

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
SANTA CRUZ

**WETLAND AMERICAS: MAPPING A LITERARY HISTORY OF NEW  
ORLEANS AND LOUISIANA**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

LITERATURE  
with an emphasis in AMERICAN STUDIES

by

**Matthew E. Suazo**

June 2015

The Dissertation of Matthew E. Suazo is  
approved:

---

Professor Kirsten Silva Gruesz, chair

---

Professor Susan Gillman

---

Professor Wlad Godzich

---

Professor Eric Porter

---

Tyrus Miller  
Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

Copyright © by  
Matthew E. Suazo  
2015

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .....	iv
Acknowledgments .....	vi
Introduction: In the Spatial Turn of American Studies: Siting New Orleans in the Wetlands .....	1
Chapter One: Swamp Tropics: The Urban Nature of Lafcadio Hearn and George Washington Cable's New Orleans .....	30
Chapter Two: <i>Marais Impraticable</i> : Translating Colonial Louisiana in Chateaubriand's <i>Atala</i> .....	91
Chapter Three: Disputing American Degeneracy: New World Wetlands and the Print Culture of <i>Atala</i> 's Creole Translators .....	154
Chapter Four: Uneven Improvements: Swamplands, Slavery, and Writing Subjects in the Louisiana Narratives of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Solomon Northup, and Martin Delany .....	223
Bibliography .....	301

## **ABSTRACT**

Matthew E. Suazo

Wetland Americas: Mapping a Literary History of New Orleans and Louisiana

My dissertation begins as a response to the socio-economic and environmental crisis that followed Hurricane Katrina. Inspired by a call for “nonsovereign” histories of the storm, I view these twinned crises through a postcolonial lens and consider the category of the nation inadequate to the task of accounting for what happened in New Orleans. With firm roots in Literature, my method is informed by the hemispheric school of American Studies, which pushes the city beyond its regional confines in the U.S. South and reframes it in relation to a number of different scales: the Caribbean, the Atlantic World, Latin(a) America, the Global South. While these frames capture a fuller portion of New Orleans’s complex history, they tend to focus on the city’s vital relationship to other places, what geographers call its “situation,” and to overlook its “site,” the actual wetlands terrain it occupies. Because such approaches foreground social and economic concerns, the environment remains an abstract landscape: culture is separated from nature, and the historical connection between the two falls out of the picture. As sites of cultural contact in tension with the nation, as well as these other geopolitical scales, wetlands merge this separation and bring an ecocritical dimension to the hemispheric studies project. While tracing an ongoing entanglement of nature and culture, I argue for the historical place of wetlands in understanding the racial and economic disparity revealed in the flood caused by Katrina.

My project centers on New Orleans, but the settlement of Louisiana and the lower Mississippi River Valley offers a broader case study for mapping the diverse and overlapping literatures that shaped this history. Within these real and imagined American geographies, I examine the material and discursive practices through which swamps and other wetlands landscapes became entangled with concepts of race as part of the same colonial processes. My study begins at the end of the nineteenth century, in the New Orleans of Lafcadio Hearn and George Washington Cable. As I explore the place of environment in their works, set amid the culture clash following the Louisiana Purchase, I argue that the wetlands and the tropics, as postcolonial creole spaces, reemerge periodically to disrupt the inevitable progress of the nation. Returning to colonial Louisiana, I then trace the emergence of the wetlands as a category of knowledge through a series of encounters with *ciénagas*, swamps, and *marais*. In a network of early American texts and translations, including El Inca Garcilaso, William Bartram, and Chateaubriand, I consider how discourses of race and landscape coincided across a range of narrative forms. With attention to the structural endurance of Louisiana's plantation system and a reconsideration of the figure of the slave in the swamp, I conclude in the nineteenth-century U.S. with the works of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Solomon Northup, and Martin Delany. In the light of this long view, the post-Katrina present does not represent a rupture of the U.S. national narrative. Rather, when embedded within the life of the wetlands, marked by periodic returns to mud and water, it is a moment continuous with an uneven, hemispheric history of the Americas.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I must thank my adviser Kirsten Silva Gruesz, who has been a steadfast ally since our first telephone conversation in 2007. The members of my dissertation and exam committees have also been continuous sources of support and inspiration. I owe many thanks to Eric Porter, Susan Gillman, Wlad Godzich, and Norma Klahn for their generosity. In the humanities and beyond, the intellectual environment at UCSC created the conditions to imagine this project, and many faculty members have shaped my thinking in fundamental ways. Chris Connery, Loisa Nygaard, Jody Greene, Deanna Shemek, James Clifford, and Karen Barad deserve special recognition. More broadly, I appreciate all of my teachers and classmates, as well as all of my students and those I have taught with: there is a little bit of every one of our shared conversations in this dissertation. As an academic home, the Literature Department has provided material support in terms of numerous grants, fellowships, and teaching appointments, but has more importantly taken care of me as a member of the community. Here, I refer to past and present department chairs and graduate program directors, including Carla Freccero, Karen Bassi, and Sharon Kinoshita, as well as the department staff. I have also been fortunate to receive external funding for my project, and must acknowledge fellowships from UCSC's Institute for Humanities Research, as well as the John Carter Brown and Newberry Libraries. For making the UC and the world a better place for graduate students, I also owe a debt of gratitude to my local union, UAW 2865.

To my friends, old and new, it would be impossible to compile a list that would sufficiently convey your individual and collective support. Nevertheless, I would not be here without those I left in New Orleans, and I would not have survived without those I have met since Jarret Lofstead dropped me off in Santa Cruz. From the former, I have taken comfort in learning that we become more ourselves with every passing year, while the latter have taught me that the surprise of genuine friendship is something we never outgrow. In this last case, because of their direct contributions to my well being as I wrote the dissertation, special thanks are due to Sara Orning, Erica Smeltzer, Kendra Dority, Keegan Finberg, and the member of my writing group, Andy Hines. For their unqualified encouragement, I am truly grateful to the Suazo family—especially my MOM—now and in the past. In recent years, I have also had the pleasure of seeing that circle expand to include the Faber, Nault, Kershaw, and Umholtz families, which leads me, above all, to Rakia. I could not have done this without you.

## INTRODUCTION

### **In the Spatial Turn of American Studies: Siting New Orleans in the Wetlands**

It was left to reporters embedded in the mayhem to let Americans know that a third world country had suddenly appeared on the Gulf Coast.

— David Carr, *New York Times*, 5 September 2005

A heady confluence of the haughty European and the boisterous third-world, New Orleans is often referred to as the northernmost Caribbean city. Precious architecture stands alongside careening overloaded junk trucks, sumptuous delicacies tickle palates while offal in the streets offends the eyes.

— Lonely Planet Online, 2009

For New Orleans, Hurricane Katrina revealed a crisis rooted in longstanding socioeconomic and environmental conditions: through the lens of a local catastrophe, the United States saw one of its cities come into a sharper global focus. As these multiple scales suggest, a post-storm critical approach to the city must accommodate and cut across a number of geopolitical units of measure. Likewise, because the event's occurrence cannot be wholly bounded by human history—as hurricanes and floods belong to seasonal cycles—one must also account for these different temporalities. Reading the city from the present moment therefore requires a method attentive to layers of space and time. With these concerns in mind, this dissertation has been guided by the question of how to write literary history post-Katrina; and, given the scene in the city, how to write literary history in an age of ecological crisis. Though scholars across the disciplines have responded with care to each aspect of this

crisis, less has been said about them as postcolonial outcomes of a shared past. Disasters such as Katrina—and I would include 2010’s Deepwater Horizon oil spill—demand that researchers of Louisiana and the Mississippi Gulf Coast in all disciplines respond holistically, both in the definition of research objects and the production of new knowledge.

The question of scale, in fact Wai Chee Dimock’s call for “nonsovereign” histories of the storm, is what draws me to the wetlands as a category of analysis. Regarding the U.S. response to Katrina, Dimock observes, “The nation-state seems ‘unbundled’ by the hurricane in ways both large and small—not only as a system of defense but also as psychological insurance, political membership, and academic field” (143). Beyond the claims and failures of national sovereignty, which are her primary concerns, Dimock’s implication of a prior, bundled nation-state raises some provocative questions, especially if New Orleans is centered in the post-Katrina scene. For a city whose culture and geography has never been completely articulated to nor fully incorporated into the U.S. national body, what was tied up in this bundle? In particular, how much of New Orleans’s several colonial pasts, including its history of land use, did this bundle contain? As Dimock suggests, the answers to these questions require a history that operates both inside and outside the boundaries of time and geography that bind the nation.

Firmly rooted in the literary, and inflected by geography, environmental history, and feminist science studies, my method is primarily informed by the hemispheric school of American Studies. In volumes edited by Robert Levine and

Caroline Levander (2007), Jon Smith and Deborah Cohn (2004), scholars including Kirsten Silva Gruesz and Matthew Guterl exemplify efforts to push the literary and cultural history of New Orleans beyond its regional confines in the U.S. South and reframe it in relation to a number of different world scales: the Caribbean, the Atlantic World, Latin(a) America, the Global South. While these frames capture the city's complex history, they tend to focus on its relationship to neighboring places, what geographers call its "situation," while ignoring its "site," the actual ground it occupies: a narrow ridge in the swamp separating the Mississippi River from Lake Pontchartrain. Because such approaches foreground social and economic concerns, the environment remains a setting, an abstract landscape: culture remains separate from nature, and the historical connection between the two falls out of the picture. As sites of cultural production in tension with the nation, as well as other geopolitical formations, the wetlands bring a necessary ecological scale to the hemispheric studies project, a scale that recalls (ironically enough) one of the events that set this long history in motion: in 1682, La Salle claimed for France all the countries watered by the Mississippi and named them Louisiana.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Though my use of *wetlands*, a term not widely used until the 1960s, is anachronistic in a discussion of early and nineteenth-century New World environments, I argue that the European colonial project, as well as the Enlightenment dispute of the New World, codified enduring attitudes about the function and value of these global landscapes. I therefore orient my reading of colonial wetlands practice, the dispute, and the texts that legitimized them, towards the twentieth-century discourse of wetlands scarcity that ultimately brought the unifying term into existence. According to Section 404 of the US Clean Water Act (1972), "Wetlands are those areas that are inundated or saturated by surface or groundwater at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal circumstances do support, a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions. Wetlands generally

As the epigraphs suggest, a point of departure for this project is provided by post-storm news media invocations of a “Third World” scene in New Orleans, as well as the uneasy recuperation of the term as a descriptor for the city. In either case, to take this seemingly irreducible judgment at face value, or to examine the city through the lens offered by such superficial reactions, is to see New Orleans reduced to the racialized space offered by the two-dimensional gaze of the camera’s eye. Broadly speaking, if race (especially in its most extreme aspects) has been one of the most visible and illuminated elements of the history and discourse of New Orleans, then this dissertation brings landscape into the same light as a co-present element of the city’s history and discourse also linked to the colonial past.<sup>2</sup> Though I do not wish to draw an essentializing correspondence between race and landscape and the attitudes that structure their histories and discourses, it is necessary to interrogate their latest convergence in New Orleans.<sup>3</sup> What has been missing in most accounts is the ground

---

include swamps, marshes, bogs, and similar areas.” For an international definition, see Article 1 of the Ramsar Convention (1971): “For the purpose of this Convention wetlands are areas of marsh, fen, peatland or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six metres.” Other examples of conservation related to wetlands include the respective incorporations of The Audubon Society (1905), Ducks Unlimited (1937), The Louisiana Wildlife Federation (1940), and Save the Bay (1961).

