write with a certain self-consciousness that her words might one day be read aloud to her family."⁸¹ In a similar vein Deborah Lawrence notes, that while Magoffin "did not write for publication, it is apparent that she was confident that her narrative would be read. She knew she was a trailblazer."⁸² Though Magoffin did not publish her account, there is also no evidence that she *didn't* contemplate it. Given that she acquired yellow fever in Matamoros while suffering the loss of another child, gave birth to two more children, and died only eight years after leaving Mexico, it is equally likely that it just wasn't possible. Magoffin's language throughout the journal, however, makes clear that she was definitely writing for an audience in mind, whether family and friends or a wider public. Missed in the critical scholarship on the journal are moments where Magoffin clearly harbors thoughts of authorship, perhaps beyond the journal she is keeping. On the possible move to "upper California," for example, Magoffin writes that "(there will be a little romance in that—and I think we might on the strength of it bring forth a novel, with Capt. Johnson, who they tell me is a good writer to handle the pen)" (*T* 139).

As Virginia Scharff remarks, through Stella Drumm's exhaustive "editorial annotations" of U.S. figures and military history, she forced a reading of the text as a "chronicle of destiny," one that commemorated "the march of American conquest."⁸³ I would add that in changing the title of Magoffin's work, Drumm also erases its transnational context, while also denying Magoffin's authorship. Though the journal has more recently been read with a less triumphalist hand than Drumm's, Magoffin's text nonetheless betrays an exceptionalist perspective, a fact that few critics find neither unexpected nor surprising.

Yet, as Randi Lynn Tanglen, briefly, but tantalizingly suggests, Magoffin's journal also provides an opportunity for uncovering moments of "indigenous resistance." Tanglen offers one example in Magoffin's visit from the Comanche chief in Santa Fé, a meeting that "represents a Native presence," and "subtext of indigenous displacement that is not overtly addressed or accounted for in her diary or other Anglo literature of the Southwest," adding that the so-called "treaty" that was brought to Magoffin's attention, "was probably related to [the chief's] concerns about Anglo encroachment on Native homelands." Tanglen notes that "because Magoffin doesn't record it or perhaps because she herself didn't know, we aren't sure what the chief wanted to say about the treaty."⁸⁴ Nonetheless, she writes, "we can read this interaction as a moment of indigenous presence, agency, and possible resistance to a course of events that we know all too well."⁸⁵

In this short passage, Tanglen begins to hint at the ways in which Magoffin's journal registers the resistance of different Mexican sovereignties towards both the occupation and potential assimilation into American national space. Though Magoffin may not express "what the chief wanted to say," what she does record of her interactions and experiences articulates the reality of alternate histories that disrupt a narrative of conquest. That is, the Mexican women, for example, will not stop wearing their *rebozos* or making tortillas in their homes, regardless of whether they are in the "American portion of the republic" or not, thereby maintaining their own domesticity against the alien Americans (*T* 177). While exposing undercurrents of agency on the part of Mexico's territorial populations, Magoffin's journal can also be read as a chronicle of the "entangled histories" and conditions that would create the American Southwest, a geographical region bounded by the nation-state, but a continuing borderland, in all that term conveys, shaped

by the racial and cultural anxieties, acts of dominance or resistance, and shifting accommodations, of Anglo-Americans, Mexicans, and Native populations alike.

Notes

¹ This scholarship is vast and multi-disciplinary. A few of the more pivotal works in new western, borderlands, and regional scholarship include, Patricia N. Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1987); Richard White, *It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own: A New History of the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991); Patricia N. Limerick, Cyldre A. Milner, II, and Charles E. Rankin, eds., *Trails: Toward a New Western History*, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991); Neil Campbell, *The Rhizomatic West: Representing the American West in a Transnational, Global, Media Age* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008); Daniel K. Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); and Rachel Adams, *Continental Divides: Remapping the Cultures of North America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

² Pekka Hämäläinen and Samuel Truett, "On Borderlands," *The Journal of American History* 98, no. 2 (September 2011): 393.

³ Kirsten Silva Gruesz and Rodrigo Lazo, "The Spanish Americas: Introduction," *Early American Literature* 53, no. 3 (2018): 652; Eliga H. Gould, "Entangled Worlds: The English-Speaking Atlantic as a Spanish Periphery," *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 3 (Jun. 2007): 766.

⁴ See for example, David J. Weber, *The Mexican Frontier, 1821-1846: The American Southwest under Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982); Gloria E. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987); Jeremy Alderman and Stephen Aron, "From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation States, and the Peoples in Between in North American History," *American Historical Review* 104, no. 3 (June 1999): 814- 841; Samuel Truett and Elliot Young, eds., *Continental Crossroads: Remapping U.S.-Mexico Borderlands History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Samuel Truett, *Fugitive Landscapes: The Forgotten History of the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Laura E. Gomez, *Manifest Destinies: The Making of the Mexican American Race* (New York: New York University Press, 2007); and Kirsten Silva Gruesz, *Ambassadors of Culture: The Transamerican Origins of Latino Writing* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2002).

⁵ Hämäläinen and Truett, "On Borderlands," 347.

⁶ For recent examples of this trend in scholarship see Brian DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the U.S. Mexican War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Andrés Reséndez, *Changing National Identities at the Frontier: Texas and New Mexico, 1800-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and Andy Doolen, "Claiming Indigenous Space: John Dunn Hunter and the Fredonian Rebellion," *Early American Literature* 53, no. 3 (2018): 685-712.

⁷ Gruesz and Lazo, “The Spanish Americas,” 652.

⁸ Bernard DeVoto, *The Year of Decision: 1846* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1942).

⁹ Amy Kaplan, “Manifest Domesticity,” *American Literature* 70, no. 3 “No More Separate Spheres! (Sept. 1998): 581-606.

¹⁰ Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2002), 18.

¹¹ Kaplan, “Manifest Domesticity,” 582.

¹² Brigitte Georgi-Findlay, *The Frontiers of Women’s Writing: Women’s Narratives and the Rhetoric of Westward Expansion* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996), xi. Findlay though also acknowledges, “women writers often subverted their claims to cultural authority, exposing in their own unstable positioning the shaky foundations of discourses of empire building and colonization” (xi).

¹³ Kaplan, “Manifest Domesticity,” 585.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 584.

¹⁵ Kaplan, *Anarchy of Empire*, 1.

¹⁶ José F. Aranda Jr., “Mexican,” *Western American Literature* 53, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 51.

¹⁷ Hämäläinen and Truett, “On Borderlands,” 347.

¹⁸ Scholarship on the Mexican-American War is extensive. I have relied on the following texts in particular for this chapter: Amy S. Greenberg, *A Wicked War: Polk, Clay, Lincoln, and the 1846 U.S. Invasion of Mexico* (New York: Knopf, 2012); DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts*; Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1845* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); and Hampton Sides, *Blood and Thunder: The Epic Story of Kit Carson and the Conquest of the American West* (New York: Anchor Books, 2006). See also Winston Groom, *Kearny’s March: The Epic Creation of the American West, 1846-1847* (New York: Knopf, 2011); Robert W. Johannsen, *To the Halls of Montezumas: The Mexican War in the American Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); and Timothy J. Henderson, *A Glorious Defeat: Mexico and Its War with the United States* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007).

¹⁹ Howard R. Lamar cites Max Moorhead, who estimated “that the value of goods in 1846 was well over a million dollars,” Lamar, foreword to *Down the Santa Fe Trail*, ix. Max Moorhead, *New Mexico’s Royal Road, Trade, and Travel on the Chihuahua Trail* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), 156. Bernard DeVoto also states: “In ’46 the trade was stimulated by the war, rather than hampered, though the trains were six months later than usual in arriving in Chihuahua.” *Year of Decision*, 250.

²⁰ Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 757.

²¹ For one history of the treaty, see Richard Griswold del Castillo, *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo: A Legacy of Conflict* (Tulsa: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990).

²² Limerick, *Legacy of Conquest*, 233.

²³ Greenberg, *A Wicked War*, 123, 195.

²⁴ Robert Redfield, *American Journal of Sociology* 32, no. 6 (May 1927): 1015; James Alexander Robertson, *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 8, no.1 (Feb., 1928): 115; Rex W. Strickland, *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 66, no. 4 (Apr., 1963): 607.

²⁵ See for example Sides, *Blood and Thunder*; Groom, *Kearny’s March*; and John M. Belohlavek, *Patriots, Prostitutes, and Spies: Women and the Mexican-American War* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2017).

²⁶ Two seminal works on women's overland travel and the gendering of territorial expansion are Lillian Schlissel, ed., *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey* (New York: Schocken, 1982) and Annette Kolodny, *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

²⁷ Virginia Scharff, *Twenty Thousand Roads: Women, Movement, and the West* (Berkeley: University of California, 2003), 38.

²⁸ Andrea Tinnemeyer, "Women and Revolution: Race, Violence, and the Family Romance in Literature of the Southwest" (PhD diss., Rice University, 2001), 90.

²⁹ Deborah Lawrence, *Writing the Trail: Five Women's Frontier Narratives* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2006), 11.

³⁰ Andrew Menard, "Down the Santa Fe Trail to the City Upon a Hill," *Western American Literature* 45, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 163. Like Menard, Deborah Lawrence also reads the journal as a penitential captivity narrative in the tradition of Mary Rowlandson's *A Narrative of Captivity and Restoration* (1682).

³¹ Lamar, foreword to *Down the Santa Fe Trail*, ix.

³² For more on James Magoffin, his consulships, and his role in the Kearney campaign, see W.H. Timmons, "The El Paso Area in the Mexican Period, 1821-1848," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 84, no. 1 (Jul., 1980): 1-28 and *James Wiley Magoffin: Don Santiago-El Paso Pioneer* (El Paso: Texas University Press, 1999).

³³ W.L. Marcy to Colonel S. W. Kearney, *Down the Santa Fe Trail*, appendix, 263.

³⁴ DeVoto, *Year of Decision*, 251; Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 760. Howe's comment is in reference to Colonel Alexander Doniphan's expedition to Chihuahua with the Missouri Volunteer Regiment and the "three hundred wagonloads of traders and goods," including the Magoffins, who trailed behind him. Echoing the critical response of others, Virginia Scharff notes that traders such as Samuel, along with their Mexican relatives "had prepared the path on which the American army rolled into New Mexico." *Twenty Thousand Roads*, 36. Brigitte Georgi-Findlay also refers to the "traders' caravan" as the "avant-garde of economic colonialism." *Frontiers of Women's Writing*, 93.

³⁵ Randi Lynn Tanglen, "Critical Regionalism, the US-Mexican War, and Nineteenth-Century American Literary History," *Western American Literature*, 48, no. 1&2 (Spring/Summer 2013): 191.

³⁶ Scharff, *Twenty Thousand Roads*, 4, 37.

³⁷ Andrew Menard also points to this passage as revealing "an inherent link between domesticity and nationalism." "City Upon a Hill," 126.

³⁸ Georgi-Findlay, *Frontiers of Women's Writing*, 103.

³⁹ For one account of the Taos uprising, see Groom, *Kearney's March*, 156-166.

⁴⁰ The young Missourian, Lewis H. Garrard, who traveled to Bent's during 1846 on his adventure tour of the west, was a rare (and stunned) witness to the trial of the Taos revolt prisoners:

"It certainly did appear to be a great assumption on the part of the Americans to conquer a country and then arraign the revolting inhabitants for treason. American judges sat on the bench, New Mexicans and Americans filled the jury box, and an American soldiery guarded the halls. Verily, a strange mixture of violence and justice—a strange middle ground between the martial and common law. After an absence of a few minutes, the jury

returned with a verdict of “guilty in the first degree”—five for murder, one for treason. Treason, indeed! What did the poor fellow know about his new allegiance? I left the room, sick at heart. Justice! Out upon the word, when its distorted meaning is the warrant for murdering those who defend to the last their country and their homes.”

Wah-To-Yah and The Taos Trail, or Prairie Travel and Scalp Dances, with a Look at Los Rancheros from Muleback and the Rocky Mountain Campfire [1850], Introduction A.B.Guthrie, Jr. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955), 172-3.

⁴¹ LeMenager, *Manifest and Other Destinies: Territorial Fictions of the Nineteenth-Century United States* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 97.

⁴² Bernard DeVoto states that the trade “was a mutually beneficial development, providing American traders with desirable goods, while providing New Mexicans and Chihuahuans with goods from Independence more cheaply than what they could obtain from the Mexican interior.” *Year of Decision*, 119. There was, however, a dark side to the trade, as Indian trade very often involved an exchange of fur for whiskey.

⁴³ Lamar, foreword to *Down the Santa Fe Trail*, xxi.

⁴⁴ In his May 11, 1846 address to Congress, Polk states:

“The most energetic and prompt measures, and the most immediate appearance in arms of a large and overpowering force, are recommended to Congress as the most certain and efficient means of bring the existing collision with Mexico to a speedy and successful termination. In making these recommendations, I deem it proper to declare that it is my anxious desire not only to terminate hostilities speedily, but to bring all matters in dispute between this government to an early and amicable agreement.”

Polk was eager as well to hold back opposition to the war by projecting a quick resolution to the conflict. “Hostilities by Mexico. Message from the President of the United States relative to an invasion and commencement of hostilities by Mexico,” Library of Congress, *A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation: U.S. Congressional Documents and Debates, 1774-1875*, United States Serial Set, Number 520, Ex. Doc. No. 60: pg. 4-10. <http://memory.loc.gov>.

⁴⁵ Greenberg, *A Wicked War*, 128.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ LeMenager, *Manifest Destinies*, 73, 99.

⁴⁸ Deborah Lawrence, *Writing the Trail*, 58.

⁴⁹ Brigitte Georgi-Findlay, *The Frontiers of Women’s Writing*, 103.

⁵⁰ George Wilkins Kendall. *Narrative of the Texan Santa Fé Expedition*, 2 vols., (New York: Harper & brothers, 1844); Josiah Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies, or the Journal of a Santa Fé Trader* (Philadelphia: J.W. Moore, 1844).

⁵¹ Kendall, *Narrative*, 1:308, 409.

⁵² Review of “Narrative of the Texas Santa Fe Expedition: With Illustrations and a Map,” *Graham’s Lady’s & Gentleman’s Magazine: Embellished with Mezzotint and Steel Engravings, Music, etc.*, 25, no.5 (May 1, 1844): 240.