<sup>2</sup> My definitions of the keywords *space*, *place*, and *landscape* are informed by W. J. T. Mitchell in *Landscape and Power* (2002), whose own views on the terms are shaped by Michel de Certeau, David Harvey, and Henri Lefebvre: “One might think, then, of space, place, and landscape as a dialectical triad, a conceptual structure that may be activated from several different angles. If a place is a specific location, a space is a “practiced place,” a site activated by movements, actions, narratives, and signs, and a landscape is that site encountered as image or ‘sight’” (x).

<sup>3</sup> In *Postcolonial Melancholia* (2005), Paul Gilroy marks “race” as a “discursive arrangement, the brutal result of the raciological ordering of the world, not its cause”

beneath the city—the actual wetland upon which it rests—and how it too has figured as the city’s “other,” much in the same way that the Native American and African slave and, later, its residents of African descent, as well as a range of darkly ethnic immigrants and migrants, have figured as the “others” of the Creole and Anglo-American populations. The emphasis on the conjuncture of site and situation in this case, instead of their disjuncture, accomplishes several things: it transforms, even estranges, nation-based readings of New Orleans texts; it challenges hemispheric views of the city that would supplant the U.S. South as a regional paradigm while paradoxically following its logic; and it ensures that this moment is read as part of a comparative story of the Americas as integral to the long-term ordering of the globe. In sum, I argue for the historical place of wetlands in understanding the divided racial and economic landscape made apparent in the flood that followed the hurricane.

To guard against yet another reading of New Orleans as exceptional—a discursive invention or myth-in-the-making that makes its “third-world-ness” a self-fulfilling prophecy—my approach to the documents of the city’s history is more recursive than chronological. Rather than trace the development of a particular view of the city (and the way that view is and has been reified by a historical sequence of images), I suggest that what governs many of the chosen representations of New

---

(39), one that produces “unnatural realm[s]” (41) mistaken for historical and universal truths. By establishing a countertradition of “anti-racist humanism” (37) populated by thinkers whose diasporic cosmopolitanism was rooted in (and routed by) this long raciological process, he participates in an ongoing intellectual project that refuses to react to “race” as ontology but, rather, engages with the systems of thought (bound up with nation, colony, and empire) that produced the discourse of race and continue to reproduce our understanding of it.

Orleans is a misrecognition of what constitutes the city as a place and the subsequent struggle to resolve this discrepancy. Instead of viewing the city's overdetermined post-Katrina aspect as part of an already ordered world, I arrive at a complex global, or worlded, perspective of New Orleans by returning to its emergence as part of the European, New World picture. Of specific interest is the moment when the future city first becomes an idea, and this moment is marked by the scene, or survey, that lies behind the founding of the settlement that would become New Orleans. In the words of geographer and historian Ari Kelman, "Bienville chose [the] location based on this felicitous reading of the river system, which he saw as the city's greatest asset, but his enthusiasm for the river's commercial benefits blinded him to many of the challenges of building a city in the delta. One might say he focused on New Orleans's 'situation' while ignoring the hazards of its 'site'" (5). Backing up to define these keywords, I follow Kelman's citation of geographer Peirce Lewis: *situation* "is what we commonly mean when we speak of a place with respect to neighboring places," and *site* is the "actual real estate which the city occupies" (5-6). In short, whether one foregrounds early French, Spanish, and British colonial struggles for dominance of Atlantic commerce and trade, or the nineteenth and twentieth-century consolidation of U.S. hegemony in the Americas, New Orleans's situation within these overlapping systems and their discourses has been strategic and explicitly linked to capital expansion. The city's site, though itself incredibly dynamic, is on the other hand seemingly stagnant: located in the mud, below sea level on a river delta that is part of an extensive system of wetlands, it becomes in the long material and discursive

history of New Orleans that which must be controlled, filled-in, and contained in order to exploit or capitalize on the city's situation.

Before proceeding, a brief return to New Orleans in the mid-nineteenth century, when cotton was king, serves as a useful marker for the apparently shocking return of racialized space in the city post-Katrina. In 1842, the English abolitionist J. S. Buckingham published *The Slave States of America*, a travelogue of his journey through the U.S. South that included a stop in New Orleans and a visit to the city's original dome in the St. Louis Hotel. For my purposes, the frontispiece of the book, an illustration titled "Sale of Estates, Pictures and Slaves in the Rotunda, New Orleans" provides, along with Buckingham's description of the auction, an already definitive and comprehensive image of the city from the point of view of its situation:

The entrance into the Exchange at the St. Louis, is through a handsome vestibule, or hall, of 127 feet by 40, which leads to the Rotunda. This is crowned by a beautiful and lofty dome, with finely ornamented ceiling in the interior, and a variegated marble pavement. In the outer hall, the meetings of the merchants take place in 'Change hours; and in the Rotunda, pictures are exhibited, and auctions are held for every description of goods. At the time of our visit, there were half a dozen auctioneers, each endeavouring to drown every voice but his own, and all straining their lungs, and distorting their countenances in a hideous manner. One was selling pictures, and dwelling on their merits; another was disposing of ground-lots in embryo cities, and expatiating on their capacities; and another was disposing of some slaves. These consisted of an unhappy negro family, who were all exposed to the hammer at the same time. Their good qualities were enumerated in English and in French, and their persons were carefully examined by intending purchasers, among whom they were ultimately disposed of, chiefly to Creole buyers; the husband at 750 dollars, the wife at 550, and the children at 220 each. The middle of the Rotunda was filled with casks, boxes, bales, and crates; and the negroes exposed for sale were put to stand on these, to be the better seen by persons attending the sale. (335-6)

Reading these moments chronologically, the scene in and around the Superdome seems an uncanny return of the plantation past captured in the 1842 illustration; however, if the illustration is encountered for the first time after Katrina, then it provides a strange reversal: the false order of the “painful scene” witnessed by Buckingham, that of people put on the slave market, haunts through its negation of the chaos witnessed in New Orleans in 2005. If the more recent image represents a radical collapse of the logic of the city’s situation into the reality of its site, then the other is just as radical in its denial of site to rationalize the city’s situation. Put another way, even though Buckingham is critical of the sale of African slaves as a function of the city’s situation, his eye takes mostly for granted the commerce in land and painted landscapes upon which the former uneasily rests.<sup>4</sup>

The immediate reactions to the post-hurricane scene in New Orleans suggest that little has changed about this one-sided view of the city. At least in popular media accounts, the city ceased to make sense in a U.S. context, ceased to be recognizable as part of the national body. Instead, in an attempt to rationalize this scene, analogies to Haiti and equations to the Third World dislocated New Orleans into the Caribbean and into underdeveloped portions of the globe. Against the backdrop of an unevenly

---

<sup>4</sup> In order to thicken Buckingham’s view of this scene, other contemporary texts also resistant to the logics of the city’s situation will be discussed. Solomon Northup’s *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853) offers a glimpse inside the brutal situation of New Orleans, as his sale in the city roughly coincides with Buckingham’s visit. In *Leaves of Grass* (1855), Walt Whitman, whose depiction of slaves at auction in “I sing the body electric” was inspired by the scene in New Orleans around 1848, mediates the views of Buckingham and Northup: he offers a different kind of resistance to the city’s specifically American situation, neither completely inside nor outside, by incorporating the African slave into his vision of an alternative national body.

inundated infrastructure, as the floodwaters rose and fell in the days immediately following the hurricane, to view the ruined city and its remaining citizens, mostly poor and mostly black, as “Third World” was again to allow the situation that produced the city, albeit its darker side, to dominate one’s view of New Orleans: it was a superficial and reductive response to a long history of stratification along class and racial lines, yet it only became publicly apparent when it became clear who occupied low and high ground in this landscape. The scholarly community responded, in part, by linking the misrecognition of New Orleans from the U.S. point of view—willful or not—to a larger process of disavowal, an integral part of modernity that allows the progress of empires, nations, and regional capital production to run apace while grinding vast swaths of populace and resources underfoot.<sup>5</sup> While agreeing with

---

<sup>5</sup> I am not alone in taking up the question of the “Third World” as a provocation to rethink the city. Analysis of the post-Katrina scene in New Orleans soon spilled over from the mainstream media and onto the pages of two of the United States’s leading journals of literary study: *American Literary History* and *American Literature*. Both were special issues published in 2006, respectively entitled “Hemispheric Literary History” and “Global Contexts, Local Literatures: The New Southern Studies.” In these issues, each journal calls for a rethinking of (national and regional) U.S. literature’s place in hemispheric and global contexts, and articles in each offer New Orleans a pivotal role in their projects. In *ALH*, Kirsten Silva Gruesz rearticulates the city’s historical and geographical orientation in a Gulf of Mexico system that recognizes its enduring transnational “Latinness,” and in *AL*, Keith Cartwright takes seriously Zora Neale Hurston’s initiation as “Rain-Bringer” in a New Orleans Voodoo ceremony, and presents a reading of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* that places the author in a diasporic tradition of “Afro-Atlantic” and “circum-Caribbean” oracular performance. While the essays were undoubtedly in process prior to August 2005, the hurricane and its aftermath lent them a renewed salience, and both authors offer a critique of the ‘Third World’ figure as a means of locating New Orleans after the storm. In Gruesz’s words, “As [Richard] Rodriguez suggests in my epigraph, the markers of the ‘Third World’ were always available to be seen in New Orleans [...]. If we adopt Sybille Fisher’s provocative thesis that Haiti represents all that must be disavowed by Euro-American plantation society and its modern avatars, then the

this interpretation, I interrogate the process behind this disavowal and question the public's willingness to confront this event as spectacle, as an uncanny inversion of a picturesque city, and not on its own terms as a material historical event taking place, in time, right before its eyes. The city that week was no more and no less "Third World" than the week before, so why did it take a shocking reassertion of New Orleans's site to force recognition of what was already apparent? Put another way, how did the city's historically overlooked site provide the ground that allowed the hurricane and subsequent flood to catalyze an intensified split between the Third World and implied First World aspects of New Orleans's situation? With the example of Buckingham, I suggest that the critique of New Orleans's situation through the lens of racial difference was not only present in the city at the height of its run as a center of Atlantic world commerce, but that this critique already shared many of the valences and ambiguities that it does at the present moment. Over time, I fear that New Orleans has become naturalized as a racialized space, and one that provides, not just from a media perspective but also from an American Studies perspective, the only relevant ground for critique.

---

evocation of a suddenly visible 'Haitianness' in the streets around the Superdome served to disavow the structural necessity of third-world spaces to provide cheap labor and goods for the first" (471). And, according to Cartwright, "Among the most persistent remarks by reporters were statements concerning the shock of 'Third World' devastation in a New Orleans turned to 'vile stew' as scenes of beleaguered and abandoned black masses seemed to the nation more 'naturally' set in Port-au-Prince than in the United States" (745). For both authors, I would argue, the representations of the city generated by the mass media's superficial comparisons to Haiti or the Third World only serve to abstract—dehistoricize and delocalize—its already visible and longstanding local realities.

Race alone, however, does not offer a satisfactory reading for the “Third World” bubble placed around New Orleans after the storm. If, in the flood that followed, the city’s site returned with such a vengeance that it for a moment wiped out New Orleans as a place, and delivered instead a state of emergency that was preconditioned—both in its production and in its reception—by the racializing legacies of the city’s situation, then site provides a potent material and discursive counterpoint to the ebb and flow of political and economic activity that has marked the city’s history. While I do not discount the significance of the post-Katrina scene for U.S. history, or world history and cultural study more broadly, instead of panicking at the view the city as a re-emergent racialized space, what this dissertation accomplishes is a re-articulation of New Orleans as place, but one that takes into account how this place was produced by a longer and more subtle history of the interplay of site and situation. Not only is new attention to *site* in New Orleans scholarship a necessary response to its material reassertion after Katrina, but also continued attention to more complex versions of New Orleans’s *situation*—versions that continue to challenge the reduction of that situation in the U.S. context to a divide between black and white. Working from a post-Katrina perspective, this dissertation therefore reframes New Orleans as a location shaped by the long-term interplay of its site and situation. I argue that United States-based literary and cultural scholarship, even in its current transnational or hemispheric guises, has overlooked the city’s wetlands site as a category for reading New Orleans, while the city’s situation—mapped first by immediate access to waterways and, second, by the

centuries of commercial and cultural penetration into the Americas that followed—has been the default category for such scholarship.

From a disciplinary point of view, then, my project is informed by the spatial turn in American Studies. Since the city's founding, New Orleans has figured as a contested place and space in the New World, and the same could be said about how it has figured in the study of the Americas. As a place that exists as much on the map as it does in the mind, New Orleans has belonged to any number of hemispheric or regional imaginaries; yet, thinking critically about the city's location in these imaginaries, even in a resistant mode, must do more than add, rename, or reveal overlooked categories. If the shaping of a distinct New Orleans literature has been overdetermined by an exceptionalizing view of the city within the already exceptional U.S. and U.S. South categories, then any critique of those categories and the interests that shape them must be wary not to simply shift scales. While sharing an awareness of the hazards and pitfalls embedded in these moves, especially when writing in and from the U.S., my particular concern is that these reconfigurations do not simply become new ways to extract cultural capital. When breaking New Orleans and its literature free from these categories, and placing it in broader, more historicizing, and comparative categories such as the Atlantic world or an expanded Caribbean, it is necessary to consider whether or not such moves too easily follow the imperatives of the city's historical situation. In this regard, I take Chris Connery's comments on David Harvey's concept of the "spatial fix" as a caution against enriching scholarship by depending on critical regionalisms that too easily follow the expansion logics of

capital.<sup>6</sup> Though New Orleans does not belong to the Pacific Rim that is the object of Connery's reference, the city has historically been caught in a number of "fixes" of its own and on any number of scales. If New Orleans, especially post-Katrina, and the Americas more broadly continue to be the focus of comparative work inspired by the spatial turn, then dis-locating the city and its representations from such "spatial fixes" and into alternate geographies, if only momentarily, is one to contend with a world map long ordered by the gaze of capital and the (neo) imperial eye.

To relate Kelman's observation to current regional or hemispheric models in American Studies, I wonder if the emphasis lies too much on routes—systems, flows, circuits—and not enough on roots, on staying put. Even if U.S. scholarship removes its blinders to gaze more broadly upon the hemisphere, I cannot help but wonder if its vision of New Orleans likewise comes filtered through Bienville's anticipatory eye and likewise neglects the ground that supports this re-vision. Alongside these routes, there is another model of movement, a local dynamism within these systems that has made New Orleans: that of re-containment and escape. Instead of focusing on the overlapping systems that lay claim to New Orleans, which one should be given precedence, and the sediment each has left behind, is it possible to move the city into a critical space that encompasses—but exceeds—its place in a multiplicity of simultaneous national and transnational, regional and hemispheric configurations? Though it seems paradoxical, I contend that such a move is possible if this global

---

<sup>6</sup> See "The Oceanic Feeling and the Regional Imaginary," *Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary* (1996).

perspective is generated by a radical return to site as an under-unexamined aspect of the local. Because there is something fundamentally untenable about the city's site, something that cannot be completely contained in space and over time, it is worth considering how that untenability has figured in the history and representation of New Orleans. At the present moment, bringing site back into play alongside situation as a lens for viewing this long history of the city, opens a view that also troubles the binary ordering of the world or globe along First/Third or North/South lines. It also marks the city's place in the more complex local and global patterns of uneven development produced by the interplay of these various configurations over time.<sup>7</sup>

Unlike its situation in respect to historical circuits of culture and capital, New Orleans's site in the wetlands does not allow for easy emplotments of the city into a history that carries its colonial heritage into a U.S. national future. Instead, the city's site, as colonized material space, carries a postcoloniality that re-emerges according to its own temporality (at different moments and to different degrees) to disrupt the emergence of that seemingly inevitable future. As Smith and Cohn have argued, the U.S. South operates "As the uncanny double of both the First and Third Worlds" [and] "calls attention to (and enables displacement of) the First World traits of putatively Third World writers and the Third World traits of the putatively First World" (10). Following Ella Shohat's re-formulation of the *postcolonial* as 'post-First/Third Worlds theory' or 'post anti-colonial critique,' they offer the U.S. South as an ideal field for study that moves, quoting Shohat, "beyond the relatively

---

<sup>7</sup> Here, an essential point of reference is provided by Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space* (1990).

binaristic, fixed and stable mapping of power relations between ‘colonizer/colonized’ and ‘center/periphery’” (qtd. 10). While the authors are right to push the U.S. South, a location not traditionally considered postcolonial *into* the critical space of the postcolonial, I would broaden that effort to include the landscapes that have been intrinsic to the uneven development that made the southern U.S. *the* South. As it enters these gaps and explores the corners of these shadows, if postcolonial thinking must become more flexible and more attuned to abrupt shifts in scale, then it is worthwhile to consider where New Orleans and Louisiana exist in postcolonial space and where, over time, these places fall on a postcolonial temporal axis.

In addition to framing my concerns about the deployment of the regional imaginary in American Studies, Connery’s essay more specifically guides my thinking about how the site of New Orleans has been hidden by its situation. By first establishing the relationship between the regional imaginary and the “spatial fix” of capital, he is able to filter that imaginary through the “oceanic feeling” as a version of the sublime, thus establishing a link between a specifically oceanic sublime and the imperial eye or the gaze of capital. As a view from above, a mapping of the city from this distance is and has been concerned mostly with situation: New Orleans connects land and sea in any number of configurations, whether one is tracing historical and/or present flows of capital or culture. However, as a riverine site that also interrupts land and sea, New Orleans as a frontier is one that troubles the sublime duration, expanse, and majesty of the bodies it both unites and separates: the Mississippi River, the North American continent, and the Gulf of Mexico. At this point, my use of *New*

*Orleans* as a proper noun has ceased to simply designate the city as a situated place now or in the past. The term has slipped back to the ground beneath the city, and New Orleans for my present purpose refers to the “actual real estate” the city occupies, as well as the wetlands surrounding it for miles. At this distance, on the ground at close range, Connery’s thought likewise provides a touchstone.

As an entity that contains its other and/or accommodates the uncanny, he discusses the ocean as a limit to the sublime, as well as to capitalist expansion, something he explores through the materiality of water itself, particularly ocean water. Unlike the mountain and canyon, its immensity defies strict notions of outside and inside, and water, the ocean, is perhaps the return that never completely goes away in the first place. For Jules Michelet, the ocean is more than water—it “is mucus: slimy and teeming with life”—and, as Connery explains in his comments on the work of Rod Giblett, the concept of “slime” has been tested as a critical category that complements and complicates the aesthetics of the sublime.<sup>8</sup> In “Philosophy (and Sociology) in the Wetlands: The S(ub)lime and the Uncanny,” Giblett follows other slime theorists such as Zoë Sofoulis to present slime (or the slime) as not an anti-

---

<sup>8</sup> Here, I must acknowledge my appreciation of wetlands “slime” as part of a genealogy that I only recently realized was indebted to feminist science studies at UCSC. Conversations about miasma with Chris Connery led me to his “Oceanic Feeling” (1996) essay, which led me to Rod Giblett’s elaboration of the “s(ub)lime” (1996), itself a citation of the dissertation (1988) of Zoë (Sofia) Sofoulis, a History of Consciousness graduate and student of Donna Haraway’s. In *When Species Meet* (2008), Haraway declares that she is “creature of the mud, not the sky” (3), and she then develops a critique of Deleuze & Guattari and their “philosophy of the sublime, not the earthly, not the mud” (28). At the same time, each of these threads might be followed back to Gaston Bachelard’s *Earth and Reveries of Will: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter* (2002).

sublime as much as its inverse. Considering its roots in antiquity and its elaboration by Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant, as well as by Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud to their particular ends, if one defines the sublime (or sublimation) as a masculin(ist) process of Western modernity that gives name to affect and mediates the transference of event or desire to thought, a process in which “all that is solid melts into air,” then the slime (as the unnamed affect of the sublime) mediates the co-present movement—the pull or return—in the other direction. As an idea, it shares much in common with the uncanny, yet as Giblett’s title suggests, its particularly clingy and odorous materiality, somewhere between solid and liquid, leaves a trace more persistent than that of a haunting, and lends the possibility of speaking about it in terms of a specific ecological analogue. As Giblett goes on to explain, in a stubborn refusal to be either solid or liquid, the wetlands activate “the will to fill” that is a characteristic impulse of capitalism, something that the infinitude of the ocean, as Connery makes clear, denies.

Recovering—or perhaps conserving—the history of New Orleans’s wetlands site alongside its strategic situation therefore requires a reorientation of vision. As modes of seeing, the sublime and the picturesque may be understood as technologies of empire and capitalism that hide the effects of these processes in plain sight, and it follows that the land use of New Orleans’s site has historically been hidden by the landscapes of its situation. Upon the wetland or swamp that lies beneath, upon the slimy, sticky, fetid, and miasmatic ground below, Kelman’s imagination of Bienville therefore takes on added significance. With his eye on the promise of the future city’s

ideal situation, it was arguably the sublime that governed Bienville's choice of location. Yet, both at hand and as affect, the slime of the future city's site, the wetland, this entity somewhere between solid and liquid or earth and water, must have been even more immediate to the actual encounter. Though one might say the force of the sublime imagination prevailed—the will to fill created the material conditions for the founding of the city—what I stress is that the place that became New Orleans also must be read as occupying a space between the sublime of its situation and the slime of its site, a space opened by a misprision in Bienville's originary encounter with the land. Historically, the picturesque has to a degree mediated this space-in-between and allowed it to be safely populated and viewed from a comfortable distance. However, the post-Katrina coincidence of crisis and spectacle in the city represents an undoing of these modes of seeing: without the sublime and the picturesque to rationalize the imperial eye and the gaze of capital, the flood caused a state of confusion in a public conditioned to these visual processes. Rather than recoil from the discomfort caused by this failure of vision, I follow it into the miasmatic murkiness of the swamp.