⁵³ Josiah Gregg, *The Commerce of the Prairies*, ed. Max L. Moorhead, forward Marc Simmons (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954), 80, 107, 268.

⁵⁴ Kendell, *Narrative*, 1: 321, 337, 309. As Shelley Streeby and Jesse Alemán have so convincingly demonstrated, the sensational U.S.-Mexico War novelettes, by author's such as George Lippard and Ned Buntline, largely written after the war, were replete with cross-dressing women fighters and dashing American soldiers saving (and often marrying) beautiful, criollo Mexican women from evil fathers or brothers, with the message of America's exceptionalist destiny to save the poor Mexican's from themselves through conquest underpinning all of them, even when the authors convey ambivalence towards the nation's agenda. See *Empire and the Literature of Sensation: An Anthology of Nineteenth-Century Popular Fiction*, ed. Jesse Alemán and Shelley Streeby (New Brunswick, NJ, and London: Rutgers University Press, 2007). See also: Shelly Streeby, *American Sensations: Class, Empire, and the Production of Popular Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

⁵⁵ For more on this, see Susan Calafate Boyle, *Los Capitalistas: Hispano Merchants and the Santa Fe Trade* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1997).

⁵⁶ For Kearney's proclamation, see William Emory, *Lieutenant Emory Reports*, ed. Ross Calvin (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1951), 51.

⁵⁷ DeLay, *War of the Thousand Deserts*, 265.

⁵⁸ Sides, *Blood and Thunder*, 56.

⁵⁹ Lieutenant Emory, *Weekly Reveille*, Sept. 28, 1846, n.p., quoted in Sides, *Blood and Thunder*, 134.

⁶⁰ Deborah Lawrence, *Twenty Thousand Roads*, 10.

⁶¹ LeMenager, *Manifest Destinies*, 98.

⁶² As George Wilkins Kendall wrote, "There is a cant expression, "I've seen the elephant," in very common use in Texas;" "When a man is disappointed in anything he undertakes, when he has seen enough, when he gets sick and tired of any job he may have set himself about, he had "seen the elephant." *Narrative*, 1:109 (emphasis in original).

⁶³ Lawrence, *Twenty Thousand Roads*, 37.

⁶⁴ DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts*, 205.

⁶⁵ Lawrence, *Twenty Thousand Roads*, 10.

⁶⁶ See DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts*, xiii-xxi.

⁶⁷ The Palace of the Governors, Santa Fé, NM.

⁶⁸ DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts*, 265.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 266; Sides, *Blood and Thunder*, 159.

⁷⁰ DeLay, *War*, 266.

⁷¹ Josiah Gregg notes the Puebloans as "furnishing most of the fruits and a large portion of the vegetable supplies that are to be found in the markets"; that "Most of the Pueblos call themselves the descendants of Montezuma;" and that, "When these regions were first discovered it appears that the inhabitants lived in comfortable houses and cultivated the soil, as they have continued to do up to the present time." *Commerce*, 268, 186.

⁷² Stella Drumm translates *comadre* correctly in one definition as "godmother," in this context the term is more likely used to convey friendship, along with a certain reverence, used more often between non-familial acquaintances, Drumm, *Down the Santa Fe Trail*, 154.

⁷³ DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts*, 267, 273.

⁷⁴ Limerick, *Legacy of Conquest*, 222.

⁷⁵ LeMenager, *Manifest Destinies*, 97.

⁷⁶ Limerick, *Legacy of Conquest*, 222.

⁷⁷ Amy Greenberg, *A Wicked War*, 263. This curtailment of expansionist plans would ironically help to drive the post-war filibustering attempts to take northern and coastal Mexican provinces.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ John M. Belohlavek, *Patriots, Prostitutes, and Spies*, 83.

⁸⁰ LeMenager, *Manifest Destinies*, 98.

⁸¹ Tinnemeyer, "Women and Revolution," 90; Lamar, forward to *Down the Santa Fe Trail*, xvii.

⁸² Lawrence. *Writing the Trail*, 12.

⁸³ Scharff, *Twenty Thousand Roads*, 39, 5.

⁸⁴ Tanglen, "Critical Regionalism," 191.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 191, 192.

Chapter Four

Where the Whale Meets the West: *Moby-Dick* and the Routes of Territorialization

Introduction: “The wonder-world”

In the first chapter of *Moby-Dick; Or, The Whale*, Melville playfully empties the whole of Manhattan, and ostensibly the nation, of their populations. From all the thoroughfares of the city and from “north, east, south, and west,” the landlocked “inlanders” gather at Battery Park and other edges of the city, united in their desire to simply gaze at the sea (*MD* 19).¹ “There is magic in it,” Ishmael declares of the power of water to induce the “deepest reveries,” finding a psychic common ground with the “[t]housands upon thousands of mortal men” who hover at the boundary between land and ocean hoping perhaps to set sail (*MD* 19). Not content with anything but “the extremest limit of land,” the “miles” and “leagues” of inlanders press as close to the continental periphery as possible, just shy of falling into the water. Perhaps, Ishmael muses, the compasses in the harbor ships have magnetically drawn them to this point. Water is more than just a vehicle for meditation, however, and Melville evokes the American west to further convince the reader of the supremacy of water over land. As Ishmael declares, the “[p]rairies in June” lack the most important element: “Water—there is not a drop of water there!” and even less so in the “great American desert” (*MD* 19). As against these untenable geophysical spaces, Melville posits the sea as both a way to alleviate Ishmael’s gloom and as an avenue of escape from terrestrial constraints, with Ishmael’s plan to start for “Cape Horn and the Pacific” as suggestive of a more maritime and globally-oriented future for the nation (*MD* 23).

The “wonder-world” that Ishmael leaps toward, however, is also one filled with premonitory dread, an ambivalence reflecting both the ebullient spirit of Anglo-Americans in

regard to the nation's geographic expansion, as well as the anxious undercurrents attending that same growth (*MD* 22). The sheer size of the recent addition of territories acquired through the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, along with the lure of more land and riches to be found in the new state of California and in the Pacific Northwest, helped push pro-expansionist rhetoric to a fever pitch. At the same time, the newly coined, but long-iterated ideology of manifest destiny continued to serve as justification for aggressive land speculation and settlement, adding increased pressures on Native populations throughout the trans-Mississippi territories. Emboldened by the outcome of the Mexican War and hoping to secure, in part, new territory for U.S. slave-holding interests, filibustering expeditions, often flying under banners of liberation, pressed into Cuba and Mexico.

Among many Anglo-Americans, however, the persistence of slavery brought fears of its geographic spread, and with it the specter of disunion, while the vast increase in territory raised anxieties over the incorporation of foreign populations into the republic, particularly Mexicans and Spanish Creoles living in the Utah and New Mexico Territories, Texas, and California. Though the Compromise of 1850 allayed sectional tensions, this was a porous, stopgap measure, just as the 1820 Missouri Compromise had been. For all the pro-destiny bluster and thinly veiled imperialism, these territories remained vast and indeterminate sites of ever-shifting boundaries and innumerable power plays. In the same way that earlier territorial acquisitions, such as those of Louisiana and Florida, had raised anxieties over whether the republic could withstand the problematics of spatial growth, concerns over just how much the United States could expand and maintain integrity were also evident in the years leading up to and after the annexation of Texas and the Mexican-American War.

While he initially orients the reader's attention far away from these disquieting spaces, it is the landed West, both real and imagined, that becomes one site through which Melville negotiates his own ambivalence towards the nation's expansion and the ramifications of continental territorialization as it is also played out in the maritime world. In a number of ways, the anxieties attending the nation's growth follow the *Pequod* as surely as Ahab follows the whale, a reality Melville alludes to in "The Albatross": "Round the world! There is much in that sound to inspire proud feelings; but whereto does all that circumnavigation conduct? Only through numberless perils to where we started, where those that we left behind secure, were all the time before us" (*MD* 195, 196). More than just a sentimental vision of hearth and home, Ishmael's question not only reflects the costs, and perhaps pointlessness, of the imperialist impulse, but also points to the recursive cultural and sociopolitical reality of territorialization. Even Ishmael's fantasy of the world as "an endless plain," an always-ahead frontier line, ends not in the promises of limitless new discoveries, but with the adventurers left wandering in "barren mazes" or over-whelmed "midway," a satirical, yet anxious vision of the geopolitics of manifest destiny (*MD* 196).

In his maritime world, Melville attempts to circumvent many of the problematics in the terrestrial sphere as he projects hopeful visions of heterogeneous solidarity and "global interfusion" aboard his whale-ship, pushing against the racial and regional identity politics endemic to continental territorialization.² Yet, life aboard the *Pequod* also registers Melville's trepidation over the ever-widening scope of the nation's expansionist agenda and the potential breakdown of democratic ideals in the face of imperialistic movements. Through scenes of human isolation and abandonment, the ocean's "heartless immensity" becomes more than just an expression of the indifference of the natural world towards man (*MD* 131). If Melville's sea tale

reflects his difficulty in squaring his desires for a liberal democratic nationalism and global unity with what Hsuan L. Hsu refers to as their “darker aspects,” however, his western imaginary is also constitutive of the same conflicted response to an over-reaching, “all-grasping western world” (*MD* 297).³

As was true for many other antebellum writers, what Edwin Fussell refers to as Melville’s “almost continuous Western references” function on one level as a means to draw upon the wealth of associations already embedded in the public’s (and his own) imagination through the frontier narratives of Cooper, Washington Irving, Parkman and others.⁴ Melville’s references may have also supplied a means to make the nautical, and particularly cetological worlds, more sensible for his readers.⁵ Throughout *Moby-Dick*, Melville makes ample use of the sea-as-prairie trope, while fashioning his own analogies, such as that between the whale and the buffalo or between prairie wolves and Ahab and his crew.

Melville’s western imaginary, though, often has little to do with the contemporaneous one of “new-built Californian towns” or with territories where the “polite broker sells you land at a dollar an inch” (*MD* 367, 352). Nor is Melville’s a West where Congress had, by 1851, ushered in a means of presumably ‘protecting’ the western tribes of the High Plains from white emigrants and settlers, and from each other, through the system of reservations.⁶ Instead, in descriptions associated with the prairie environments of the Great Plains, and more broadly, imagery and references associated with an earlier West east of the Rocky Mountains, Melville stops well short of the “mysterious divine Pacific” and the Far West, both geographically and temporally (*MD* 367). Along with images of “sea-pastures” or of the Nantucket whaler who “lives on the sea, as prairie cocks in the prairie,” Melville conjures up a nation that has not yet “expand[ed] to its bulk,” evoking pioneer archetypes, western legends, and nostalgic fictions of

untrammelled western spaces—references drawn from a literary-historical ‘frontier archive’ as it were (*MD* 367, 65, 349).

Though perhaps indicative of a quiescent, played out West, as Stephanie LeMenager suggests, one removed from a nation already pressing beyond “the extremest limit of land,” many of Melville’s western references are nonetheless the same ones that fed directly into a mythos of exceptionalism that continued to drive territorialist agendas (*MD* 19).⁷ Narratives of Daniel Boone, of backwoodsmen and hunters, and of a west when it was still “a wilderness and a virgin,” all helped to contribute to the stories Anglo-Americans told themselves of the power of the ‘westerling spirit’ and an unpopulated continent ripe for the taking, feeding into what Mark Neimeyer refers to as the “arrogant and dangerous bravado of the rhetoric of the 1840’s and 1850’s” (*MD* 353).⁸ Particularly in those instances where the whale meets the west, Melville both exposes and re-contextualizes this narrative trajectory and the fantasies of western expansion that, in 1851, were still very much at work in both the terrestrial and maritime spheres. Even where Melville does not explicitly draw on narratives of the west, much of the rhetorical dodging and assumptions they embodied—of, say, neutral or empty spaces or benign appropriation—are manifest in his “watery world,” that is, what Donald E. Pease refers to as the “ideological cover-up[s]” that myths such as “virgin land” or what one could call the rhetoric of ‘philanthropic’ Native removal were perpetuated (*MD* 65).⁹

Melville scholars have, of course, long probed *Moby-Dick* as a response to the contemporaneous cultural and sociopolitical climate, including, if not especially, the nation’s geographic expansion.¹⁰ Drawing symbolic parallels between Melville’s narrative and expansionist rhetoric and political figures, critical readings have positioned the *Pequod* as a floundering ship of state; Ahab as the embodiment of James Polk or John C. Calhoun, among

others; the whale the territory to be appropriated.¹¹ Similarly, critics such as Anne Baker locate Melville's response to the processes of territorialization through his engagement with the discourse of 'bigness,' a "rhetoric of size" which pro-expansionists used to justify their agendas.¹² Melville's treatment of this rhetoric is perhaps most apparent in the so-named cetology chapters, where throughout his multi-disciplinary exegesis of the whale, expansive in form and content, Melville lampoons and critiques many of the excesses of the era, even as he mimics them; "Cetology" alone an extended jab at the hubris behind antebellum modes of cartographic and taxonomic classification.

In the cetology chapters, Ishmael attempts to pull meaning from the "constituents of a chaos," perhaps a sardonic nod on Melville's part to the turbulent state of the nation. For a number of critics, these "digressions," as J.A. Ward terms them, are often read as Melville's way to stall the forward motion of the narrative. Ann Baker, for example, argues that the cetology chapters force "the reader to pause, rather than recklessly follow Ahab to his quest's denouement." Similarly, for Andrew Delbanco they also serve to "retard the pace" of the novel. For his part, David Ketterer suggests that the cetology chapters "cannot be said in themselves to consume any of the horizontal narrative time line. In effect, they are dropped vertically into the ongoing action, temporarily suspending that action."¹³

The fact that so many of his western references are embedded in these chapters as well is, I would argue, not incidental. Alongside their emblematic use or as evidence of the influence and assimilation of frontier literature and imagery on his authorship, in an anxious age where the future of the republic remained uncertain, the western imaginary in *Moby-Dick* not only registers Melville's negotiation with the inherent tensions surrounding territorialization, but a certain ambivalent longing as well—not necessarily a sentimental nostalgia, but perhaps a space where

he might locate the democratic promises of an earlier nation. Alan Heimert, one of the first critics to recognize the “political symbolism” in Melville’s works and to contextualize his work within the sociopolitical milieu of the time, expresses a similar impulse among the larger population, that the “average political American, distraught as he was by visions of a Union about to be dismembered, looked longingly to the nation’s past.”¹⁴ But, as evidenced in *Moby-Dick*, that same past was also mined and re-tooled to justify a variety of territorialist moves—continental, hemispheric, and global—that underlay many of Melville’s and the nation’s anxieties.