To this end, in a broadly conceived New Orleans literature, I read the sublime and the picturesque not just as categories of seeing, but also as tools of imperial cum national expansion focused squarely on the city's strategic situation. Because the emergence of New Orleans as a real and imagined location develops with and against its local wetland site, the swamp thus becomes a necessary location from which not only to look and write back at empire and nation, but also for measuring the material

history of land colonization. Bound by the tension of its site and situation, New Orleans and its literature does not inevitably belong to the U.S., but is the postcolonial product of a longer history of New World European colonization folded into the global designs of U.S. Empire. To return to Kelman's observation about Bienville's choice of location for settlement, the deceptively simple formulation about site and situation is not, of course, exclusive to the founding of New Orleans. However, I would amplify that in the particular *case* of this New World city, the dynamic between site and situation in the making of place has been and continues to be especially fraught, thus providing a prism through which to trace this process elsewhere in the hemisphere and around the globe. By examining representations of New Orleans and Louisiana as they have figured in texts that originate in, travel through, or touch on the city, a more complex and less reactionary articulation of race and landscape—and a more nuanced reading of New Orleans as a whole—is possible if the long-term and dynamic relationship between the city's situation and site is centered in the analysis.

As the hurricane demonstrated, the neglect of the city's site comes at a cost, both in terms of the conditions that made the ensuing flood possible, as well as in terms of the ability to understand the scene it produced within a U.S. frame. When New Orleans's site is brought into tension with its situation as an unstable and contradictory ground for study (94), it forces a more thorough consideration of the co-constitutive relationship between the city's material and discursive histories: land use itself becomes as important as reading and writing landscape, and the ecosphere

troubles the public sphere's exclusive claim on the production of culture.<sup>9</sup> When the city is placed into an ecosystem, and the rhythms of the natural world are taken into account, a more complex picture begins to emerge. If containment defines the city's history as a place, then un-containment defines what preceded its existence and what has periodically escaped into the present moment. Because forces beyond the ebb and flow of human history shape the spaces of the wetlands, the variable and recurrent cycles of these forces must be examined on their own terms. As it recedes into the past, Hurricane Katrina becomes, from the point of view of history, just one of a series of irregular, yet inevitable natural disasters. However, from the point of view of tropical weather patterns or river avulsions, one measured seasonally and the other in hundreds-years intervals, these accidents of history in New Orleans—the hurricanes, disease epidemics, crevasses, and floods—look more like acts of an indifferent Nature, bodily rejections of the original accident, which was the city's founding and settlement. Somewhere between these extremes, in a model in which the ecosystem enfolds the city, never completely and always uneasily, lies the difficult interaction between the public sphere and the ecosphere that underscores my project.

When brought together, the ecosphere and public sphere provide a different ground for cultural production. More specifically, if entering the public sphere has provided the normalizing or universalizing measure of the writing subject, this dissertation asks to what degree this has come at the expense or the neglect of the

---

<sup>9</sup> A self-conscious paraphrase of James Clifford quoting Stuart Hall: see “Taking Identity Politics Seriously: ‘The Contradictory, Stony Ground ...’” in *Without Guarantees: In Honour of Stuart Hall* (2000).

ecosphere. From the perspective of the former, what Katrina left behind was ruins. When the latter is taken into consideration, however, it is not a question of what the storm left behind, but rather a matter of what the flood returned of the colonized spaces of the wetlands. If the problematic is restricted to who is left behind in the ruins, it ignores and silences those who were always already occupying this contradictory ground. For that reason, the problematic must be expanded to consider what kind of space the combined public and ecospheres constitutes, and only when this location is established can writing subjects and their products emerge in all of their complexity.<sup>10</sup> More broadly, how does a more thorough engagement with the ecosphere alter the literary history of New Orleans?

To answer this question, the long-term dynamism of New Orleans's under-examined, local site in the wetlands must also be charted as part of an American system of wetlands, itself shaped variously by the pressures of colony, empire, and nation. To counter its situation-based maps, locating or siting New Orleans in the wetlands establishes nodal rather than circuitous relationships between places, and it networks space more than it bounds it. William Howarth offers a model of what such global map might look like. He rejects what he sees within the literary disciplines as a naturalized, or undisciplined, definition of literature as "imagined territory," and replaces it with a definition that takes a more nuanced look at the relationship between place and cultural production: "place is physical, social, and intellectual; it

---

<sup>10</sup> See Rod Giblett, "Is the Public Sphere to the Ecosphere as Culture Is to Nature? (As Male Is to Female?)," *Continuum* (1997).

surrounds constructions like race, gender, or class because they must stand or transpire somewhere, within a recognizable place, though that place may range from the dateline of journalism or the venue of law to the poet's pleasure in setting." Most important for my project, he suggests that "we also need to find ways to explain why literary places change in value over time" (59), and for Howarth, the changing value of the wetlands in the Americas provides the test case for a discussion that maps the Western literary tradition (and Western modernity writ large) in a way that takes physical place, or site, seriously. By establishing the biblical trope of a Judeo-Christian God dividing land from water as one of the foundations for patriarchal Western culture, he traces the changing status of wetlands at particular historical moments, with the exploration and settlement (the conquest and colonization) of the Americas providing a starting point. Ultimately, he argues, historical attitudes about the wetlands "form a constellation of paradoxes," and they "have come by long association to express divided values: (1) difficulty or uncertainty, as in a quagmire, or morass; (2) change, since wetlands are transition zones between water and land; and (3) contingency and possibility, because wetlands may foster new life" (66). I emphasize that these ambivalent attitudes rest on the wetland's particular materiality, and because they are a global habitat, occurring at all latitudes and elevations, from seaboard plains to alpine ranges" (65), the material dimension of New Orleans as a "literary place" exceeds any one of its situations. As imagined spaces, the wetlands offer landscapes, the discursive boundaries for disentangling race and landscape; yet,

as material locations, they offer actually existing topographies and geographies for examining the real effects of these imaginaries.

### **Critical Texts and Contexts**

In the ten years since Hurricane Katrina revealed a social and environmental crisis in New Orleans, volumes of scholarly research have been produced in response to these twinned crises and their enduring economic and ecological impacts.<sup>11</sup> However, responding to these crises as un-twinned, as “co-productions” (Reardon, 2005) of the same postcolonial history, has proven more difficult, even in inter-disciplines such as American Studies. Though the visual evidence following the storm, transmitted in endless media representations, offered seemingly indisputable proof that environmental concerns, such as wetlands management, differentially affect social concerns, such as race and class, disciplinary boundaries often limit the ability of researchers to respond holistically. While natural scientists, on one hand, and humanists and social scientists, on the other, may acknowledge each other’s concerns in regard to Katrina and its aftermath, disciplinary and institutional spaces need to be transformed to think and inhabit New Orleans and the wetlands together as “naturecultures” (Haraway, 2007). My project is part of this effort.

---

<sup>11</sup> Though a thorough survey of this scholarship is not feasible, recent publications relevant to my research include Romain Huret and Randy J. Sparks, eds., *Hurricane Katrina in Transatlantic Perspective* (2014); Christopher Morris, *The Big Muddy: An Environmental History of the Mississippi and Its Peoples from Hernando de Soto to Hurricane Katrina* (2012); and John Lowe, ed., *Louisiana Culture from the Colonial Era to Katrina* (2008). For a local, UCSC, example of this kind of work, see John Brown Childs, *Hurricane Katrina: Response and Responsibilities* (2005).

In taking New Orleans and Louisiana as a case study for mapping a literary history or “literary historiography” (White, 2000) of the wetlands in the Americas, my thought has moved from the categories of landscape and geography to those of ecology and environment (and back again). Ultimately, as described above, my work resides at an intersection of hemispheric American Studies and Literature and the Environment. Both of these fields are inflected by the postcolonial (Gilroy, 1993; Nixon, 2011), and while thinking hemispherically I have been guided by the history of wetlands representation (Miller, 1989; Wilson, 2006), as it is underscored by the history of landscape and ideology (Bermingham, 1986; Schama, 1995; Mitchell, 1994). My research is by nature interdisciplinary, both in the cultural studies context of Literature at UCSC (Connery and Wilson, 2007), as well as in the context of cultural geography (Lewis, 2003; Kelman, 2003; Campanella, 2008) and its overlap with the non-representational (Tuan, 1974; Harrison, Pile, and Thrift, 2004). Environmental history likewise offers foundations (Nash, 1967; Cronon, 1983), as well as touchstones for my work on the wetlands (Williams, 1990; Vileisis, 1997). At various points, these fields overlap with ecocriticism, bookended by two essential anthologies (Glotfelty and Fromm, 1996; Hiltner, 2015). Nevertheless, my approach to Literature and the Environment has been organic, with the feminist branch of Science and Technology Studies (STS) more fundamentally intervening in the way I define my project. While ecocriticism, broadly conceived, encompasses aspects of STS, the latter more specifically accounts for the human/nature split in Western thought, while also accounting for the presumed splits between science/nature and

art/nature. In short, it provides a necessary check on “representationist” thinking (Barad, 2007), and provides a language for thinking the human and the natural together, not so much to account for these presumed splits but, instead, to question or to deny that they ever existed. In the language of STS, New Orleans and the wetlands are not my ‘research interests’ but more appropriately “matters of concern” and “care” (Latour, 2008; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2011), and the goal of my research is not simply to trace how New Orleans has figured in representations of the wetlands and vice versa, but rather to trace how New Orleans and the wetlands have “come to matter” together in the long history of the Americas (Barad, 2007).

While this final turn would appear to place my work at quite a remove from the literary, that distance is closed by turning to Donna Haraway’s understanding of Erich Auerbach, whose elaboration of *figura* is essential to my method of reading historical texts, representations, and events across time and space.<sup>12</sup> Given “the disreputable history of Christian realism [...] the love/hate relation with apocalyptic disaster-and-salvation stories maintained by people who have inherited the practices of Christian realism, not all of whom are Christian,” Haraway argues,

we are forced to live, at least in part, in the material-semiotic system of measure connoted by the Second Millennium, whether or not we fit that story. Following [Auerbach’s] arguments in *Mimesis* (1953), I consider figures to be potent, embodied—incarnated, if you will—fictions that collect up the people in a story that tends to fulfillment, to an ending that redeems and restores meaning in a salvation history. After the wounding, after the disaster, comes the fulfillment, at least for the elect; God’s scapegoat has promised as much. I think contemporary technoscience in the United States is deeply

---

<sup>12</sup> See my discussion of Auerbach in “Figures of Cosmopolitanism in the Postcolonial Present,” *boundary 2* (2010).

engaged in producing such stories, slightly modified to fit the conventions of secular realism. (243)<sup>13</sup>

In respect to how stories get produced, Haraway's comments raise the stakes of writing literary history and reading New Orleans post-Katrina, and my study engages with the underpinnings of the common-sense "secular realism" that she describes.

### **Overview of Chapters**

As a whole, my dissertation examines the wetlands as an ecocritical category for considering how discourses of race and landscape emerged and coincided in the colonial and nineteenth-century literatures of the Americas. While the map for this project centers on New Orleans, a city whose strategic situation has historically overshadowed the difficult topography of its swampy site, the settlement of Louisiana provides a broader case study for mapping the Spanish, French, Anglo, and African interests that shaped these literatures. As I consider these literatures and the transatlantic networks in which they circulated, dating back to the De Soto expedition and continuing through the Antebellum Era in the United States, I am concerned with the material texts that brought the wetlands into being. By reading works of fiction, exploration narratives, and natural histories alongside documents such as maps, swampland legislation, and manuscript plantation records, I draw attention to their status as sediments of particular historical moments. By returning to the colonial period, and by examining the structural endurance of the plantation economy, my account recognizes the ongoing entanglement of environmental and social concerns.

---

<sup>13</sup> "Modest\_Witness@Second\_Millennium," *The Haraway Reader* (2004).

When embedded within the life of the wetlands, marked by periodic returns to mud and water, the post-Katrina present does not represent a rupture of the U.S. national narrative but, instead, a moment continuous with an uneven, hemispheric history of the Americas.

At the end of the nineteenth century, much like today, New Orleans was in the midst of a moment of reconstruction and development, and local writers returned to the creole past to re-imagine the American present and global future of the city.

Chapter One proposes that New Orleans's situation in respect to the tropics defined this global imaginary, not unlike the city's inclusion in the ongoing spatial projects in American Studies, and it at the same time illustrates that this vision was already being troubled by New Orleans's site in the wetlands. As postcolonial spaces, both the tropics and the wetlands follow distinct temporalities, periodically reemerging to disrupt the seemingly inevitable progress of the nation, and "Swamp Tropics: The Urban Nature of Lafcadio Hearn and George Washington Cable's New Orleans," explores this idea in works like *Chita* (1889) and *The Grandissimes* (1880), set amid the culture clash that followed the Louisiana Purchase. In contrast to Hearn, who develops a tropical aesthetic that tends to dislocate New Orleans into the Caribbean, Cable stays rooted in the swamp, and presents the wetlands as part of a creole ecology that, like the seeming fluidity of Louisiana's racial landscape, is viewed as both seductive and corrupt by the territory's forward-looking American immigrants.

With the stage set for a return to texts and translations related to colonial Louisiana, Chapter Two argues that the wetlands first emerged as a category of

knowledge through a series of discrete encounters with *ciénagas*, *marais*, and swamps. Narratives such as Garcilaso's *Florida del Inca* (1605), Charlevoix's *Histoire de la Nouvelle France* (1744), and William Bartram's *Travels* (1791) document the exploration and the natural history that shaped these encounters, and "Marais Impraticable: Translating Colonial Louisiana in Chateaubriand's *Atala*" explores the manuscript and print culture that brought the wetlands into being. While adapting classical *topoi* such as the *locus amoenus* and developing a New World sublime, Chateaubriand translated representations of the territory and its inhabitants from sources such as Bartram, and the book's many translations then circulated throughout the Atlantic World. In the European view typified by these texts, wetlands are depicted as wilderness or waste, unimproved landscapes populated along racial lines. That perspective, however, was challenged by Creoles such as Fray Servando and Caleb Bingham, America's first Spanish and English translators of *Atala*, who found themselves and the continents' natives mired in the dispute of the New World. Sparked by Buffon's *Histoire naturelle* (1749), the debate was driven by Cornelius de Pauw's exaggeration of the theory of American degeneracy, which ascribed the deficiency of New World flora, fauna, and peoples to its damp soil and cold climate. Wetlands thus became linked to racial disparity as part of the same Enlightenment discourse. Chapter Three, "Disputing American Degeneracy: New World Wetlands in the Print Culture of *Atala*'s Creole Translators," locates Louisiana within this discourse, which developed in new genres of philosophical travel and history. Though wetlands first figured in European books as examples of New World degeneration, I

argue that American writers transformed them into a rich rhetorical ground from which they exposed the ignorance of their European detractors and asserted their autonomy.

Turning to Louisiana in the nineteenth-century national context, Chapter Four argues that intersecting discourses of race and landscape were shaped by the interdependence of city and country in the plantation zone where wetlands encounters take on an increasing social and economic complexity. “Uneven Improvements: Swamplands, Slavery, and Writing Subjects in the Louisiana Narratives of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Solomon Northup, and Martin Delany,” focuses on the embodiment of one of these intersections, the fugitive slave in the swamp, and reconsiders its status as a figure and locus of resistance to plantation discipline. Because the rhetoric of labor and land discipline diverges when spoken in terms of improvement—swampland improvement is incompatible with the improvement or education of slaves—I argue that the unity of identity and place that constitutes this resistant “other” is fractured. In *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853), and *Blake* (1861-2), as action shifts between New Orleans and the rural Red River region, African-American protagonists and wetlands landscapes combine to counter the logic of the plantation and the nation that sponsors it; however, the revolutionary potential of the slave in the swamp is to varying degrees undermined by the same narratives that give it expression.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Swamp Tropics: The Urban Nature of Lafcadio Hearn and George Washington Cable's New Orleans

#### Introduction

With a simple paragraph break, George Washington Cable marks the Frowenfelds' entry into the narrative of *The Grandissimes* (1880) as one of hopefulness—"It was an October dawn, when, long wearied of the ocean, and with bright anticipations of verdure, and fragrance, and tropical gorgeousness, this simple-hearted family awoke to find the bark that had borne them from their far northern home already entering upon the ascent of the Mississippi"—immediately frustrated: "We may easily imagine the grave group, as they came up one by one from below, that morning of first disappointment, and stood (with a whirligig of jubilant mosquitoes spinning about each head) looking out across the waste, seeing the sky and the marsh meet in the east, the north, and the west, and receiving with patient silence the father's suggestion that the hills would, no doubt, rise into view after a while" (11). In the paragraphs that follow, as he describes the journey of these American immigrants into the recently acquired territory of Louisiana and towards the city of New Orleans, Cable develops the ambivalence established by this abrupt transition, a feeling that seems to emanate from the landscape itself. No hills, of course, are encountered, but instead a "land hung in mourning, darkened by gigantic cypresses, submerged; a land of reptiles, silence, shadow, decay" (12). Though "there were long openings, now and then, to right and left, of emerald-green savannah, with

the dazzling blue of the Gulf far beyond,” they were “waving a thousand white-handed good-byes as the funereal swamps slowly shut out again the horizon” (13). As the reader soon finds out, this alien landscape, this swamp, holds more than the seeming power to foreclose on the family’s tropical expectations, and they soon become its indirect casualties when all but the son, Joseph, quickly succumb to yellow fever.

Nonetheless, beyond the symbolic content of these landscapes, their apparent effects, and the ways both continue to shape the narrative (not least in terms of Joseph’s analogous encounter with the city’s equally alien Creole culture), my primary interest in this introductory scene lies in how Cable entangles New Orleans in the real and imagined territories of the swamp and the tropics.<sup>14</sup> More to the point, because Cable’s narrative is exemplary of the ambivalence about these intertwined territories that became commonplace in the late-nineteenth century, I am interested in what would happen if these categories, provided a foundation for readings of Cable and his contemporaries. Rather than simply serving as elements of setting that bolster readings in the traditional national and regional frames—or even in emerging hemispheric paradigms—what if the history of land use and resource extraction that underwrites these categories was considered as well?

By reading the work of Cable and Lafcadio Hearn against an ongoing tradition of New Orleans regionalisms, this chapter proposes that New Orleans’s situation in

---

<sup>14</sup> For more on the conjuncture of the swamp and the tropics in the nineteenth century, see David Miller, “Frederic Church in the Tropics” (107-17) and the “Penetration of the Jungle” (118-124), in *Dark Eden* (1989).

respect to the tropics defines much of the city's inclusion in the now-established and ongoing spatial projects in American Studies, and argues that equal attention be paid to the city's site as part of a global system of wetlands. By illustrating New Orleans's place in the conflation of the real and imagined territories of the tropics and the wetlands, this chapter initiates my literary history of the city that takes the wetlands as its organizing principle.

When brought together within a New World paradigm inextricably tied to the larger processes of modernity, the tropics and the wetlands figure as territories whose respective decadence and waste was discursively invented to all but justify their own colonization and exploitation. Yet, these figurations were rooted in actually existing material conditions measured by their relative discrepancy from European norms. Though imperial and national expansion came later, the structural effects produced by the intersection of the European imagination and these conditions became increasingly entrenched in the nineteenth century but were already partially in place at the time of New Orleans's founding in 1718. To locate the city at the intersection of the tropics and wetlands, then, is to see a different map emerge, one continually reinscribed from the colonial period to the present moment. While marked by the contending histories that shape any particular moment, including the present one, this map would not be overdetermined by the city's situation in relation to any one of the cultural circuits produced by political and economic expansion. Grounded by the city's site, it is a map that consolidates the historical pressures that have been placed on New Orleans due to its exceptional situation.

To take just the nineteenth century and artificially close it, there are any number of discreet historical moments in which New Orleans's situation comes to the fore as a cultural crossroads, and the number of these moments only multiplies the closer one looks. From the perspective of several overlapping American hemispheres or regions, 1803, 1848, and 1898 stand out for the way international traffic was moving through the city due to political upheaval, revolution, and war in Haiti, Mexico, and Cuba. However, what about the Louisiana Purchase, the war of 1812, the Civil War? Specific U.S. claims and conflict—both internal and external—very quickly enter the picture, and the field provided by the city's situation quickly becomes oversaturated. At the same time, moving chronologically, subsequent moments to a degree foreclose on the possible futures of those moments coming prior. To name just certain segments of New Orleans's founding populations, the cultural and political impact of the French and the Creole, the African, the Latin American, and the Cuban lives on in the city, but the future of this situation-based story leads first to a specifically New Orleans version of exceptionalism—the hackneyed cultural “gumbo” model—and then becomes subsumed by a larger U.S. American exceptionalism, that of the “melting pot.” Monoliths both, but look at all the diversity!

Behind these screens of diversity, however, these hemispheric pasts were increasingly consolidated into a particularly Anglo-American future during the nineteenth century, perhaps not in the culture on the ground, but certainly in the wielding of political and economic power. Nevertheless, the U.S. literature of this

moment contains an example that seems to run counter to the future consolidation of the nation: Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. Though not published until 1855, certain key scenes in the poem were arguably developed in response to what he encountered in New Orleans in 1848. His imaginary of the city, which incorporated the slave at auction into the American political body, was included in and influenced his cosmic and culturally inclusive view of America. To a degree, New Orleans, on the ground and from below, suggested to Whitman a future-to-come for the nation, or was a microcosm of the nation-to-be. From this perspective, the darker side of the city's historical situation as a hub for capital as well as exploited slave labor seems to be transformed and brought into the light of a hopeful future. However, when looking back from a different future, post-Civil War, Whitman in *November Boughs* recalls a view of New Orleans not from below or on the ground, but one that seems to be projected onto the screen of diversity I suggested above. His journalistic eye is much different from the body through which his poetic voice flows: as he recalls the city's market, instead of speaking New Orleans's many "others" into the life of that shared national body, it is instead ethnic types inhabiting picturesque scenes, an armchair view of the city just as well expressed by the stereoviews that began to proliferate about the same time.<sup>15</sup> In part, this chapter takes up the picturesque, another technology of imperialism, and traces New Orleans and Louisiana's place in the development—and portability—of its durable and enduring Caribbean version. A staple of the tourist economy, the picturesque has long rationalized the uneven

---

<sup>15</sup> See Oliver Wendell Holmes, "The Stereoscope and the Stereograph," *The Atlantic Monthly* (1859).

development of the tropical zone by silencing the figures whose labor produce its landscapes and by hiding-in-plain-sight the means of bringing land under control.