While critics have certainly located what Edwin Fussell calls the “implicit identification of the Western Ocean and the American West” as a dominant motif in *Moby-Dick*, that motif and that “West” are multivalent.¹⁵ Through his engagement with western frontier figures and imagery, Melville maps an expansionist discourse drawn through the continental west onto his maritime world and legendary whale, and in similar fashion to Ishmael’s infamous resistance to completing the story of the whale even as he is determined to write it, one finds the author grappling with competing strands of the nation’s narrative as it had been, and was being, similarly written.

References to the “American West” are not limited to *Moby-Dick*, of course, appearing in both Melville’s earlier and later works. Several texts, however, explored further in this chapter, are particularly relevant to Melville’s conception of and negotiation with the west in *Moby-Dick*—“Mr. Parkman’s Tour,” his 1849 review of Francis Parkman’s *The California and Oregon Trail*, and “The Encantadas or Enchanted Isles” (1854). Though Parkman’s *Oregon Trail* provided, as Jack Scherting suggests, a “pattern of analogy which, in its inverted form, enriched the imagery of *Moby-Dick*,” particularly that of the prairie as sea, Melville’s review reveals more

than just points of textual appropriation or influence.¹⁶ As both a critical response to Parkman's treatment of Native Americans *and* endorsement of his tale of high adventure on the plains, "Mr. Parkman's Tour" enacts the complex relationship between a romanticized conception of the west and the territorialist realities drawn from those conceptions that infuse *Moby-Dick*. Similarly, Melville's "Sketch Fourth (A Pisgah View From the Rock)" from "The Encantadas, or The Enchanted Isles," reflects back on and continues Melville's engagement with western legends in *Moby-Dick*, amplifying both the dangers of adhering to the exceptionalist undercurrent of those legends in a global world, and the strong pull of those same national narratives on his own and the nation's consciousness.

Chasing Melville's West

The images and references that make up Melville's western imaginary are, to a large degree, those drawn from expedience. Prior to writing *Moby-Dick*, Melville gained some experience of the prairie west, when in June of 1840 he traveled with his friend Eli James Murdock Fly to Galena, Illinois in the ill-fated hope of finding work as a surveyor. Melville's uncle, Thomas Melvill, Jr., had moved to the lead-mining town when his Berkshire farm failed, and Melville and Fly stayed with the family throughout that summer. Adjacent to the Wisconsin and Iowa Territories to the north and west, Galena was a riverside "boom town," which had escaped the worst of the Panic of 1837, yet Thomas Melvill's financial woes continued in Illinois and the two young men quickly discovered he would not be able to help them secure work.¹⁷ No written account of this trip has been found, but based on descriptions and specific references found throughout Melville's works, plus the routes most likely taken by travelers at the time, scholars generally agree that Melville and Fly traveled on the Erie Canal for three days from

Albany to Buffalo; then on a Great Lakes steamboat from Detroit to Chicago, and from there they crossed the tall-grass prairie by mail coach to Galena, a trip of about five days. From Galena, Melville and Fly presumably traveled down the Mississippi, perhaps as far as Cairo, Illinois, then worked their way back to upstate New York.¹⁸ Though a financial bust, the trip would have undoubtedly made an impression on the twenty-one-year-old author, and it clearly provided Melville with at least some of the western imagery that marks *Moby-Dick*.¹⁹

Apart from this early trip, Melville's picture of the trans-Mississippi west was shaped by many of the same popular texts that fired the imaginations of readers throughout the antebellum years, and scholars have looked to a number of these for their influence on the imagery, structure, and characterization of *Moby-Dick*—works such as Richard Henry Dana Jr.'s *Two Years Before the Mast* (1840), Charles Wilkes's *Narrative of the U.S. Exploring Expedition* (1845), and Francis Parkman's *The California and Oregon Trail; being Sketches of Prairie and Rocky Mountain Life* (1849).²⁰ Both Dana's and Wilkes's narratives brought the Pacific and the western coast into sharper focus for many Anglo-Americans, helping, as Anne Baker suggests, to “crystallize the new nation's sense of itself by establishing a more coherent picture of what was imagined by many (correctly, it turned out) to be its future Western boundary.”²¹ By contrast, Parkman's is a portrait of the Great Plains and Southwest, a narrative written concurrently with some of the opening salvos of a war that would, within a few years, establish that very boundary.

In 1849, several weeks after publishing *Mardi*, Melville wrote an anonymous review of Parkman's *Trail* for the New York *Literary World*, a piece notable for Melville's paean to universal brotherhood and for his criticism of Parkman's anti-Indian stance. As discussed in the previous chapter, Parkman's views of Native populations as a whole rarely waver, concluding at one point that, so alien is the native to the “civilized white man,” that it doesn't take long before

“he begins to look upon them as a troublesome and dangerous species of beast” and one shot with as little remorse.”²² Melville initially takes Parkman to task on the issue of authorial integrity, critiquing the author for his disingenuous title, as Parkman never made it as far as California nor all the way on the Oregon Trail (though he does sympathize with the author for having to dictate his story due to illness). Parkman’s narrative also raised Melville’s egalitarian hackles, and he uses his review to criticize the tendency for “civilized beings sojourning among savages” to “come to regard them with disdain and contempt.”²³

Melville argues the indefensibility of this reaction based on the fact that all “civilized” people will find a “savage” among their ancestors. Ultimately drawing on the divine, Melville exhorts: “we are all of us—Anglo-Saxons, Dyaks and Indians—sprung from one head and made in one image. And if we reject this brotherhood now, we shall be forced to join hands hereafter.”²⁴ Hardly the first to decry the denigration and dehumanization of Native Americans, in his plea to “pity” rather than “disdain” the “savage,” Melville also makes clear his view on the current status of the indigenous population.²⁵ Nonetheless, in drawing a global and genealogical frame around the nation’s manifest Indian problem, Melville subverts the nationalist rhetoric normally bound to the issue.

Having “found fault with the title and another with the matter of the book,” Melville switches to a summative and less probing tone, essentially cataloging the contents.²⁶ Concluding “in brief” that Parkman’s *Trail* “is excellent, and has the true wild-game flavor,” Melville famously suggests to his readers that:

he who desires to quit Broadway and the Bowery—though only in fancy—for the region of wampum and calumet, the land of beavers and buffalos, birch canoes and “smoked

buckskin shirts,” will do well to read Mr. Parkman’s book. There he will fall in with the veritable grandsons of Daniel Boon [*sic*]; with the Mormons; with war-parties; with Santa Fe traders; with General Kearney [*sic*]; with runaway United States troops; and all manner of outlandish and interesting characters.²⁷

Melville ends his review with a long excerpt from “The Chase,” one of the “numerous fine and dashing descriptive chapters” he finds in Parkman’s narrative and one for which obvious parallels can be found with the Ahab’s own pursuit of Moby Dick, and in chapters such as “The Grand Armada.”²⁸ In vivid prose, Parkman describes the “imposing spectacle” of his party coming upon a “vast host of buffalo,” their backs creating “a surface of uniform blackness.” As the hunt ensues, Parkman finds himself amid the “the tramp and clattering of ten thousand hoofs” and “half suffocated by the dust and stunned by the trampling of the flying herd.” But, as Parkman relates, he was “drunk with the chase and cared for nothing but the buffalo.” Plunging down a ravine with his faithful horse and out of ammunition, he eventually takes down a bull with a knife. Closing the chapter, Parkman writes: “We encamped close to the river. The night was dark, and as we lay down, we could hear mingled with the howlings of wolves the hoarse bellowing of the buffalo, like the ocean beating upon a distant coast.”²⁹

Overall in his review, Melville seems taken with the more romanticized, Cooper-esque portraits of what he calls the “Land of Moccasons” [*sic*] and with the many “perilous charms of prairie life” that he draws out from Parkman’s narrative.³⁰ Even as he exposes the rhetoric of white superiority exemplified in *The Oregon Trail*; mentions the “present gold fever,” “Sacramento,” and “California;” and lightly gestures towards the Mexican War by citing General Kearny and “runaway United States troops,” by the end of “Mr. Parkman’s Tour,” it is the West

of adventure, danger, and conquest as epitomized in the buffalo hunt that Melville leaves his readers with.³¹ Given that it is a review, it is not surprising that, while Melville uses the piece as a platform in the beginning, he concludes on a laudatory note and with a reader-grabbing excerpt. Nonetheless, the geographies and narratives associated with Parkman's west clearly resonate with Melville. For some scholars, this finds expression in *Moby-Dick* through his appropriation of all the "fine and dashing" elements and symbolic trappings of the hunt, so that for a readership familiar with narratives such as Parkman's, the ultimate chase of *The Pequod* is a western one, since, as Edwin Fussell remarks, "an American hunting story, regardless of ostensible locale, was inevitably a story about the West."³²

The western imaginary in *Moby-Dick*, however, one drawn from Melville's memories of the grasslands of Illinois or through sources like Parkman, ultimately functions as more than any singular, structural armature. These geophysical environments were a locus for a variety of narratives that normalized the nation's imperialist designs and in his ambivalent response to Parkman's expansionist-driven prose, Melville's shift from the topical to the literary-historical prefigures the complex and often conflicted interplay between a romanticized west and the realities of the nation's present in *Moby-Dick*.

The White Steed of the Prairies

In his extravagant exposition of the color white, Ishmael attempts to uncover what it is about the whiteness of Moby Dick—this "thought, or rather vague, nameless horror" that "above all things appalled [him]" (*MD* 159, 165). Ishmael initially leads the reader through a taxonomic pastiche of symbolic, mythic, and cultural associations with the color, seemingly attempting to demonstrate the veracity of Melville's comment in "Hawthorne and His Mosses" that "all

subjects are infinite.”³³ Melville peppers this opening with references to the west. A sardonic claim that the color gives “the white man ideal mastership over every dusky tribe” is quickly followed by nods to Native American ethics and spirituality; that “among the Red Men of America the giving of the white belt of wampum was the deepest pledge of honor,” while to the “noble Iroquois, the midwinter sacrifice of the sacred White Dog was by far the holiest festival of their theology” (*MD* 159, 160). Having next speculated on the primal awe and fear engendered by the albatross’s whiteness in sea-lore—“whence come those clouds of spiritual wonderment and pale dread in which that white phantom sails in all imaginations?”—Melville then turns to the legend of the white steed of the prairies, which is “most famous in our Western annals and Indian traditions” (*MD* 160, 161).

Circulated by hunters and trappers, versions of the legend could be found in a number of antebellum texts, including Washington Irving’s *A Tour on the Prairies* (1835), George Wilkins Kendall’s *Narrative of the Texan Santa Fé Expedition* (1844), Josiah Gregg’s *Commerce of the Prairies* (1844), and James T. Hall’s *The Wilderness and the War Path* (1846). Whether described as white, black, or grey, certain common threads run through all the “marvelous accounts” of the singular stallion. The horse is a natural ‘pacer’ (a type of trotting gait) and exceptionally fast. In Kendall’s version for the *Democratic Review* (1843), the steed wears down “no less than three race-nags sent out expressly to catch him with a Mexican rider.”³⁴ As the horse has eluded pursuit for years, “large sums of money have been offered to any one who would catch him and the attempt has frequently been made; but he still roams the prairies in freedom, solitary and alone.”³⁵ Relating the anecdote of “a black horse” found along the “Brasis” (Brazos) River in Texas, Irving similarly writes that, “offers were made for him to the amount of a thousand dollars; the boldest and most hard-riding hunters tried incessantly to make

prize of him, but in vain.”³⁶ As with other western legends and ‘tall tales,’ the stories of the steed hold regional currency and the various anecdotes regarding the horse locate him all over the western map, a physical impossibility that causes Gregg to rightly question their veracity:

I infer that this story is somewhat mythical, from the difficulty which one finds in fixing the abiding place of the equine hero. He is familiarly known, by common report, all over the great Prairies. The trapper celebrates him in the vicinity of the northern Rocky Mountains; the hunter, on the Arkansas, or in the midst of the Plains; while others have him pacing...on the borders of Texas. It is hardly a matter of surprise, then, that a creature of such an ubiquitary existence should never have been caught.³⁷

Whichever source or sources he drew from, Melville characteristically makes the legend uniquely his own by drawing on a rich variety of references and associations. In similar fashion to the effect the albatross has on sailors, the “spiritual whiteness” of the steed engenders a “trembling reverence and awe” in even the “bravest Indians,” both bird and steed invested with a “strange glory” (*MD* 161). At the same time, Melville’s mustang is no longer the lone animal as related in most of the anecdotes, but a conquering and “elected Xerxes,” poised at the head of “vast herds of wild horses.” He is a “magnificent milk-white charger”—a description that may have reminded Melville’s readers of Zachary Taylor’s famous horse, ‘Old Whitey’—who has the “dignity of a thousand monarchs” and “westward trooped it like that chosen star” (*MD* 161).³⁸ Marching “amid his aides and marshals,” Melville’s war-horse leads his “countless cohorts” as they all stream “endlessly over the plains, like an Ohio,” imagery that evokes both troop movements and western migration. When stopped, with his “circumambient subjects browsing

all around at the horizon,” the celestial, monarchial Steed reviews his subjects at a gallop. Granting his steed a broader geographic range, his “pastures in those days were only fenced in by the Rocky Mountains and the Alleghanies,” fairly defining here, in reverse, one trajectory of Anglo-American migration (*MD* 161). For the “old trappers and hunters,” already making their mark on the land, this sovereign horse is an “imperial and archangelical” phantom from an Edenic past that revives the “glories of those primeval times when Adam walked majestic as a god, bluff-browed and fearless as this mighty steed” (*MD* 161).

Melville’s rendition of the “most famous” legend is, of course, a small part of a chapter filled with allusions and, as such, could be viewed as nothing more than a highly imaginative variation on the anecdote. Yet, following his extended exposition on myth formation and influence in the previous chapter, “Moby Dick,” and how the “outblown rumors of the White Whale” circulate and expand, Melville’s interpretation of the legend projects more than a *mélange* of descriptive references to the West (*MD* 153). Drawing on language evocative of empire and expansion, Melville’s ambiguous rendition is, on one level, a satiric play on the manipulative, bellicose rhetoric of manifest destiny.

In engaging this rhetoric, however, he also narrates a certain exceptionalist triumphalism, a bravado that reached a new peak in many quarters after the Mexican-American War. At the same time, while the more locally and regionally-inflected anecdotes of the steed play into contemporaneous fantasies of western freedom, Melville’s version of the myth also registers the expectant narratives Anglo-Americans told themselves about western spaces—of a vast region of independence, where one can range unimpeded and where homogeneous camaraderie holds sway. By deflecting the steed’s seeming embodiment of territorial conquest into a fictive past,

though, Melville seems to want to hold those fantasies (and their consequences) in a kind of temporal stasis, a narrative move that will not hold as the chapter progresses.

Melville resurrects a pioneer past again, as further on in his meditation on the “incantation of this whiteness,” Ishmael relates how a “backwoodsman of the West,” can with “indifference view[s] an unbounded prairie sheeted with driven snow, no shadow of tree or twig to break the fixed trance of whiteness” (*MD* 164). Melville draws on this brief image of the frontier backwoodsman primarily as a way to provide contrast to the sailor who “beholding the scenery of the Antarctic seas” imagines instead an ice-filled, “boundless” cemetery. Under the logic of Ishmael’s larger argument, the backwoodsman’s tranquility in the face of potential danger merely signals an “unimaginative mind,” as it turns out that it is only those with active imaginations, like himself, for whom whiteness elicits the greater terror (*MD* 163). Melville’s archetypal figure, like the White Steed, is at a temporal remove from what seems the more immediate and active fear of the sailor. Yet, while Melville conjures a static figure gazing at a blank expanse, the frontiersman’s calm reaction taps into the cultural imaginary of the intrepid pioneer figure, a Daniel Boone or Natty Bumppo, and again, with the “unbounded prairie,” to the fantasy of an empty, perpetual western space.

Melville’s western imaginary takes a more ominous and less equivocal turn near the end of the “The Whiteness of the Whale.” Following Ishmael’s conspiratorial comment to the readers, concerned they might think he is suffering from delusions with his rant on whiteness, Melville returns again to the West to further drive home Ishmael’s fear of the “colorless, all-color” (*MD* 165). Describing the instinctual dread raised in a Vermont colt when a “fresh buffalo robe” is shaken behind him, Ishmael wonders why this should be the case when,

[t]here is no remembrance in him of any gorings of wild creatures in his green northern home, so that the strange muskiness he smells cannot recall to him anything associated with the experience of former perils; for what knows he, this New England colt, of the black bisons of distant Oregon? No: but here thou beholdest even in a dumb brute, the instinct of the knowledge of the demonism in the world. Though thousands of miles from Oregon, still when he smells that savage musk, the rending, goring bison herds are as present as to the deserted wild foal of the prairies, which this instant they may be trampling into dust. (*MD* 164)

A purposeful analogy designed to highlight Ishmael's own intuitive knowledge of evil in the natural world and his primal fear of Moby Dick, the passage also projects a different western imaginary, as Melville shifts from visions of the region between the "Rocky Mountains and the Alleghanies" or the backwoodsman's prairie, to the distant points of a more contemporaneous coast-spanning nation. Locating his prairie and bison—iconic symbols of the High Plains even then—to a farther west, Melville's Oregon Territory is rendered as a dark and bloody space, the easterner fearful of it as a smell or concept.³⁹ This is not the hoped-for environment that emigrants were streaming towards in 1851, but an animalistic, savage, anxiety-producing space far from the green fields and placidity of New England. The fictive language of beauty which attends his description of the White Steed—the "flashing of his mane, the curving comet of his tail," which "invested him with housings more resplendent than gold and silver beaters could have furnished him"—is replaced here with realistic images of violence and gore (*MD* 161,155). The majestic and "fearless" steed is reduced to a quivering colt and a "deserted wild foal...which this instant [the bison] may be trampling into dust," an image of abandonment which

foregrounds the marooned and the orphaned left in the *Pequod's* and other whale-ship's wakes (*MD* 161, 164).

Melville's vision not only serves to drive home Ishmael's analogous fears to those of the Vermont colt—fears lurking in the “invisible spheres” of the [natural] world—but his bloody and uncaring Far West is also an anxious representation of the ramifications of trans-continental expansion (*MD* 164). At the same time, Melville traces an arc from a legendary west to what could be playing out at “this instant” in the nation's landed periphery, striking a cautionary note about the efficacy of western tales and archetypes to impact territorial impulses and realities in the present. The fantasies of untroubled spaces that suffuse his references to an archaic past project forward and outward into a West that, unlike the one of manly adventure that Melville is attracted to in “Mr. Parkman's Tour” is, quite simply, dangerous. The presumptions and fictions underlying the freedom of the triumphant Steed roving in his broad domain or the backwoodsman's ostensibly neutral ethics—*indifference* also defined as “neither decidedly good nor evil”—feed into a vision of expansion gone awry, the mobility which allows for territorialist agendas to proliferate as spawning an irrational and unforgiving morality.⁴⁰

Certainly at this juncture it is a given that references to “hunters and trappers,” an “Edenic” west, and “unbounded prairies,” formed part of an ongoing expansionist discourse, though interestingly it is in these same images that Stephanie LeMenager and others locate a post-continental impulse in *Moby-Dick*, often pointing to Melville's parenthetical summation of the primal West as one “(in whose sunset suns still rise)” by way of confirmation (*MD* 353). Rather than projecting a western imaginary lacking in importance for the nation's more global future, however, Melville exposes a West that still holds a critical cultural and ideological viability, if not volatility.⁴¹

For a number of scholars, “The Whiteness of the Whale” is, as Robert Belknap suggests “the psychological center, the heart of all the material presented,” a critical stance prefigured in Ishmael’s own tantalizing words, that “in some dim, random way, explain myself I must, else all these chapters might be naught.”⁴² These readings have added valuable insight into Melville’s project as a whole, and there is certainly no question that Ishmael’s meditation on whiteness dissolves into a metaphysical enigma; the essence of white is shown to be “a colorless, all-color,” both everything and nothing. Melville’s chapter on whiteness, however, conveys more than metaphysical musing, particularly when viewed alongside the preceding chapter, “Moby Dick,” and the close-following “The Affidavit,” in which Ishmael continues his coercive manipulation of the reader as he works to establish the veracity and “reasonableness of the whole story of the White Whale” (*MD* 172). As part of a larger discourse on legends, actuality, and interpretation, Melville’s western references in “Whiteness” inject another strand of engagement with the fluidity and consequences of “tales and telling,” in this case in relation to expansionist rhetoric and policies.⁴³

Yet, in a chapter that is both notorious *for*, yet also *about* ambiguity, in similar fashion to how the cetological chapters may provide Melville with the means to postpone the action of the chase as a number of critics have suggested, his references to a frontier west might also represent a way for Melville to forestall the nation’s forward motion and the dismal vision of territorialization etched onto his Oregon prairie, however obliquely drawn. That Melville is attracted to a romanticized West is evidenced throughout *Moby-Dick*, perhaps not as exuberantly as Edwin Fussell suggests—that he is “positively in love with the prairies”—but certainly to the degree that a fictive West inflects his own sociopolitical and cultural imaginary as it did for many Americans (and, to an unfortunate degree, still does).⁴⁴ But if, through the legends and

archetypes of the West, Melville works to locate an earlier nation where republican ideals still have the potential to flourish—in the various and successive Anglo-American wests that were thematized as a forge for the nation’s character—the avenues of space and mobility foundational to those ideals were, as he well knew, the same ones that allowed for an aggressive territorialization.

“A Loose-Fish and a Fast-Fish, too”

The parallels between the legend of the western mustang and the equally legendary Moby Dick become apparent particularly when viewed against the anecdotes of Kendall and others—both are elusive, solitary animals, resistant to human domination and greed. As with the mustang, the White Whale repeatedly manages to escape, though with the added characteristic of being impervious to repeated harpoon strikes. Among the “outblown rumors” of the whale, is the “unearthly conceit” that he is not only “ubiquitous” like the steed, but that he is also “immortal (for immortality is but ubiquity in time)” (*MD* 155). Like the White Steed, the whale is free to explore the larger domain of the “limitless, uncharted seas,” racing ahead of any pursuers (*MD* 155). The “eternal” White Whale is at least temporarily, if not in perpetuity, a “Loose Fish” (*MD* 355, 307).

As Melville’s narrator explains, a “Fast-Fish” quite simply “belongs to the party fast to it,” while a “Loose-Fish is fair game for anybody who can soonest catch it” (*MD* 308). Dead or alive, a Fast-Fish is a whale anchored to a ship with as little as a “cobweb,” or one floating loose, but impaled with a “waif-pole,” a sign of a ship’s possession and intention to recover their temporarily abandoned property (*MD* 307, 308). A Loose-Fish, by Ishmael’s definition of the commodity, does not enjoy an essential freedom, but is merely a Fast-Fish that has not yet been

caught. Applying this porous and easily manipulated jurisprudence to the politics of annexation, Melville satirizes the darker motives underlying imperialist claims that possession “is the whole of the law”—“What to the rapacious landlord is the widow’s last mite but a Fast-Fish? What to that apostolic lancer, Brother Jonathan, is Texas but a Fast-Fish? (*MD* 309, 310). Pressing further on the “internationally and universally applicable” doctrine of the Loose-Fish, Melville takes jabs at how the acquisition of territory under the guise of manifest destiny is little different than empire building (*MD* 310). As to the question: “What at last will Mexico be to the United States?” the answer of “Loose-Fish” frames that country as one potentially “waifed,” just as America was by Columbus “for his royal master and mistress” or what India is to the East India Company and England—further pressing on the spurious means through which imperialist agendas are legitimized (*MD* 310). In the global land grab, however, Melville also satirizes the hubris underlying territorialist claims, just as the escaped whales in “The Grand Armada” can easily be taken “by some other craft than the Pequod” (*MD* 305).

In his “broad boundless ocean” and artful whale, however, *Moby-Dick* registers the possibility that some spaces and populations might remain beyond the clutches of appropriation or domination, the combination of space and mobility acting as a hedge against territorialist designs, the same mobility which, as Hsuan L. Hsu remarks, “gestures toward—even if it seldom delivers—the possibility of escape from the domestic, heterosexual, and economic constraints of national culture” (*MD* 169).⁴⁵ But as conveyed through Melville’s western imaginary in “The Whiteness of the Whale,” the impulse to move outward carries its own contradictory consequences, a dichotomy reflected in the final cetology chapter “Does the Whale’s Magnitude Diminish? —Will he Perish? In ‘answering’ these questions, Ishmael counters the idea that whale pods are shrinking by suggesting that they are just finding newer and more distant

territories, so “if one coast is no longer enlivened with their jets, then, be sure, some other and remoter strand has been very recently startled by the unfamiliar spectacle” (*MD* 353-4). This, along with the whale’s longevity and dubious claim of the low-yield nature of the whale-hunt—that is, demand never outstripping supply—further precludes the whale’s “speedy” extinction (*MD* 352). Unlike the buffalo, “which not forty years ago, overspread by tens of thousands the prairies of Illinois and Missouri,” but “at the present day not one horn or hoof of them remains in all that region,” the whales will presumably escape the forces of imperialism (*MD* 352).⁴⁶

Melville’s description of the pioneering Leviathans, though, analogizes some of the exceptionalist rhetoric underpinning the processes of territorialization. For most Anglo-Americans, the presumption that certain liberties and gains could be achieved by moving farther into “remoter territories” was viewed as a national right, even as the motivations of many emigrants sparked increasing sectional tensions as the republic grew. This presumption was countered, of course, by the reality that the “remoter strand” was not only populated, but that the inhabitants were rightly “startled” by the newcomers. The enormous “pasture” that the whale has to swim in is not an empty one, and the impact of his presence is not unrecognized. While Melville optimistically grants the whale an avenue of freedom and refuge, his representation not only puts the lie to the empty west fantasy, but to the fiction that “uncharted seas” necessarily means unoccupied.

In his argument against the whale’s demise, as in his engagement with the west in “The Whiteness of the Whale,” Melville struggles with the dialectical tension between space as liberty granting and with the over-spreading domination that the same freedom might engender. In a nation where the promises and ramifications of expansion were everywhere being felt, this is hardly surprising. The “paradox” of “republican-imperial expansion,” that is, between

democratic ideals and the ultimate outcomes of territorialization, which, as shown, Cooper's *The Prairie* also reveals, was still very much in play, albeit with re-contextualized geo-political terms and stakes.⁴⁷ The credo that it was the right and duty of Americans to spread the principles of democracy along with themselves was one that, from Jefferson's agri-based "empire for liberty" on, was continually re-tooled by politicians and the press to serve their immediate purposes. The role of expansion in "extending the area for [democratic] freedom," as Andrew Jackson asserted, for example, was undercut by the darker, non-egalitarian and racist realities and imperialist aspirations bound to that rhetoric.⁴⁸

In the early 1850s, the idea of extending freedom through territorial aggrandizement was perhaps nowhere more pronounced than in the politics and discourse surrounding various unofficial military expeditions, or filibusters, that were mounted after the Mexican-American War.⁴⁹ One of the most reported of these were the Cuban filibusters of 1850 and 1851 led by Narciso López. López, a Venezuelan-born, Cuban property owner living in the United States convinced others, mostly mercenaries and speculators, to join in the liberation of the Cubans from the Spanish government on the assumption that they would back his invasions—they did not. While López made claims to free the oppressed from colonial rule, he and his backers well knew that the island "figured prominently as a slaveholding territory that could be wrested from the Spanish empire and annexed to the United States."⁵⁰ Arrested after his first attempt for violating the Neutrality Act, López tried again, only to be executed by Spanish troops.⁵¹ In the September 18, 1851 inaugural issue of the Whig-leaning *New-York Daily Times*, the editors conclude from these failed attempts that, "for the present at least, the inhabitants of Cuba do not desire their freedom." Careful to distance those Americans who "will always sympathize with any people struggling, or supposed to be struggling against oppression" from the filibusters, the

editors maintain that López and his troops lacked such enlightened reasons and essentially ceased “to be American citizens the moment they set out, as invaders, for the shores of Cuba.”⁵²