By charting the historical development of New Orleans's situation in terms of the tropics, a global and postcolonial geography emerges that cuts across, yet links, the multiple geopolitical histories that have laid claim to the city. In fact, in terms of its hemispheric orientations, the city has been long imagined as occupying this geographical zone. In 1877, writing for the *Cincinnati Commercial*, Lafcadio Hearn recorded a journey down the Mississippi River. In "Memphis to New Orleans," he offered a typically impressionistic vision of a Louisiana sunrise: "an auroral flash of pale gold and pale green bloomed over the long fringe of cottonwood and cypress trees, and broadened and lengthened half way round the brightening world. The glow seemed tropical, with the deep green of the trees sharply cutting against it; and one naturally looked for the feathery crests of cocoa-nut palms" (Starr 4). Judging by its title, Hearn's subsequent article on New Orleans—"At the Gate of the Tropics"—not only confirmed the tropical aesthetic of this vision but also fixed its geography. As a development that coincided with Hearn's career, the profusion of worlds' fairs and expos also provides a touchstone for measuring New Orleans's established situation as a hub for capital extraction in the tropical zone. As a city that hosted its own fair in 1884-5, the World's Industrial and Cotton Exposition, New Orleans at this moment was strategically positioned in the U.S. imaginary to fulfill the always anticipatory projects that have defined the nation's public orientation to Latin America and to its other American Souths, such as the Phillipines. Seven years after the publication of

Hearn's article, in a context more attuned to the city's other salient geography, that of "Gateway to the Americas," President Chester Arthur offered a statement about the city (via telegraph) to officially open the event. After congratulating the "citizens of the Southwest on their advancing prosperity," he states:

Situated as it is at the gateway of the trade between the United States and Central and South America, it will attract the attention of the neighboring nations to the American system, and they will learn the importance of availing themselves of our products, as we will of theirs, and thus, not only good feeling, but a profitable intercourse between the United States and the States of Central America will be promoted. (Fairall 17-8)

If Hearn's vision of New Orleans geography is decidedly aesthetic and affective, then that of President Arthur in regard to the Expo is overtly economic and geopolitical; however, these examples are not presented as mutually exclusive. Rather, these roughly contemporary visions are set side-by-side to illustrate the gateway as a metaphor for the conjuncture of the tropics and the Americas as twinned orientations of the city. Herbert S. Fairall's guide to the expo, especially the celebratory "Centennial Poem" which Mary Ashley Townsend wrote to commemorate and open the event, furthermore draws on and transforms the colonial history of the city to rhetorically incorporate New Orleans into the progress of the U.S., with its neighbors to the south in tow. Ultimately, this was a future for the city that never was, with the nation's gateways shifting respectively west and east to San Francisco and Miami, along with its Pacific and PanAmerican dreams and realities. However, even with national designs out of the picture, corporate interests remained, and the chapter gestures towards the implications of reading these interests on a continuum with the colonial, yet commercial, enterprise that founded the city in the first place. Though

inherited from the prior imperial designs of France, Spain (and even England), from a U.S. point of view, the two gateway visions of the city outlined above come together at this moment that is explicitly hemispheric in scope but implicitly global in ambition. With the foreclosure of the plantation economy as a foundational structure for economic expansion, the imbrication of the tropics into the American imaginary may be taken as a measure of a world order to come. Like the metaphor of the “Third World” that was used to rationalize the city following Katrina, the “gateway” is another that evacuates or dis-locates the place of the city. Viewed from this perspective, one might ask: is the New Orleans of those fateful days in 2005 somehow the abject offspring of those hopeful days of 1884?

In *Letters and Social Aims* (1876) Ralph Waldo Emerson offers some words that help place this particular New Orleans moment into a broader U.S. context. While defining the “Resources of Man” as “the inventory of the world, the roll of arts and sciences; [...] the whole of memory, the whole of invention; [...] “all the power of passion, the majesty of virtue and the omnipotence of will,” he offers “one fact that shines through all this plenitude of powers.” That:

all these acquisitions are victories of the good brain and brave heart; that the world belongs to the energetic, belongs to the wise. It is in vain to make a paradise but for good men. The tropics are one vast garden; yet man is more miserably fed and conditioned there than in the cold and stingy zones. The healthy, the civil, the industrious, the learned, the moral race,—Nature herself only yields her secret to these. And the resources of America and its future will be immense only to wise and virtuous men. (153)

In relation to the strategic standpoint of empire and capital embedded in Emerson’s remarks on an emerging world order, New Orleans’s ideal situation at the intersection

of the Americas and the tropics is crucial to my project because it becomes part of this intimated shift from the hemispheric to the global in the U.S. expansion imaginary. Though the processes are older, the post-Reconstruction era marks the city's full incorporation into these patterns. From a northern view, the South, including New Orleans, was economically underdeveloped, not just due to the war but also due to the longer-standing underdevelopment of the plantation economy. Though not geographically at the exact center of either the Americas or the tropics, a case can be made for the city's centrality or, better, its in-between-ness in the uneven political, economic, and cultural development of these two zones. While I do not disagree with the emplacement of the city in its U.S., Caribbean, or Atlantic World contexts, to situate New Orleans at the nexus of the Americas and the tropics makes a more compelling case for a global, or worlded, view of the city's geography that is more indicative of its long term uneven development.

Sorting through these layered, recursive, or overlapping temporalities within the frame of the city's situation is no easy task, and the history of New Orleans is full of such mixed promises. However, more attention to how the city's wetlands site grounds its cultural products and representations, and not just in acute moments of its reassertion, such as in floods following hurricanes, provides a method and a different kind of sieve for filtering the sediment of these accumulated historical moments. Put another way, the global future revealed by the hurricane cannot be explained fully by the city's national or hemispheric histories, no matter how complex the configuration. For this reason, New Orleans's site in the wetlands must be featured as a radically

local determinant co-present yet resistant to the ebbs and flows of its historical situation. As a category for reading New Orleans as a “literary place,” the wetlands lend new dimensions to local readings of the city at particular moments. Here, I am speaking of “the arrhythmic temporalities of the natural world and their site-specific manifestations,” and “Les Belles Demoiselles Plantation” and “Jean ah-Poquelin,” two of Cable’s short stories, provide introductory examples.<sup>16</sup> In simple terms, the plots of both stories turn on very particular aspects of their settings. In “Belles,” the honor of a French Creole planter is tested against property, entitlement, and the mixed-racial legacy of the family’s founding father. In sum, the sudden appearance of river erosion threatens the De Charleu’s family plantation mansion, and a long-standing desire to consolidate his fortune by buying the family’s city house from his less-pure, blood cousin, Injun Charlie, transforms into a desperate urge: he decides instead to unload the threatened country property on his relative by way of a trade, one property for the other. In “Jean,” by drawing attention to the cultural insularity on both sides, the intervention of the Americans into the traditional life-ways of the French Creole is examined against the hidden memory of the slave trade and its exposure through the new American government’s desire to improve Poquelin’s former indigo plantation, now swampy and undeveloped, by filling it in and building a road through the property. In both cases, setting as a static and dynamic backdrop could be plumbed for its latent and explicit symbolic content to develop readings of the stories’ many themes as they relate to this particular historical moment. However,

---

<sup>16</sup> The quoted formulation comes from one of my qualifying exam questions.

if these representations of setting are instead viewed as representations of site, the crises they set in motion are indicative of a history that is deeper than particular actors populating a particularly New Orleans or south Louisiana landscape. What Cable's stories explicitly reveal, yet somehow hide in the plain sight of landscape, is land and land use as the other story of the colonial and national projects in the New World. In this sense, the reassertion of site in "Belles," and its successful re-containment (after a prior reassertion) in "Jean" is more than a convenient use of setting as a literary device. Locating New Orleans on a map that brings site into more of a coeval relationship to situation also thickens readings of disease (e.g. yellow fever) and weather (e.g. hurricanes) as active and latent vectors that have shaped the city's landscape, both in representation and in practice, since its founding. Lafcadio Hearn's *Chita* (1889) provides an excellent example of a vision of South Louisiana in which first a hurricane and then an outbreak of yellow fever (associated with the miasmatic site of New Orleans) radically reorder social space in order to produce a creole or hybrid American family that defies national borders.<sup>17</sup> In respect to situation, Cable and Hearn's post-Reconstruction New Orleans is ripe for readings that separate a colonial Creole past from a national American future; however, if site and the history

---

<sup>17</sup> In a very different historical political register, the film *Panic in the Streets* (1950) reveals the endurance of the association of the city's site, as well as its situation, to disease by offering a narrative of containment in which the implication of a miasmatic waterfront is coupled with unchecked immigration in order to suggest (but never quite realize) the degree of affect promised by the title. In contrast to *Chita*, not only does a male, explicitly white agent ensure the safety of the city, but the film also ends with a reassertion of the normalcy and propagation of the Anglo-American family.

of capitalist land use is considered alongside, it closes this divide, as culturally contentious as this transition may be presented in their stories.<sup>18</sup>

### **Lafcadio Hearn's America: Writing New Orleans Into the Tropics**

In 2008, as part of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Tennessee Williams/New Orleans Literary Festival, a panel was titled, “At the Gate of the Tropics: New Orleans as a Caribbean City.” On the festival website, the organizers framed and described the panel as follows:

In his 1877 essay “At the Gate of the Tropics,” Lafcadio Hearn wrote, “It's not an easy thing to describe one's first impression of New Orleans: for while it actually resembles no other city upon the face of the earth, yet it recalls vague memories of a hundred cities. It owns suggestions of towns in Italy, and in Spain, cities in England and in Germany, of seaports in the Mediterranean, and of seaports in the tropics.” In effect, he was describing New Orleans as a Creole city. This panel will look at how Caribbean echoes become Creole voices, and question whether New Orleans is indeed a “Caribbean city.” Is a Creole identity the same throughout the Caribbean as it is in New Orleans? How does “Creole” travel from the Caribbean to New Orleans and further into the United States? And just what makes a Creole “Creole”?

Without question, the idea behind this panel, as well as the choice of passage to frame it, is significant for the study of the hemispheric literature of the Americas. The work

---

<sup>18</sup> In *The Creoles of Louisiana* (1885), Cable offers a definition of the term: “As to the etymology of [*creole*] there are many conjectures, but few bold assertions. Is it Spanish?—Italian?—Carib?—an invention of West Indian Spanish conquerors? None of these questions meet an answer in the form of hearty assertion. In the *American Journal of Philology* (October, 1882), Professor Harrison, of Washington and Lee University, Virginia, after exhausting Littré on the subject, says of Skeat, that “He proceeds with agile pen—dashes, abbreviations, equation lines—to deduce the word, though with many misgivings, from the Spanish *criollo*, a native of America or the West Indies; a corrupt word made by the negroes, said to be a contraction of *criado*, diminutive of *eriado*—one educated, instructed or bred up, pp. of *criar*, lit. to create, also to nurse, instruct” (fn. 41)

of Hearn, Cable, and their Louisiana contemporaries certainly raises questions of “Creole identity” and how it “travel[s] from the Caribbean to New Orleans and further into the United States,” and both questions are central to any attempt at relocating literary New Orleans or Southern regional literature in transnational or global contexts. In addition, beyond current debates and developments in American studies, one must consider that the panel was presented just three years out from the storm, when the city was still very much struggling to rebuild its infrastructure and redefine its identity in a post-Hurricane Katrina world. Why was Hearn’s vision on organizer’s minds as they thought about new frames of reference for understanding the past, present, and future of the New Orleans, and how may this be understood in terms of its situation in the Americas and its status as a site of literary production?