One of the results of filibustering attempts such as that of López or of Tejano, José Carabal’s efforts to “carve out a new republic” in northern Mexico, was an uptick in the rhetoric of neutrality in the press and halls of power.⁵³ President Fillmore, for example, devotes a large part of his second annual address in December of 1851 to the topic. Referring back to the Neutrality Act of 1818, Fillmore asserts that the United States has led the world in “proclaiming and adhering to the doctrine of neutrality and nonintervention.” He goes on, however, to acknowledge that “in a country now having 3,000 or 4,000 miles of coastline, with an infinite number of ports and harbors and small inlets,” these laws are necessarily difficult to execute, as from some of these “unlawful expeditions may suddenly set forth, without the knowledge of Government, against the possessions of foreign states.” Behind the scenes, leaders often supported these unofficial filibusters, though outwardly their sentiments usually echoed those of Fillmore, who reminds Congress that “‘friendly relations with all, but entangling alliances with none,’ has long been a maxim with us” and that the goal is to teach the principles of democracy “by example,” rather than through “artifice or force.”⁵⁴

Melville would certainly have read of López’s expeditions in *The Pittsfield Sun* (Pittsfield, MA), which ran continuous coverage of the filibuster’s exploits.⁵⁵ Whether Melville was as taken by reports of López as other Americans, who were so “transfixed by the story of Cuba” that they often ignored the more pressing issues of the day such as slavery and the “sectional crisis,” *Moby-Dick* nonetheless registers the duplicitous rhetoric surrounding the topic of filibustering and annexation in the public sphere.⁵⁶ In “The Advocate,” for example, Ishmael in “all anxiety” works to enlighten the reader as to the true nature and influence of the “business

of whaling” (*MD* 97). Under the aegis that whalers are the “one single peaceful influence.... upon the whole broad world,” claims are made of the whale-ships expeditionary role “ferreting out” unmapped territory and opening the door to imperialist designs, well before other government-sponsored exploring expeditions (*MD* 99). Whale-ships paved the way for missionaries and merchants in the “uncounted isles of all Polynesia;” laid out the welcome mat for “American and European men-of-war” in previously “savage harbors;” and stand at the “threshold” of the ‘opening’ of Japan (*MD* 99). The reader learns, too, that whalers agitated South American countries to throw off the “yoke of Old Spain,” trading colonial rule for independence and an “eternal democracy,” mirroring the outwardly lofty motives of filibusters such as López (*MD* 99).

Melville was obviously deeply indebted to and admiring of the whaling industry on numerous levels and his description of the whale-ship’s vanguard status was not an uncommon view in the 1850s. From his earlier travels in the Pacific, though, Melville was well aware of the impact of both colonial rule and imperialist agendas on indigenous populations and local environments, a fact made palpable in his novels prior to *Moby-Dick*. Melville was also attuned to the pressures of territorialization on Native Americans and other non-Anglo populations in part through what he witnessed during his Midwest trip and gleaned from his western and other sources, such as Parkman’s *Oregon Trail*. As such, Melville’s representations of the whale-ship’s non-aggressive interventions in the global sphere seem less inspired by the kind of “proud feelings” temporarily raised by the fictional Ishmael’s thought of sailing around the world, than by a desire to take a jab at the rhetoric of “soft imperialism” peddled by Democrats such as John O’Sullivan and by Fillmore and other Whigs who advocated a kind of “economic and cultural imperialism” (*MD* 195).⁵⁷ Yet, just as Melville well knew that his “backwoodsman” was not

necessarily the benign influence that he evokes, but rather an advance expansionist presence, in presenting the whalers as commercial pioneers, roving diplomats, and “savage” tamers—maritime versions of earlier fur trade companies on land—Melville plays loose with their “peaceful influence.” That is, his critique is to some degree attenuated by images and a rhetoric that many of his reader’s would applaud.

Earlier in the novel, Melville makes more explicit the empire-building role of the whaling in his out-sized ode to the Nantucket whalers. Comparing the influence and power of the whalers over other imperialist efforts, Melville declares in a popularly-cited passage:

And thus have these naked Nantucketers, these sea hermits, issuing from their ant-hill in the sea, overrun and conquered the watery world like so many Alexanders; parceling out among them the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian oceans, as the three pirate powers did Poland. Let America add Mexico to Texas, and pile Cuba upon Canada; let the English overswarm all India, and hang out their blazing banner from the sun; two thirds of this terraqueous globe are the Nantucketer's. For the sea is his; he owns it, as Emperors own empires; other seamen having but a right of way through it (*MD* 65).

Though the whaling industry would begin to decline within the decade, here Melville’s local band of whalers coalesces into a formidable commercial and territorial monopoly, rivaling the power of nations. Reminiscent again of fur-trading monopolies, these floating factories are not just in the vanguard of annexation or imperialism as in “The Advocate,” but instead circumscribe an aggregate of territories in their watery empire. Under the logic of Melville’s fast and loose fish, the Nantucket whalers fully enact the creed that possession is “the whole of the law.”

While Melville's is a tongue-in-cheek portrait of the whalers' maritime imperialism, he not only positions U.S. imperialist interests in general within a larger, more global context, but also satirizes American attempts to frame desires for hemispheric land-grabs within a discourse of national exceptionalism.

While Melville well knew that the sea and land were different spaces of transaction, in his various plays with the rhetoric of annexation and filibustering, the nation's nostalgic cultural imaginary of a continental frontier as "neutral territory between advancing civilization and nature lying beyond" is rendered as a similar fiction in the globalized, maritime world.⁵⁸ Even as he gestures towards the possibility of escape from the darker realities of imperialism, perhaps towards a different outcome altogether, one more in line with the "spatial interconnectedness commonly associated with globalization," Melville struggles with the contradictions inherent in those potentialities.⁵⁹ The "unshored, harborless immensities" of the sea in which the *Pequod* will soon be "lost," which opens the chapter "Cetology," for example, is clearly meant to highlight the physical and metaphysical size of the ocean (and the whale) and the anxieties inherent in that for Ishmael. But this brief phrase also hints at the problematics of expansion that Melville negotiates: while there are no shores to take or dominate—to stake a "waif-pole" in—there is no potential refuge, or harborage either (*MD* 115).

In his argument against the whale's extinction, Melville attempts to locate a space out of reach of imperialist agendas, a "deterritorializing tendency" that is mirrored in "The Whiteness of the Whale."⁶⁰ Just as in his engagement with a frontier west, however, the same fantasies of mobility and space that unforgivingly track onto his Oregon prairie find analogous expressions in the cetological world. In "Does the Whale's Magnitude Diminish?," Melville's unwillingness to entertain the idea that it is man who is altering the whale's behavior seems a curious omission, an

ambivalence suggestive of narratives of a frontier past that painted a west of endless abundance, while also mirroring the kind of “imperialist nostalgia” found in Parkman and others.⁶¹ In “The Grand Armanda,” however, he fully acknowledges man’s impact and the whale’s response to the “unwearied activity with which of late they have been hunted” (*MD* 298). In a culture engaged in various forms of “pursuit,” perhaps most notably those brought on by the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, this relentless pressure on the whales clearly resonates.

Further relating that the whales are now found swimming in larger herds “as if numerous nations of them had sworn solemn league and covenant for mutual assistance and protection,” Melville offers up a prescient warning of the potential ramifications of territorialization within the context of the commercial realities of the whaling industry (*MD* 298). Similarly, while the parallels between the legendary White Steed and Moby Dick have been noted, the untouchable, divine purity of the mustang is clearly different from a whale imbued with “intelligent malignity” premeditating ways to strike back at his pursuers—one of the “wild suggestings” which finally fills Ishmael with his own “natural terror,” even while he attests that he is not one to be taken in by these rumors (*MD* 155). Unlike the White Steed, the oft cornered Moby Dick is repeatedly forced to fight back to maintain his freedom. It is perhaps this that engenders the whale’s preternatural rage. Serving another admonitory purpose, whether consciously or no on the author’s part, Melville’s fictional and angry whale exemplifies the pressures of domination on indigenous populations and the potential for conflict. At the same time, if the White Whale is symbolic of the new territories being chased by the nation, as Melville scholars focusing on political allegory in the text have suggested, by analogy that territory is a deformed and scarred environment, that is, a space already exhibiting the effects of repeated imperialist intrusions.

Daniel Boone and the Global Sphere

For most of the short chapter, “Schools and Schoolmasters,” Ishmael narrates an Orientalist fantasy, imagining a school of female whales and the ever-present dominant male as an “Ottoman and his concubines” (*MD* 305). As this “sated Turk” and former schoolmaster grows older, the “exemplary, sulky old soul” leaves the harem and travels the oceans alone. At this point, however, Melville abruptly shifts geographic focus to an early national American west, as the aged whale is compared to another “sulky old soul:”

Almost universally, a lone whale—as a Solitary Leviathan is called—proves an ancient one. Like venerable moss-bearded Daniel Boone, he will have no one near him but Nature herself; and her he takes to wife in the wilderness of waters, and the best of wives she is, though she keeps so many moody secrets. (*MD* 307)

Melville’s Boone is not only wedded to Nature, like the old whale, but has *become* Nature. As Eric Kaufmann points out, Boone biographies, particularly after his death in 1820, “began to introduce the idea of this frontiersman as an organic creature of nature.”⁶² While Boone was clearly comfortable in the natural world, Melville’s Boone is represented as fixed, rather than mobile, his “moss-beard” evoking an old tree, an “established national geographic type,” already firmly rooted in the national consciousness.⁶³ Yet moss can also be underfoot, tenacious, and over-spreading, much like the circulation within the national imaginary of western legends such as those that surrounded Boone.

In 1851, perhaps no figure was as well known in what Melville calls the “Western annals” as Daniel Boone (*MD* 161). Boone was introduced to the public through John Filson’s

The Discovery, Settlement and Present State of Kentucke, which included in the appendices a ghostwritten biography, the *Adventures of Col. Daniel Boon, one of the first Settlers, comprehending every important Occurrence in the political History of that Province* (1784).⁶⁴ Immediately popular in Europe, Filson's romanticized Boone quickly became a national figure. The public's fascination with Boone led to an outpouring of books about him, particularly in the Jacksonian and antebellum eras, when as Daniel J. Herman notes, he became America's "first mass culture hero" (432).⁶⁵

The most popular of these accounts was Timothy Flint's *Biographical Memoir of Daniel Boone, the First Settler of Kentucky Interspersed with Incidents in the Early Annals of the Country* (1833) which, as John Mack Faragher notes, saw fourteen printings between 1833 and 1868.⁶⁶ In hagiographic fashion, Flint carves out a high-action portrait of Boone as the buckskin-clad backwoodsman, who could fight off bears and Native Americans alike with, literally and figuratively, one hand tied behind his back. At the same time, Flint infuses his *Memoir* with, by then, recognizable imagery and exceptionalist rhetoric to describe Boone's Kentucky: "the rich and boundless valleys of the great west—the garden of the earth—and the paradise of hunters," where "civilization had not yet driven the primitive tenants from their favorite retreats. Most of the country was still in a state of nature—unsettled and unappropriated."⁶⁷

During his lifetime, Boone's popularity was reflected in his ubiquity, a characteristic shared with the legends of Moby Dick and the White Steed. Even after he had, in 1799, permanently moved to Spanish Missouri "to escape his creditors," there were still reported sightings of Boone in Kentucky, the most notable of which was John James Audubon's claim to have gone hunting with him in the Kentucky woods.⁶⁸ After Boone died in 1820, his legendary status gained further traction when, in 1845, his body, along with that of his wife, were

disinterred from plots in Missouri and re-interred with great fanfare in Frankfort, Kentucky. Newspapers of the time ran the story of the ceremonies, *The Southern Patriot* reporting an attendance of 15,000-20,000 people, including dignitaries and “the first black man who ever trod the soil of Kentucky,” though as Faragher writes the festivities actually saw closer to “several thousand people.”⁶⁹

As with any legend, representations and appropriations of Boone varied over the decades to suit a variety of agendas and ideologies—from Filson’s “fighting frontiersman and forest philosopher;” to a man escaping the vile excesses of an increasingly mercantile country; to Indian-hater; to the nation’s uber-pathfinder.⁷⁰ Regardless of the various renditions, the paradox of Boone is that while he was usually represented as a figure, often a misanthropic one, rushing away from civilization, he was also an icon of territorialization, or as Daniel J. Herman notes “America’s original hero of Manifest Destiny [who] claimed the continent not through the doctrine of *vacuum domicilium*...but by engaging deer, bear, and Indian in chivalrous combat.”⁷¹

At the same time, any mention of Boone would have been evocative not only of geophysical expansion, but of what constituted the American character as well. Over time, Boone morphed into a figure who, besides exemplifying a host of character traits, such as self-reliance and masculine energy, “appropriate[d] the voice of virtue and republican simplicity.”⁷² In much the same way as Cooper’s Natty Bumppo, Boone may have been represented as a loner from civilization, but his moral integrity was unimpeachable. Though Boone became uncomfortable with the public’s conception of him as a divinely endowed “harbinger of progress,” it is exactly that image which Americans were insatiably drawn to, as his form of conquest made many of the actualities of expansionism both justifiable and palatable.⁷³ In similar fashion to Melville’s “hunters and trappers” and “backwoodsman,” Boone was the

embodiment of a nation's imagined, exceptionalist sense of itself and willingness on the part of a number of Anglo-Americans to buy into and maintain Flint's and others' fantasy of western territories as "unsettled and unappropriated."⁷⁴

In "The Whiteness of the Whale," Melville's references to an archaic West become mapped onto the contemporaneous east-west (but noticeably, not north-south) reach of the nation. In "Schools and Schoolmasters," in comparing the aged whale, the Eastern "Turk," with the hyper-nationalized Daniel Boone, Melville moves that expansion-driving relationship into the global sphere. While he does this, albeit fleetingly, in his comparison between the two august and "exemplary" old souls, Melville also effects this move at the end of the chapter in his description of the raucous, collegiate, "bull schools" (*MD* 307). As they grow older, the young whales eventually "break up, and separately go about in quest of settlements, that is, harems" (*MD* 307). The last part of the sentence is, again, an abrupt shift in temporal and geographic orientation, the word *settlements* of course gesturing towards continental expansion, and more specifically early national migration, while "harems," moves the reader back to the Orientalist trope the chapter begins with. Whether this stutter represents hesitancy on Melville's part to move the correlation forward or as a way to subtly enforce it is difficult to say. Nonetheless, intentionally or not, Melville frames the young whales, along with Boone and what he came to symbolize, within the global context of empires.

While unusual in Melville's overall vocabulary, Boone seems to hold a certain fascination for Melville and he resurrects him again in "The Encantadas or Enchanted Isles" (1854), his ten sketches of the Galpápagos Islands which he visited in 1841 while aboard the whaling vessel *Acushnet*.⁷⁵ In "Sketch Fourth," subtitled "A Pisgah View From the Rock," Melville's narrative voice, Salvator R. Tarnmoor, invites the reader in the first paragraph to stand

with him at the top of Rock Rodondo, the highest point in the Galpápagos Islands—and Melville’s hierarchical aviary—and “be rewarded by the view” (*E* 111). It becomes immediately apparent, however, that any attempts to imagine anything along with the narrator is suspect. In the opening paragraph, Tarnmoor describes a grueling “prescription” on how to prepare oneself to ascend an unscalable rock by mastering, as Hester Blum remarks “several exotic varieties of climbing skill, not simply one” (*E* 111).⁷⁶ Critiquing in part the disingenuous rhetoric of antebellum boosterism—one that purported to provide the reader with directions and a true picture of California or Oregon—Melville’s narrator continues: “How we get there, we alone know. If we sought to tell others, what the wiser were they? Suffice it, that here at the summit you and I stand” (*E* 111).

The reader is then prompted to look outward and ignore the more immediate view of the “Burnt District” of the Galpápagos: nevermind that you “see nothing; but permit me to point out the direction, if not the place of certain interesting objects in the vast sea, which, kissing this tower’s base, we behold unscrolling itself towards the Antarctic pole” (*E* 111). While the reader struggles to imagine any of the “enchanted” environments being described as geophysical realities—which of course, is part of the point—Melville continues the geography lesson, describing land masses in other directions that also cannot be more immediately seen—for example, the continent of South America to the east and the Polynesian chain to the west—a lesson interspersed with essentially useless mileage and latitude figures. Bringing the reader’s gaze back around to the more immediate surroundings, Melville continues the tease: “If you could only see so far . . . you would catch sight of the isle of Narborough” (*E* 113).

From the summit, Melville’s Tarnmoor slyly asks whether a “balloonist” or the “man in the moon” could have a better view, speculating that: “Much thus, one fancies, looks the

universe from Milton's celestial battlement. A boundless, watery Kentucky. Here Daniel Boone would have dwelt content" (*E* 111). Melville's Pisgah is, of course, a Biblical reference to Mount Nebo, and Boone was frequently portrayed in both print and the visual arts as Moses leading his people to the Promised Land. Robert Morgan makes the point that "by Thoreau's time, Boone's forward-pressing Pisgah vision had become the type and archetype to which American poets and philosophers and even politicians appealed."⁷⁷ Mirroring Melville's backwoodsman, who gazes with "indifference" at the snow-blanketed prairie, Flint makes use of this "Pisgah vision" in describing Boone's own vision of the nation's future:

...he had caught some of the glimmerings of the future, and saw with the prophetic eye of a patriot, that this great valley must soon become the abode of millions of freemen; and his heart swelled with joy, and warmed with a transport which was natural to a mind so unsophisticated and disinterested as his. (*E* 171)

From the top of Rock Rodondo, Melville gestures towards Flint's and other narratives that find Boone prophetically and patriotically filling the "great valley" spread before him with Anglo-American "glimmerings of the future" (*E* 117). Yet, if the ocean or Melville's "watery Kentucky" is, as LeMenager suggests the "new landscape of the nation's future," it is bleak prospect given the surrounding environment from which that future projects (*E* 111).⁷⁸ In this and other sketches, the islands are described as exhibiting an "emphatic uninhabitableness" (*E* 99). They are filled with "dark cavernous recesses," "grim cliffs," and "ocular deceptions," where the "chief sound of life...is a hiss" (*E* 100). The "lesser isles" are an "archipelago of aridities, without inhabitant, history, or hope of either in all time to come" and "So far as you

Abington Isle is concerned, Adam and his billions of posterity remain uncreated” (*E* 116). In his sketch “Two Sides to a Tortoise,” Melville’s narrator allows that “sackcloth and ashes as they are, the isles are not perhaps unmitigated gloom,” using the tortoise’s “black and bright” sides as a means to sermonize: “Enjoy the bright, keep it turned up perpetually if you can, but be honest and don’t deny the black,” even though to view the tortoise’s “bright” side requires placing the animal in a paralyzed, vulnerable state (*E* 103, 104). But, apart from this brief, sardonic interjection, Melville sums up the penitential and primeval Island’s features this way: “it is to be doubted whether any spot of earth can, in desolateness, furnish a parallel to this group” (*E* 99).

The “unimpaired.....silence and solitude” of the islands would certainly have appealed to the iconic Boone and, in relation to the surrounding terrain, Melville may be poking fun at Boone’s legendary ability to dwell “content” in any wilderness environment. Yet, the difficulty that Melville has in locating a space outside the reach and influence of manifest destiny in *Moby-Dick*, finds similar, though more perhaps more direct expression in “The Encantadas.” As with the territory of *Moby-Dick* (along with the actual whale), this is a deeply scarred environment, not only the blasted landscape as Melville describes it, but an equally marred sociopolitical environment wrought by a real and imagined human presence. As “a common watering and outfitting spot for whalers, naval vessels, and merchant ships alike,” the Islands were clearly woven into a vast network of commercial and military exchange, and in one sketch, Melville describes an encounter in 1812 between the battleship, U.S.S. *Essex* and a duplicitous, flag-exchanging British vessel.⁷⁹ Melville’s Islands, though, have also felt the presence of other “runaways, castaways, and solitaires”—from the marooned and abused “Chola widow” Hunilla, to an island littered with the detritus left behind by West Indian pirates (*E* 147).

But it is in sketches including those of Oberlus, an insane hermit, who lures, then kidnaps sailors for slave labor; or the mad, filibustering Dog-King of Peru, whose crazed re-enactment of the Peruvian struggle for independence against the Spanish ends in revolt against him by his own colony along with his exile—the remaining ‘colonist’s’ then entrapping sailors for supplies—that Melville fully drives home the Galpápagos Island’s inescapable position within a global sphere of colonialist and imperialist excesses and exploitation. Reminiscent of Melville’s visions of violence and abandonment in the Oregon Territory, the same darker repercussions of expansionism are everywhere felt in “The Encantadas.” If Melville’s sketches are, as Eric Wertheimer usefully suggests a “meditation upon the ‘strata and policies that are left behind in exploration’s wake,” when seen in relation to the Pisgah vision from the summit of Rock Rodondo, the sketches also point to how what is “left behind” impacts the potentialities of the future.⁸⁰ Put another way, Melville seems to ask what kind of future for the nation can be built on “heaps of cinder?” (*E* 99).

In “The Encantadas,” the reference to Boone and his “watery Kentucky” is a fleeting and anachronistic moment. Yet, knowing full well the strength of these associations, it seems likely that Melville is doing more here than just making the foreign recognizable for his readers with an amusing reference. To a certain degree, Melville’s representations of Boone in *Moby-Dick* and in “The Encantadas” are suggestive of a figure that has lost vitality in the nation’s imaginary—an old man who has permanently left society; or a figure “content” to dwell in an endless, eternal backwoods sea; or a static presence on the rock, as timeless as the Islands, unable to do more than gaze at, but not necessarily effect the outcomes of his Pisgah vision. As Hsu suggests, “Melville’s island settings evoke feelings of solitude and stasis that seem antithetical to the notions of progressive temporality.”⁸¹ Even as these images of the isolated frontiersman are

parodic of the many romanticized portraits of the mythic Boone, however, Melville presses on Boone's role as the opener of the West to expansion and the potential ramifications of that by positioning the "hero of Manifest Destiny" in the broader global arena; the "progressive temporality" of globalization rendered as tainted by the force of that ideology, rather than advanced.⁸²

Boone's Kentucky was hardly an untouched, unpeopled environment before he and his family arrived in 1775 along with others who would make up the settlement of Boonesborough. Even the narratives of Filson and Flint, which otherwise portray the region in glowing terms, nonetheless makes clear the presence of Native populations, even if negatively, either through catalogs such as Filson's "account of twenty-eight different nations of Indians, Eastward of the Mississippi," or through narratives of what, from our viewpoint, was the clear resistance of Shawnee and Cherokee to white settlement.⁸³ Kentucky was also one of many sites that fostered and generated, what in 1851, was a still-moving wave of slavery and of Native dislocation and decimation.

Like many Americans, though, the skeptical, cosmopolitan Melville was not immune to to narratives of the pioneering spirit of Boone, any more than he was to the "awakening power" that Cooper instilled in him, or to the adventures of Parkman, Wilkes and others.⁸⁴ Though the actualities of Boone's life were largely ignored by his biographers—including the fact that, from the Revolutionary War on, he was ambivalent in his political leanings, if not indifferent—the fantasy of Boone as the embodiment of democracy and republican virtue, who by Melville's day was also painted as a figure escaping the excesses of the market revolution, was a hard one to shake.⁸⁵

While in his evocations of Boone, the “settlements,” and the “watery Kentucky,” Melville draws a trajectory between the early national period and the global world, there is still a subtle unwillingness to jettison the mythos surrounding those references, even as he both parodies and exposes the dangers of them. But the genealogy of Boone went beyond the narrative. In “Mr. Parkman’s Tour,” Melville reminds the reader that among the other “outlandish and interesting characters,” they will “fall in with the veritable grandsons of Daniel Boon [*sic*].”⁸⁶ As if to punctuate the trajectory between the literary-historical and the topical, the younger Boones are part of a group of emigrants headed for California and the ocean beyond.

The Pacific

From the beginning of *Moby-Dick*, Melville’s ambiguously rendered inland populations, massed at the edge of Manhattan, are poised to embrace the nation’s future beyond the peripheries. As though leaving a divisive nation behind, Ishmael wonders how, though drawn from all the cardinal directions, “yet here they all unite” (*MD* 19). For Ishmael, with the “flood-gates” open, the Pacific awaits, yet it is in the “heart of the Japanese cruising ground” that some of Melville’s most romanticized references to the American west are found:

There are times, when in his whale-boat the rover feels a certain filial, confident, land-like feeling towards the sea; that he regard it as to much flowery earth and the distant ship revealing only the tops of her masts, seems struggling forward, not through high rolling waves, but through the tall grass of a rolling prairie: as when the western emigrants horses only show their erected ears, while their hidden bodies widely wade through the amazing verdure” (*MD* 368, 373).

In this tranquil conjoining of continental expansion and maritime commercialization, Melville seems to draw most from sources such as Cooper or Parkman and from his youthful trip to Illinois; the rover “seated in his boat, light as a birch canoe,” recalling native populations of the East and Midwest, rather than of the High Plains. As in other moments where he evokes the prairie west, here Melville seems to want to effect a pause, a slowing down of the realities of expansionism, just as Ishmael is relaxed by the calm sea. As Melville notes, however, this “soothing scene” of the two frontiers is a “temporary” one (*MD* 373). While these land-sea comparisons in “The Gilder” are part of Melville’s speculation on the fluctuations in one’s life, he could just as easily be referring to the “temporary” status of these visions of the nation’s progress.

While Melville’s larger western imaginary, his frontier images and legends such as the White Steed and Daniel Boone, function as referential points for negotiating the problematics of territorialization, he nonetheless engages with a contemporaneous west coast in *Moby-Dick* and the relationship of that region to the agitations of imperialism playing out in the Western Ocean. Melville well knew, for example, that even as whalers sailed out of Nantucket and New Bedford, other ships were sailing into ports along the West coast as part of the mass migration of Anglo-Americans and other fortune seekers to California following the discovery of gold at Sutter’s Mill in 1848. Like the men hovering at the edges of Manhattan, pulled from their drudgery by visions of riches and adventure, migrants travelled overland or around the Cape in hopes of finding the same in the gold mines of the Far West.⁸⁷ A global phenomenon, the “gold fever” that Melville mentions in “Mr. Parkman’s Tour” and critiques in *Mardi*, was but one aspect of a west that was on the minds of many Americans and anything but worn out.⁸⁸

It is this west, and the vast whaling grounds beyond it, that infuse Ishmael's rapt meditation on the "serene" Pacific, one where the same waves that wash against the shores of California, also flow against those of the Pacific islands, Asia, and the "impenetrable Japans" (*MD* 367).⁸⁹ For critics such as poet-scholar Charles Olson, Melville's short chapter "The Pacific" is constitutive of his wholesale endorsement of the great national press outward into those "eternal swells;" and that, without qualification on Olson's part, "America completes her West only on the coast of Asia" (*MD* 367).⁹⁰ Rob Wilson, also citing what he calls Melville's narration of "American expansion Westward (across the vast Pacific)," finds Melville's "pro-imperialist tone" to be "ominous."⁹¹

Yet, from the opening line, Ishmael's desire to revel in the dreams of his youth in the seemingly benign "wide-rolling watery prairies," is already forestalled by "other things," including the intensification of Ahab's mad revenge (*MD* 367). The reader learns, too, that the gentle "sea-pastures" are a vast graveyard, the "Potters' Fields of all four continents" (*MD* 367). More pointedly, however, in drawing the maritime and the terrestrial spheres together, Melville registers his ambivalence towards the implications of these "midmost waters of the world" for the nation's future. While the ocean "zones the worlds whole bulk about," it also "makes all coasts one bay to it," including the western continental one.