One answer, as I have already discussed, has to do with the scene broadcasted on television in the days immediately following the 2005 hurricane. For many, what was witnessed in the city leaves no doubt about “whether New Orleans is indeed a ‘Caribbean city.’” In response to public perceptions, Kirsten Silva Gruesz has for instance commented on the “suddenly visible ‘Haitianness’ in the streets around the Superdome” (471). Another reason for interest in Hearn’s New Orleans may have to do with the comparative state of redevelopment that is now present in the city. The author’s residence in New Orleans (1877-88) coincided with its hosting of the World’s Industrial and Cotton Centennial Expo, which opened in 1884, and for the post-Reconstruction city, this was an opportunity to showcase the new vitality of its economy and industry in an international context. Likewise, present-day New Orleans

is seeking opportunities to showcase the renewed vitality of its now mostly “cultural economy” in the emerging global context. Finally, a third explanation for interest in Hearn’s vision may have to do with the recent influx of Latin American migrants, both from within and without the U.S. Surely, the presence of a newly visible Latina/o population in the city serves as a reminder of its proximity to the Caribbean as well as to Latin American in general. In relation to Hearn, I outline these cultural, historical, economic, and geographical possibilities (and there are certainly others) for renewed interest in New Orleans as a tropical, Caribbean, or Latin city to illustrate its centrality to broader reconsiderations of the American South in these same contexts. As will become clear, Hearn’s writing anticipated many of these developments.

### **Hearn’s Hemispheric Orientations**

In 1880, only two years into his residence in New Orleans, Lafcadio Hearn wrote the following lines to his friend H.E. Krebiel back in New York:

Times are not good here. The city is crumbling into ashes. It has been buried under a lava-flood of taxes and frauds and maladministrations so that it has become only a study for archaeologists. Its condition is so bad that when I write about it, as I intend to do soon, nobody will believe I am telling the truth. But it is better to live here in sackcloth and ashes, than to own the whole State of Ohio. (Bisland 215)

The above passage, particularly the line about “sackcloth and ashes,” has been invoked repeatedly in the writing that has been produced in and on New Orleans since the hurricane. I can think of at least three books in which it appears as an epigraph. What is striking about the lines, of course, is their timeliness—Hearn could have just as well been writing about the city in 2008. However, what I truly think appeals to

people about Hearn's statement is the aesthetic judgment about the city that it contains. There is something of value about the city, the last line suggests, that can be obtained just by living there. Defining the aesthetic value of the city, then, is one of the goals of this section, and I will define it primarily through the lens of Lafcadio Hearn and his writing about the city and its environs. For Hearn, the aesthetic value of New Orleans has much to do with where it is—not just on the map but also in his mind—and in order to begin to determine this value, the city's geographic, imaginary, and even ideological locations must be analyzed. New Orleans is where it is and is not where Ohio is, and that is an important component of its value for Hearn. For my purposes, therefore, the passage that follows in the letter may be just as significant:

Once in a while I feel the spirit of restlessness upon me, when the Spanish ships come in from Costa Rica and the islands of the West Indies. I fancy that some day, I shall wander down to the levee, and creep on board, and sail away to God knows where. I am so hungry to see those quaint cities of the Conquistadores and to hear the sandalled sentinels crying through the night—*Sereño alerta!—sereño alerta!*—just as they did two hundred years ago. (Bisland 215)

The aesthetic value Hearn assigns to New Orleans and Louisiana, specifically the Gulf islands, is almost always coupled with an imaginative trajectory that takes him into the Gulf of Mexico—away from the United States—and then on to Latin America or the West Indies. The proximity of the city and the state to these tropical locales is therefore crucial to an understanding of how Hearn envisioned the place of New Orleans and Louisiana in the Americas. Broadly speaking, I will now explore the aesthetic and geographic imperatives that are embedded in Hearn's thinking and writing about New Orleans and begin to delineate some of their correspondences.

As a backdrop to my discussion of Hearn's writing in New Orleans, it should be kept in mind that the novella *Chita*, the primary focus of my analysis, is a story book-ended by two acts of nature or natural disasters (depending on your ecological orientation): the hurricane that roared over L'Île dernière in 1856 and the yellow fever epidemic that ravaged New Orleans in 1867. Both the low-pressure weather systems that produce hurricanes and the blood-borne disease originate in the tropics, and as I consider Hearn's novella, my imaginary includes the oceanic currents that brought them from the Atlantic, into the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico, and onto the Gulf islands of Louisiana and New Orleans. As Ari Kelman so lucidly explains, the geography on the ground in New Orleans—its “site” at the mouth of the Mississippi River as an ideal “situation” for trade and colonial expansion along the waterways that connect the interior of North America to the Atlantic world—is therefore of the utmost importance for understanding how the geography of the city and the Gulf islands function in Hearn's novella. When one considers the plot of *Chita*, the geographical vectors of the hurricane and the outbreak of yellow fever determine the fate of the story's namesake more than any other factor. However, it is not the weather nor the disease, but the location of the story—its site and situation—that is most significant. To make this argument does not exclude other readings, but it does foreground the link to the tropics that is essential to the development of the fiction and its outcome.

By focusing primarily on *Chita* and Hearn's journalistic work for the *City Item* and the *Times-Democrat*, I outline a geographic space that includes the city of

New Orleans and the outlying Gulf islands of Louisiana, and I delineate a temporal space that includes the time that Hearn resided in the city (1877-1887) as well as the time depicted in the novel (1856-1867). The spatial and temporal gaps in this construct are apparent, and it is worthwhile to consider how successfully Hearn's imagination of a Creole present and his memory of a Creole past collapse the intervening space and time. I pay attention to Hearn's residences in Ohio and the West Indies only so far as they are interconnected with his experience in Louisiana: roughly speaking, Cincinnati corresponds to the American side of New Orleans, and Martinique corresponds to the Creole. In Cincinnati, as an apprentice journalist, he was encouraged to seek out the margins of the city and soon began to perfect a vision of it in his writing. His personal life in that city followed a similar course, ending with a failed (and illegal) marriage to Mattie Foley, a black housekeeper. This relationship cost him his job at the newspaper. Hearn's *City Item* sketches run from the picturesque and grotesque, to a stark realism that sometimes touches the edges of the proto-modernism encapsulated the epigraphic sketches Félix Fénéon composed while employed in a similar capacity.

In his Foreword to the 2001 edition of Lafcadio Hearn's *Two Years in the French West Indies*, Raphaël Confiant groups Hearn's residences in Louisiana and the West Indies into a unit that designates the third portion of his life. Because Confiant sets Hearn's residence in Cincinnati (1869-77) apart as separate unit, I find the geography of these groupings as significant as their limiting dates or the capsules of biography that they contain, because they suggest a national correspondence between

the states of Ohio and Louisiana that is different than the implied cultural affinity between New Orleans, the Gulf islands of Louisiana, and the West Indies. In regard to this latter correspondence, Jon Smith and Deborah Cohn have suggested, “in a hemispheric or global context Virginia and Louisiana might well be said to have less in common than, say, Cuba and the Dominican Republic—or for that matter, Cuba and Louisiana, Havana and New Orleans” (3). Following the lead provided by Confiant, and with an awareness of the hemispheric perspective of Smith and Cohn, I consider Hearn’s time as a writer in the Americas as organized into distinct, yet interconnected, geographic units.

The resulting hemispheric map centers on New Orleans, with Cincinnati and Martinique designating the outer limits of Hearn’s literary trajectory. Water—rivers, bays, gulfs, seas, and oceans—is crucial to my imagination of this map, and I have in mind a hemispheric designation that also draws on the organizing principles of constructs such as Peter Hulme’s expanded Caribbean, Joseph Roach’s circum-Atlantic, or Kirsten Gruesz’s Gulf of Mexico System.<sup>19</sup> By acknowledging the riverways that connect Cincinnati to New Orleans and the Gulf of Mexico, I hope that Martinique, lying at the edge of the Caribbean Sea, will come into a different focus in its relationship to Hearn’s prior residence in the Ohio. While I only touch on these outlying locales, I suggest that they are connected by Hearn’s vision of New Orleans, with the new American sector of that city roughly corresponding to Cincinnati, and

---

<sup>19</sup> Hulme, “Expanding the Caribbean,” *Home, Identity, and Mobility in Contemporary Diasporic Fiction* (2009); Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (1996); Gruesz, “The Gulf of Mexico System and the ‘Latinness’ of New Orleans,” *American Literary History* (2006).

the old Creole quarter roughly corresponding to Martinique. In other words, the human geography of New Orleans at the end of the nineteenth century and the author's orientation in that space, with Canal Street forming the primary boundary between the burgeoning American future and the receding Creole past, becomes a microcosm of Hearn's orientation and trajectory in the larger portion of the American hemisphere that includes Cincinnati and Martinique as two interconnected poles. In relation to this hemispheric map, where and how Hearn located himself and his New Orleans work, especially *Chita*, will become apparent. However, as Smith and Cohn have warned, "It would be erroneous ... simply to assimilate the U.S. South into the Caribbean" (7), and I will not dislocate the city from its place in North America by thinking in hemispheric terms. Rather, I emphasize the interconnectedness of the U.S., the South, and the Caribbean. Hearn cannot imagine New Orleans without Cincinnati, and he similarly cannot imagine the West Indies without Louisiana.

Jennifer Greeson argues that the Americanization of the U.S. South after the Civil War constituted a prototype of U.S. expansion and imperialism, and she equates European imperial travel writing in the colonies with local color or regional writing in the U.S. South.<sup>20</sup> I would extend this equation to Hearn's journalism in New Orleans. In Hearn's imaginary, the city of New Orleans at the time of his residence presents a fading microcosm of the U.S. nation's occupation and incorporation of the regional South, with Canal Street as its dividing line. Uptown, above Canal, the American portion of the city progressed into the future; while downtown, below this dividing

---

<sup>20</sup> "Expropriating The Great South and Exporting 'Local Color': Imaginaries of the First Reconstruction." *American Literary History* (2006).

line, the old Creole portion of the city remained rooted firmly in the past. In essence, much of Hearn's ethnographic journalism in the *City Item* and *Times-Democrat*, especially that centered on Creoles and Creoles of color in and around New Orleans, brought made apparent the colonial world that the city and its environs contained. As an outsider who chose to align himself with old New Orleans, Hearn depicted a world for his local American readership that has its parallels with the regional *Life on the Mississippi* (1883) that Mark Twain captured for his national American audience. In drawing these comparisons, I turn briefly—as Greeson does—to Mary Louise Pratt. I would not suggest that Hearn looked on the Creole world of New Orleans and Louisiana with the same 'imperial eye' that Pratt attributes to Mungo Park or Sir Richard Burton, but his point of view is nonetheless similar and belongs to the same genealogy.