This truncated geophysical representation reflects the promises and perils of expansion—that is, a sense of global interconnectedness and easier access to foreign markets on the one hand, and opportunities for an aggressive imperialism on the other. While this ambivalence, marked throughout *Moby-Dick*, exemplifies what Hsu refers to as a kind of "cosmopolitan despair," that is the inability to balance these contradictory or conflicting outcomes in relation to "US influence abroad," Melville nevertheless reflects that ambivalence back on to the nation's coastal margins

and the piers of “the new-built Californian towns, but yesterday planted by the recentest race of men.”⁹²

Moby-Dick not only registers Melville’s concerns about the nation’s geophysical expansion, but also about the potential for the nation to lose itself in that process, trepidations perhaps most poignantly expressed in his representation of the ocean itself: “No mercy, no power but its own controls it. Panting and snorting like a mad battle steed that has lost its rider, the masterless ocean overruns the globe” (*MD* 224). This sense of a loss of control is similarly expressed in the chapter “The Grand Armanda.” The whales who initially form “close ranks and battalions” against the onslaught of *The Pequod*, suddenly become “gallied,” that is, they exhibit a state of “inert irresolution,” with some whales “aimlessly swimming” in their panic; others “completely paralyzed” in their dismay (*MD* 300). Comparing the whale’s timidity first to other “herding creatures”—to a band of “tens of thousands” of “buffaloes of the West,” who break into a chaotic frenzy by the mere presence of a “solitary horsemen”—Melville then carries the analogy to humans, who “at the slightest alarm of fire, rush helter-skelter for the outlets, crowding, trampling, jamming, and remorselessly dashing each other to death” (*MD* 300). Lest the reader find the whale’s behavior strange, Melville reminds them that nothing can outdo “the madness of men” (*MD* 300).

Melville’s description here of what precipitates that “madness” is clear to any reader. Yet, with language reminiscent of the “rending, goring bison herds,” which may well be “trampling into dust” the deserted foal on the prairies of the Oregon Territory, or to the calm instruction of Ishmael’s that, regarding whale sightings, “you must kill all you can” or barring that “wing them, so that they can be afterwards killed at your leisure,” Melville’s litany of panic-induced violence is also suggestive of a breakdown of morality or perhaps of the “democratic

dignity” which Ishmael finds radiating from the crew of *The Pequod* (MD 103, 164, 301). But the whale’s stunned timidity and “inert irresolution” also alludes to a different concern, namely, the fear of a national paralysis of thought in relation to resolving the volatile issues of the day, a great many of which were the direct result of an expansive territorialization.

Through his early western imaginary, Melville works to find a way to circumvent events playing out in the contemporaneous world, such as mounting tensions surrounding the issue of slavery or the rise of nativism and xenophobia, which contributed to a sense that the nation’s moral character and democratic principles were crumbling. That is, the west of hunters and trappers could be fantasized as a static, yet formative space for democratic ideals—a space beyond “the depredations of man,” which were increasingly evident in the America(s) of the 1840’s and 1850’s.⁹³ In the maritime world, Melville also gestures towards the possibility of escape from the many disparities underpinning the nation’s imperialist agendas.

As *Moby-Dick* makes clear, however, the fantasies drawn from an archaic or romanticized West normalized and popularized narratives of American exceptionalism that served to both marginalize and abandon national and global populations. Similarly, the Jacksonian-era rhetoric that expansion was the means to extend the reach of democracy, a concept which appealed to Melville in theory, is found wanting in practice in *Moby-Dick*. As many Americans witnessed, the Mexican-American war and ongoing filibustering attempts made it clear that the line between opportunities and opportunistic was a thin one, and that to ‘rescue’ the oppressed was most often a disingenuous justification for the acquisition of more territory.

Since the 1960s and Alan Heimert’s scholarship on Melville’s political symbolism, even when parallels have continued to be drawn between contemporaneous events or persona that impacted both the continental west and maritime realms—such as between Polk and the

Mexican-American War and Ahab and his imperialist quest—these political analogies are rarely viewed against Melville’s ambivalent expressions of an imagined west, one that is contiguous, rather than just analogous to, the oceanic sphere.⁹⁴ At the same time, when Melville’s western references are specifically addressed, they are often just catalogued as evidentiary examples. While insightful and important scholarship, this work often misses how Melville’s engagement with the west not only participates in drawing parallels or framing events in the global, maritime sphere as a recursive expression of expansionist ideologies and agendas, but that any such correlations are inherently unstable. In *Moby-Dick*, Melville’s own sense of the west as a potential ideological and moral safe-haven from the problematics of territorialization is rendered untenable, while his attempts to pull the supposed freedoms of the frontier west into his maritime world, are found to be equally conflicted.

For Melville, as with all the other authors in this study, the mobile space of the geophysical and conceptualized West represents the source of both anxiety and opportunity. In *The Prairie*, Cooper projects a national imaginary that taps into a vision of transcontinental expansion, one made possible in part through the Louisiana purchase and subsequent cessions in Florida. When faced with the dispersion of borderlands populations, however, with what in *Notions of the Americans* he describes as a “tide of emigration, which has so long been flowing westward” and as such “must have its reflux,” he narratively effects that reversal with his fictional characters.⁹⁵ For Parkman, it is a privileged mobility that allows for a western adventure in search of a “primitive” past, but it is a tour that becomes literally and ideologically disrupted by the movements of emigrants and of “American wandering” in the present.

In her travels into Mexico, mobility grants Magoffin a certain gender freedom, yet also positions her within an environment marked by the long-standing settlement of Mexican and

Puebloan populations, a reality that problematizes conceptions of national borders and of what constitutes the domestic and the foreign, an ambiguity which is rendered more explicitly than in Cooper or Parkman's texts. For Melville, narratives of mobility and space that undergird principles of liberty in a democratic society become the means for an aggressive and duplicitous imperialism.

At the same time, from Jefferson's massive purchase onwards, the West was imagined as a space for solving the presence of nonwhites. The Great Plains would solve the "Indian problem." The Mexican-American war would hopefully find those populations vanishing as well. As Thomas R. Hietala notes, expansionists viewed Texas as a potential outlet for their country's unwanted black population" by shifting slavery farther away.⁹⁶ The processes of territorialization and incorporation, however, only exacerbated those problems. The western imaginaries fashioned by or tapped into by the authors discussed here, not only reflect their own anxious negotiations with internal emigration, but with the reality that the incorporation of foreign populations into national space, cannot be divorced from conceptions in the cultural imaginary of an American West.

Notes

¹ Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*, ed. Harrison Hayford and Hershel Parker (New York: Norton, 2002), hereafter cited in text as *MD*, unless otherwise noted.

² Hsuan L. Hsu, *Geography and the Production of Space in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 131.

³ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁴ Edwin Fussell, *Frontier: American Literature and the American West* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1965), 258.

⁵ Elizabeth Schultz suggests that Melville's "images of the prairie are metaphorical, concerned to illuminate land-based readers' lack of understanding the sea" (32). "Sea of Grass" to "Wire and Rail": Melville's Evolving Perspective on the Prairies," *American Studies* 52, no. 1 (2012): 30-47.

⁶ In 1851, the U.S. Congress passed the Indian Appropriations Act, officially creating the reservation system.

⁷ For Stephanie LeMenager, Melville's novel "declares the West [as] essentially 'over' in 1851," with the ocean as a "bigger, better sequel to the tired Far West." *Manifest and Other Destinies: Territorial Fictions of the Nineteenth-Century United States* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 109, 112.

⁸ Mark Niemeyer, "Manifest Destiny and Melville's *Moby-Dick*; or, Enlightenment Universalism and Aggressive Nineteenth-Century Expansionism in a National Text," *Q/W/E/R/T/Y: arts, literatures & civilisations du monde Anglophone* 9 (October 1999): 303.

⁹ Donald E. Pease, "New Perspectives on U.S. Culture and Imperialism," in *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, eds. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 21.

¹⁰ Though a prominent and important aspect of much of this critical work, it is not my intention here to cite the extensive debates within this scholarship as to Melville's endorsement or critique of American imperialism.

¹¹ See Alan Heimert's seminal "*Moby-Dick* and American Political Symbolism," *American Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (Winter, 1963): 498-534, and Andrew Lawson, "*Moby-Dick* and the American Empire," *Comparative American Studies* 10, no. 1 (March 2012): 45-62. On Melville and politics, see also James Duban, *Melville's Major Fiction: Politics, Theology, and Imagination* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1983); Michael Paul Rogin, *Subversive Genealogy: the Politics and Art of Herman Melville* (New York: Knopf, 1983); and *A Political Companion to Herman Melville*, ed. Jason Frank (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2013).

¹² Anne Baker, *Heartless Immensity: Literature, Culture, and Geography in Antebellum America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 116.

¹³ J.A. Ward, "The Function of the Cetological Chapters in *Moby-Dick*," *American Literature* 28, no. 2 (May 1956): 168; Ann Baker, *Heartless Immensity*, 30; Andrew Delbanco, *Melville: His World and Work* (New York: Vintage, 2006), 157; David Ketterer, "The Time-Break Structure of *Moby-Dick*," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 19 (1988): 301. Lori N. Howard suggests that Melville's "breakouts" may "signal Melville's need to build some 'sea room' into the narrative" either to help overcome writer's block or to "perhaps give himself or the reader enough space in which to process the truth of the tale" (33). "Ungainly Gambols' and Circumnavigating the Truth: Breaking the Narrative of *Moby-Dick*," in *Ungraspable Phantom: Essays on Moby-Dick*, eds. John Bryant, Mary K. Bercaw Edwards, and Timothy Marr (Kent, Ohio: UP Kent State, 2006): 25-36.

¹⁴ Heimert, "American Political Symbolism," 498, 527.

¹⁵ Fussell, *Frontier*, 232.

¹⁶ Jack Scherting, "Tracking the *Pequod* along the Oregon Trail: The Influence of Parkman's Narrative on Imagery and Characters in *Moby-Dick*," *Western American Literature* 22 (1987): 5.

¹⁷ G. Thomas Tanselle, "Herman Melville's Visit to Galena in 1840," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 53, no. 4 (Winter, 1960): 377. For more on Galena as boomtown

and impact of the Panic of 1837 on, see especially pp. 377-8. Thomas Melvill's move to Galena and subsequent jobs and financial problems are covered throughout Tanselle's article.

¹⁸ For more on Melville's trip and on Galena, Illinois see Delbanco, *Melville*, 32-36; Herschel Parker, *Herman Melville: A Biography (1819-1851)* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 1:167-179; John W. Nichol, "Melville and the Midwest," *PMLA* 66, no. 5 (Sept., 1951): 613-625; Laurie Robertson-Lorant, "A Traveling Life," in *A Companion to Herman Melville*, ed. Wyn Kelley (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 3-18; and CityofGalena.org. For an overview of the Chicago-Galena coach Melville and Fly probably took and the average time for the trip, see David Young, "Wild West Chicago: With Little Comfort and Speed, Stagecoaches Deliver Mail, People," *The Chicago Tribune Archives*, Oct. 26, 1997, 435, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1997-10-26-9710260131-story.html>.

¹⁹ Less obvious are what impressions the trip might have had beyond those of a money-strapped tourist. Most scholarship on Melville's trip does little more than locate and catalog the "scattered fragments" found in various texts that point to definite or plausible first-hand experience. Delbanco, *Melville*, 35. More speculatively, Herschel Parker accesses travel accounts written close to the time that Melville travelled, to project what he and Fly would have seen and experienced on the canal, and in Buffalo and Detroit, suggesting that in the frontier spaces he traveled through, "Melville witnessed, and began to brood upon, the process by which whites were suppressing or even extirpating people of another race." *Herman Melville, A Biography*, 1:178.

²⁰ Melville's sources themselves have, of course, spawned their own ambitious form of scholarship, perhaps most notably, Merton M. Sealts, Jr., *Melville's Reading: a check-list of books owned and borrowed* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1988); Mary K. Bercaw's, *Melville's Sources* (Evanston, ILL: Northwestern University Press, 1987); and Robert L. Gale's, *A Herman Melville Encyclopedia* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1995).

²¹ Ann Baker, *Heartless Immensity*, 185. For Edwin Fussell it is Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast* (1840) that Melville "felt tied and welded to." As both a "story of life upon the ocean and a story of life in the wilderness," Fussell argues that Dana's "first great emigrants' guide for young men...going to California by sea instead of overland," was the primary text for enabling Melville to realize his West/Ocean motif. *Frontier*, 232.

²² Francis Parkman, *The Oregon Trail, The Conspiracy of Pontiac*, Notes, William R. Taylor (New York: Library of America), 242.

²³ Herman Melville, "Mr. Parkman's Tour," in *The Writings of Herman Melville: The Piazza Tales and Other Prose Pieces 1839-1860*, eds. Harrison Hayford, Alma A. MacDougall, G. Thomas Tanselle, et al. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press and The Newberry Library, 1987), 231. Having later felt the sting of criticism towards his own work, Melville expressed his regret for having attacked Parkman in a letter to Evert A. Duyckinck. Melville to Duyckinck, London, December 14, 1849, *The Letters of Herman Melville*, ed. Merrell R. Davis and William H. Gilman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), 95.

²⁴ Melville, "Mr. Parkman's Tour," 231.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 232.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 233.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 234.

²⁹ Ibid., Parkman excerpt pp. 641-644. For more on the influence of Parkman's *Oregon Trail* on *Moby-Dick*, see Nicholas Lawrence, "Appealing to the Sensible: 'Mr. Parkman's Tour,' Gold Fever, and Melville's Ambivalent Westward Approach," *The Melville Society and Johns Hopkins University Press* 19, no.1 (2017): 66-84; Thomas Altherr, "Drunk with the Chase": The Influence of Francis Parkman's *The California and Oregon Trail* upon Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick, or the Whale*," *Journal of American Studies Association of Texas* 21 (1990): 1-14; and Jack Scherting, "Tracking the *Pequod*."

³⁰ Melville, "Mr. Parkman's Tour," 232, 233. Both Parkman and Melville offered up their indebtedness to Cooper after his death. In Parkman's eulogy of Cooper, he writes that: "of all American writers Cooper is the most original, the most thoroughly national." Apart from this not unexpected tribute, Parkman drives home the point that Cooper's fiction becomes reality in the public's mind. *North American Review* 74, no. 104 (January 1852): 147-161. Melville's feeling for Cooper was similar. Cooper died on September 14, 1851, exactly two months before the American publication date of *Moby-Dick*. In December of that year, in a letter to Rufus Wilmot Griswold, Melville offered his apologies for being unable to attend a memorial to Cooper in New York City. Flush from his recent publication, Melville's letter expresses his debt to Cooper and perhaps his own hopes for leaving a similar literary legacy:

But I rejoice that there will not be wanting many better, tho' not more zealous, men than myself, to unite on that occasion, in doing honor to a memory so very dear, not only to American Literature, but to the American Nation... I never had the honor of knowing, or even seeing, Mr. Cooper personally; so that, through my past ignorance of his person, the man, though dead, is still living to me as ever. And this is very much; for his works are among the earliest I remember, as in my boyhood producing a vivid, and awakening power upon my mind. (*Letters*, 145)

³¹ Melville, "Mr. Parkman's Tour," 230, 233.

³² Fussell, *Frontier*, 257, 258. Richard Slotkin similarly argues that Melville's "epic takes the form of a colossal hunt." *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier* (Middleton: Wesleyan University Press, 1975), 529. In relation to Melville's attraction to the adventure of Parkman's *Trail*, David S. Reynolds also makes the important point that in "the excitement today over Melville's premodern themes, it is sometimes forgotten that [Melville] was a professional adventure novelist who tried hard to please American sensation lovers." *Beneath the American Renaissance: the Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville*, 1988 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 276.

³³ Herman Melville, "Hawthorne and His Mosses," in *The Writings of Herman Melville: The Piazza Tales and Other Prose Pieces 1839-1860*, eds. Harrison Hayford, Alma A. MacDougall, G. Thomas Tanselle, et al. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press and The Newberry Library, 1987), 9: 253.

³⁴ "The White Steed of the Prairies," *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review* (New York), Vol.XI1, No. LVII (1843): 367. The editors also include a poem by one J. Barber that describes a hunt for the steed, which includes the following lines:

His mane streaming forth from his beautiful form/Like the drift from a wave that has burst in the storm/Not the team of the Sun, as in fable portrayed/Through the firmament rushing in glory arrayed/ Could match, in wild majesty, beauty and speed/That tireless, magnificent, snowy-white steed/...His fields have no fence save the mountain and

sky/His drink the snow-capped Cordilleras supply/'Mid the grandeur of nature sole
monarch is he,/And his gallant heart swells with the pride of the free.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Washington Irving, *Three Western Narratives: A Tour on the Prairies, Astoria, The Adventures of Captain Bonneville* (New York: Penguin, Library of American Series, 2004), 90.

³⁷ Josiah Gregg, *The Commerce of the Prairies*, ed. Max L. Moorhead, forward Marc Simmons (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954), 366.

³⁸ Melville lampoons Taylor in his anonymously written "Authentic Anecdotes of Old Zach," which appeared in seven installments in the short-lived *Yankee Doodle*, July 24-Sept 11, 1847. In relation to the phrase "westward trooped it like that chosen star," while Parker and Hayford note that Melville is referring here to the planet, Venus, it is a mixed metaphor, as he may also be alluding to Bishop George Berkeley's well-known "Verses on the Prospect of Planting Arts and Learning in America" (1726) and the line "westward the course of empire goes." Appropriated later by Emanuel Leutze's for his 1861 mural "Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way," and Andrew Melrose's 1867 painting "Westward the Star of Empire Takes Its Way," among others, variations on the phrase held currency throughout antebellum and postbellum rhetoric. *Moby-Dick*, 161, f. 4.

³⁹ While for the time, it is bio-geographically accurate that bison herds were massed on the eastern plains of Oregon, for the majority of Americans, their experiences of the animal and environment were located in the fictive west of James Fenimore Cooper, travel narratives of Washington Irving and Francis Parkman, and expedition reports of Zebulon Pike and Stephen Long, as examples.

⁴⁰ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "indifference" *obsolete*, www.oed.com.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu.

⁴¹ While Richard Slotkin fruitfully suggests that what *Moby-Dick* "provides is a prophetic extrapolation of future history from the evidence of motivation and purpose inherent in national myths," he does not elaborate on what that might be. *Regeneration Through Violence*, 550. Given his reading as a whole, one possibility is that he may be referring to an endless cycle of hunting, one that of course ends badly for *The Pequod*. I argue that Melville was very attuned to how those same myths affect the present, not just the future, and that he negotiates that reality in his novel.

⁴² Robert E. Belknap, *The List: The Uses and Pleasures of Cataloguing*, (New Haven: Yale UP, 2005), 157.

⁴³ Jason Frank, "Introduction: American Tragedy: The Political Thought of Herman Melville," in *A Political Companion to Herman Melville*, ed. Jason Frank (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2013): 4.

⁴⁴ Fussell, *Frontier*, 247.

⁴⁵ Hsu, *Geography*, 134. I am indebted here to Stephanie LeMenager for her provocative suggestion that "*Moby-Dick* locates its hope, inasmuch as the book has hope, in the assumption that some territories, perhaps Mexico or the more nebulous "world," will remain elusive of U.S. dominance." *Manifest and Other Destinies*, 109.

⁴⁶ In 1851, this was a reasonably accurate statement. While the most devastating of the buffalo hunts would occur between 1870 and 1880, "by most accounts the bison had disappeared from Illinois by the 1820s due to hunting pressure." "Prairies in the Prairie State: Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie," online exhibit, Illinois State Museum, 5 May 2008 <museum.state.il.us/exhibits/midewin/bison02.html>. The exhibit text also notes, "[Ted

Franklin] Belue (1996) wrote that the last reported bison kill in Illinois took place in 1808.” Here Melville also reveals a West more reminiscent of his 1840 trip.

⁴⁷ Andy Doolen, *Territories of Empire: U.S. Writing from the Louisiana Purchase to Mexican Independence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 155.

⁴⁸ Andrew Jackson quoted in Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 703.

⁴⁹ The government, as well, continued to press for a larger global presence. Besides setting sights on Cuba and Latin America, the acquisition of California fostered the desire for increased maritime expansion and control. In signing the 1849 Treaty of Friendship, Commerce and Navigation with Hawaii, President Fillmore, rushed to stay one step ahead of European powers on both diplomatic, military/strategic, and commercial fronts, while perhaps hoping for the eventual acquisition of that nation for the United States.

⁵⁰ Rodrigo Lazo, “The Ends of Enchantment: Douglass, Melville, and U.S. Expansionism in the Americas,” in *Frederick Douglass and Herman Melville: Essays in Relation*, ed. Robert S. Levine and Samuel Otter (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 212.

⁵¹ See Robert E. May, *Manifest Destiny’s Underworld: Filibustering in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), pp. 29-32 and 137-138. See also Tom Chaffin, “Sons of Washington”: Narciso López, Filibustering, and U.S. Nationalism, 1848-1851,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 15, no.1 (Spring 1995): 79-108. For an account of Narciso López, the expeditions, and the reaction of Cuban poets and newspaper editors in New Orleans to López’s campaign and his execution, see Kirsten Silva Gruesz, *Ambassadors of Culture: The Transamerican Origins of Latino Writing* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002): 108-160.

⁵² In the same September 18, 1851 *New York Daily Times*, a short article on page two covered a rumor coming out of New Orleans of a planned expedition to “dismember[d]” three Mexican provinces south of the post-U.S.-Mexican War boundary line; a “Mexican foray” the editors decry as “only one more of those chronic diseases bequeathed us by the Mexican affair.”

⁵³ May, *Manifest Destiny’s Underworld*, 35-38. I would add that while William Walker’s filibustering was also widely known, his expeditions to Sonora and Baja Mexico (1853) and ‘conquest’ of Nicaragua (1855-6), post-date *Moby-Dick*.

⁵⁴ Millard Fillmore, “Second Annual Message, December 2, 1851,” Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia, <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/december-2-1851-second-annual-message>.

⁵⁵ *The Pittsfield Sun* (Pittsfield, MA) offered ongoing news of and opinion on the expeditions. As with other periodicals, the *Sun* recorded the often conflicting (and exaggerated) reports of López’s failure or success: “Spanish accounts state that Gen. López was surrounded by 4,000 of the government forces, while on the contrary it is affirmed that he is joined by large numbers and has advanced to Mariel, only 30 miles from Havana.” *Postscript*, 4 Sept, 1851: 3. The deaths of American’s such Col. Crittenden and Capt. Kerr aroused anger toward the Spanish, while prompting reports that the government “will employ all means at their command, to check and break up any armed and illegal expeditions... It being the fixed determination of government to maintain its treaties of obligations and enforce the laws of the land.” “The Cuba Affair at Washington,” 28 Aug. 1851: 2. Yet, while one article also maintained that a success by López would raise “international questions,” and “require the wisdom of the wisest, and the firmest assertions of American principles,” the writers also project U.S. imperialist desires for the island:

“It’s [Havana’s] commercial [and, hence, military] importance can hardly be overestimated... It is not only the most important city of South America, but is the key of the West Indies, and by no nation is its position half so important as it is to the U. States.” Rpt. from the Boston Post: “Cuba Freedom,” 9 Sept. 1851:1.

⁵⁶ May, *Manifest Destiny’s Underworld*, 2.

⁵⁷ LeMenager, *Manifest Destinies*, 116; Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 706.

⁵⁸ Fussell, *Frontier*, 24.

⁵⁹ Hsu, *Geography*, 153.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁶¹ Renato Rosaldo, *Culture & Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*, 1989, Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1993, Chapter 3 (“Imperialist Nostalgia”), esp. pp. 68-74.

⁶² Eric Kaufmann, “Naturalizing the Nation’: The Rise of Naturalistic Nationalism in the United States and Canada,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 40, no. 4 (October, 1998): 673.

⁶³ Martin Brückner, *The Geographic Revolution in Early America: Maps, Literacy, and National Identity* (Chapel Hill: UP North Carolina, 2006), 237.

⁶⁴ John Filson, *The Discovery, Settlement and Present State of Kentucke* (Wilmington, DE: James Adams, 1784).

⁶⁵ Daniel J. Herman, “The Other Daniel Boone: The Nascence of a Middle-Class Hunter Hero, 1784-1860,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 18, no. 3 (Autumn, 1998): 432.

⁶⁶ John Mack Faragher, *Daniel Boone: The Life and Legend of an American Pioneer* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1992), 430.

⁶⁷ Timothy Flint, *Biographical Memoir of Daniel Boone: The First Settler of Kentucky Interspersed with Incidents in the Early Annals of the Country*, ed. James K. Folsom (New Haven: College and University Press, 1967), 170, 171. Amusingly, Flint derides Filson’s and other “extravagant romances” about Boone, even as he writes his own, 57.

⁶⁸ Herman, “The Other Daniel Boone,” 435; Faragher, *Daniel Boone*, 309.

⁶⁹ *The Southern Patriot* (Charleston, S.C.), 26 Sept. 1845: 2.; Faragher, *Daniel Boone*, 358.

⁷⁰ Faragher, *Daniel Boone*, 321.

⁷¹ Herman, “The Other Daniel Boone,” 432.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 436.

⁷³ Faragher, *Daniel Boone*, 322.

⁷⁴ Flint, *Biographical Memoir*, 171.

⁷⁵ Herman Melville, “The Encantadas, or Enchanted Isles,” in *Great Short Works of Herman Melville*, ed. Warner Berthoff (New York: Perennial/Harper Collins, 2004): 98-150, hereafter cited as *E*.

⁷⁶ Hester Blum, *The View from the Masthead: Maritime Imagination and Antebellum Sea Narratives* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 155.

⁷⁷ Robert Morgan, *Boone: A Biography* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2007), 452.

⁷⁸ LeMenager, *Manifest Destinies*, 17.

⁷⁹ Blum, *View from the Masthead*, 134.

⁸⁰ Eric Wertheimer quoted in Hsu, *Geography and the Production of Space*, 157.

⁸¹ Hsu, *Geography*, 153.

⁸² Herman, “The Other Daniel Boone,” 432; Hsu, *Geography*, 153.

⁸³ Filson, *Discovery, Settlement*, 67.

⁸⁴ Melville, *Letters*, 145.

⁸⁵ For Boone's political leanings, see Faragher, *Daniel Boone*, 143; for Boone escaping market forces, see Herman, "The Other Daniel Boone," 436.

⁸⁶ Melville, "Mr. Parkman's Tour," 233.

⁸⁷ Malcom J. Rohrbough notes that "Within a year, the small population of California—perhaps on the order of thirteen thousand at the time of Marshall's discovery [at Sutter's Mill]—had been submerged by a foreign population eight times as large, and each successive annual immigration further inundated it" (19). It is not without some irony that, as Rohrbough notes, one of the first eastern towns the Gold Rush impacted in terms of migration was the whaling village of Sag Harbor, Long Island (21). *Days of Gold: The California Gold Rush and the American Nation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

⁸⁸ In *Mardi*, Melville's offers his strongest critique of what was playing out in the goldmines of California:

"Gold is the only poverty; of all glittering ills the direst [. . .] After the glittering spoil, by strange river-margins, and beneath impending cliffs, thousands delve in quicksands; and, sudden, sink in graves of their own making: with gold dust mingling their own ashes. Still deeper, in more solid ground, other thousands slave; and pile their earth so high, they gasp for air, and die; their comrades mounting on them, and delving still, and dying—grave piled on grave! Here, one haggard hunter murders another in his pit; and murdering, himself is murdered by a third. Shrieks and groans! cries and curses! It seems a golden Hell!"

Herman Melville, *Mardi, and a Voyage Thither*, *The Writings of Herman Melville*, ed. Harrison Hayford, Herschel Parker, G. Thomas Tanselle, et al. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press and The Newberry Library, 1970), 547.

⁸⁹ For a fascinating account of Melville, the "impenetrable Japans," and Melville's contemporary, the Japanese sailor John Manjiro, see Christopher Benfey, "Herman Melville and John Manjiro: Toward a wave theory of the Pacific," *Common-Place* 5, no. 2 (2005), common-place.org. Interestingly, Manjiro ended up in California in 1849 to join the '49ers, where he "amassed enough gold" to make it to Honolulu and then back to Japan.

⁹⁰ Charles Olson, *Call me Ishmael* (New York: Grove Press, 1947), 117.

⁹¹ Rob Wilson, *Reimagining the American Pacific: From 'South Pacific' to Bamboo Ridge and Beyond* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 36.

⁹² Hsu, *Geography*, 130; Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 367.

⁹³ Fussell, *Frontier*, 274.

⁹⁴ See for example, Andrew Lawson, "Moby-Dick and the American Empire," *Comparative American Studies* 10, no. 1 (March 2012): 45-62. Lawson, who positions the novel in the context of the Mexican-American War, framing Polk as analogous to Ahab as the captains of the ship, however, does not mention Melville's frontier west in relation to either territorial or global expansion.

⁹⁵ James Fenimore Cooper, *Notions of the Americans Picked up by a Travelling Bachelor*, Intro. Robert E. Spiller, (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1963), 2:83.

⁹⁶ Hietala, *Manifest Design*, 11.

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