Because Hearn lost the use of his left eye in an accident at [the age of 16] and by all accounts was quite near-sighted in his "good" eye, the question of his gaze takes on an added dimension. Hearn's vision of landscape is primarily myopic, extremely detail-oriented, and therefore picturesque in its capacity for representation; yet, it is also holds a sensitivity for the sublime, in which individual detail expands into obscurity or multiplies into confusion, and any middle ground seems to fall away. Hearn's tendency to shift abruptly between these two modes is most noticeable in the opening pages of *Chita*, yet a more refined example may be found in *Two Years in the French West Indies* as he relates his first journey by boat into the

constellation of islands.<sup>21</sup> Because it tends toward the picturesque, Hearn's depiction of New Orleans, its places and people, participates in its commodification, both in the present he occupies and in the past he imagines. On both counts, along with Cable, Chopin, Grace King and others, he helped construct a perception of the city that endures.

A well-known and much reproduced drawing depicts Hearn as he appeared when leaving New York for Japan in 1890. In this pencil sketch, produced from memory by C. D. Weldon, the *Harper's* artist depicts the writer from behind. He wears a rumpled suit, his trademark wide-brimmed hat, and clutches a suitcase in his left hand and a valise in his right. Back slightly hunched, he strolls away from the viewer into a featureless background—an indeterminate future. That his travel to the Orient, which resulted in a permanent relocation, is widely considered the defining moment in his life and writing career cannot be disputed, and this image must

---

<sup>21</sup> He writes, "Morning over the Caribbean Sea,—a calm, extremely dark-blue sea. There are lands in sight,—high lands, with sharp, peaked, unfamiliar outlines. We passed other lands in the darkness: they no doubt resembled the shapes towering up around us now; for these are evidently volcanic creations,—jagged, coned, truncated, eccentric. Far off they first looked a very pale gray; now, as the light increases, they change hue a little,—showing misty greens and smoky blues. They rise very sharply from the sea to great heights,—the highest point always with a cloud upon it;—they thrust out singular long spurs, push up mountain shapes that have an odd scooped-out look. Some, extremely far away, seem, as they catch the sun, to be made of gold vapor; others have a madderish tone: these are colors of cloud. The closer we approach them, the more do tints of green make themselves visible. Purplish or bluish masses of coast slowly develop green surfaces; folds and wrinkles of land turn brightly verdant. Still, the color gleams as through a thin fog. ... The first tropical visitor has just boarded our ship: a wonderful fly, shaped like a common fly, but at least five times larger. His body is a beautiful shining black; his wings seem ribbed and jointed with silver, his head is jewel-green, with exquisitely cut emeralds for eyes" (Confiant 7).

primarily be considered in that context. However, if the image is removed from the Japan context, it is possible to imagine Hearn turned away from the United States, a posture representative to some degree of his life and writing career while he still resided in the nation. This is not the same as suggesting that Hearn as a writer turned his back to America, because he was not doubt an American writer, albeit a peculiar one. His relationship with his adopted country was complex, and as Simon J. Bronner observes, he sometimes presented himself as an “immigrant writer, at other times from the self-conscious viewpoint of an American artist. He used the stance of an outsider to quizzically refer to the oddity of ‘you Americans,’ and he embraced the collective ‘us’ and ‘we’ to boast an exemplary American attitude” (2). With this in mind, I suggest that Hearn, as he developed his own idiosyncratic vision of America in his writing, seemed to turn his back to what the United States as an entity had to offer him as a normalizing or homogenizing force. As a writer in New Orleans, Hearn was already orient-ed away from the emerging cultural and societal norms of the new American city-center, and orient-ed toward the culture and society of the old Creole Quarter, especially life at its margins. To add to that notion, I would suggest that the Weldon sketch might be used as a metaphor for Hearn’s overall relationship to the U.S., especially as it relates to a trajectory that took him from Cincinnati to the West Indies, with New Orleans and the Gulf coast of Louisiana in between.

What we see if we look at Hearn’s life and writing from this perspective is a succession of back-turnings on the emerging norms of modern American life. During the twenty years he lived in the Americas, Hearn seems to have been seeking,

location-by-location and degree-by degree, a more authentic alternative to the life offered to him by the United States proper. The transplanted vestiges of the Creole plantation culture he first encountered up-river in Cincinnati were traced down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, by Hearn, to New Orleans and the Gulf Islands and then on to the West Indies. Though this is a romantic and overly simplified view, it suggests that what Hearn found most distinct, rich, and provocative about American culture eventually took him off the map, outside of the States, and into the Caribbean. An analysis of the writing he produced in New Orleans supports my vision of the interconnectedness of his literary trajectory in the Americas, and makes a claim for Hearn as an American writer who, even while in the states, exceeded the boundaries of 'local color' or Southern regionalism.

### **Locating *Chita***

Just as Hearn embodies a certain positionality in regard to the American and Creole possibilities of the hemispheric system I have outlined, so too does *Chita*, the one extended piece of fiction he centered on New Orleans and its environs. Jefferson Humphries, in his introduction to an edition of the book published in 2003, describes the relationship between the setting of the novella, its title character, and its author in these terms: "L'Île dernière [Last Island] is a metaphor, in Hearn's imagination, for New Orleans itself in all its sad, fatal beauty, and Chita is an allegory of that beauty's persistence, even in the midst of inclement forces—as well as of Hearn's own odd odyssey" (xxi). Though I engage more closely with the particular beauty of Chita and

its resonance later, what I focus on here is the correspondence Humphries establishes between New Orleans, Last Island, Chita, and Hearn. For both the title character of the novella and for the author himself, a movement may be traced away from the city and further toward the Caribbean, both geographically and culturally.

Where exactly, then, does Hearn locate the story of Chita? The novella opens with an image of movement: “Traveling south from New Orleans to the Islands, you pass through a strange land into a strange sea, by various winding waterways” (3). Though only separated by about 100 miles on the map, Hearn makes it clear that to travel by water from the city through the Louisiana wetlands is to cover a new and more profound kind of distance. The narrator observes, “The magic of steam has placed New Orleans nearer to New York than to the Timbaliers, nearer to Washington than to Wine Island, nearer to Chicago than to Barataria Bay” (21). To travel beyond the reach of the railway, then, is to enter another world altogether, one not subject to the modern collapsing of time and space. The traveler soon encounters “pretty islets”

all radiant with semi-tropical foliage, myrtle and palmetto, orange and magnolia. Under their emerald shadows curious little villages of palmetto huts are drowsing, where dwell a swarthy population of Orientals,—Malay fishermen, who speak the Spanish-Creole of the Philippines as well as their own Tagal, and perpetuate in Louisiana the Catholic tradition of the Indies. ... Farther seaward you may also pass a Chinese settlement: some queer camp of wooden dwellings clustering around a vast platform that stands above the water upon a thousand piles. (5-6)

In Hearn’s eyes, there is a different kind of creolization taking place in this remote landscape, a hybridity that exceeds anything that one might encounter in New Orleans. Geographically speaking, the Caribbean is central to this mix, especially in terms of the ecology, but the author’s gaze extends outward past the West Indies and

takes in the Far East and Southeast Asia as well. This trajectory anticipates the move he will make later in his life, but as I suggested earlier, he was already orient-ed in this direction while writing *Chita*. The trip by steamer that takes up the first part of the narrative, therefore, locates the setting of the novella beyond Louisiana and the United States, somewhere in an imagined Caribbean, an imagined Orient, and at times, an imagined Eden. Upon approaching this imagined destination, the narrator remarks, “The charm of a single summer day on these island shores is something impossible to express, never to be forgotten. Rarely, in paler zones, do earth and heaven take such luminosity: those will best understand me who have seen the splendor of a West Indian sky. And yet there is a tenderness of tint, a caress of color, in these Gulf-days which is not of the Antilles;—a spirituality, as of eternal tropical spring” (12).

It is into this imagined tropical paradise that the hurricane washes Lili, the orphaned French Creole child from New Orleans. In Hearn’s imagination, she becomes further creolized—*hybridized* might be a better term—as she grows up on Viosca’s Island under the care of Feliu and Carmen, her Spanish immigrant saviors, and her life eventually comes to somewhat resemble that of the Malay fisherman we glimpsed before. Further complicating Lili’s racial transformation on the island is the identity Hearn assigns to her adoptive mother. Early on, we learn that Carmen is “a little brown woman who had followed [Feliu] from Barcelona to share his fortunes in the western world” (36), and that she prays “Before a little waxen image of the Mother and Child,—an odd little Virgin with an Indian face, brought home by Feliu

as a gift after one of his Mexican voyages” (38). We learn that she dreams about her dead child, “little Concha,—Conchita, her firstborn, who now slept far away in the old churchyard at Barcelona.” In a particularly troubling dream, one that prophecies the coming of Lili, Carmen sees her little waxen Virgen grow before her eyes to “place in her arms the Child;—the brown Child with the Indian face.” Somehow, in Hearn’s hemispheric vision of the Americas, Carmen’s presumably Peninsular identity—and that of her dead child—is transformed by locating her in a zone of tropical hybridization that exceeds the boundaries of Louisiana. As Hearn merges her with the Virgen de Guadalupe, she becomes part Spanish, part Mexican, part Indian, and we might extend this identity to her adopted daughter. (One might even make a case for Chita as a sort of proto-Latina.) Though “the brown Child with the Indian face” given to Carmen in the dream, “whitened in her hands and changed” (41), Lili, as she becomes Chita, takes on the manner and physical characteristics of the islanders. In essence, she becomes naturalized by this idyllic environment—re-made by the island and the sea—and by the end of the story, she has been fully absorbed into this world, both in terms of language and the color of her skin. When finally recognized by Julien, her birth father, she is speaking Spanish and has become as brown as her adoptive parents. One might imagine that long after the floodwaters of the hurricane that separated her from her Creole parents had receded, the current continued to pull her deeper into the culture of the island.

Hearn’s own experience is interrelated to the production of the story. A visit to Grand Isle in 1884 and an acquaintance with a Basque family, coupled with an

introduction to the history of the Last Island hurricane, inspired Hearn to write *Chita* and eventually pulled him to the West Indies. As Elizabeth Bisland, Hearn's friend and early biographer, observes, "It was because of the success of *Chita* that Hearn was enabled to realize his long-nourished dream of penetrating farther into the tropics ... for which he suffered a life-long and unappeasable nostalgia" (97). One may argue that Hearn wrote or invented his way into the West Indies, much like he transformed Lili into an islander in *Chita*. Furthermore, Hearn's treatment of New Orleans in the novella as a backdrop or origin point for the action of the story is in keeping with the orientation toward the Caribbean that I have already outlined for the author. The New Orleans that Hearn presents in *Chita* is a city still holding on to its Creole past and looking for an alternative to an American future. That Julien, the French Creole, dies of yellow fever—a disease brought to the city by modern trade and commerce—while away on Viosca's island, suggests that he has no place in the future of the New Orleans. *Chita*, likewise, though born of French Creole parents, never returns to the city, and the ending of the novella suggests she has become suited for life only on the island, neither a part of the fading Creole present nor the American future of the city. If Feliu, Carmen, and *Chita* form an alternative American family, then Hearn has redefined both the geography and the culture of Louisiana and the American South.

I framed this section with the question of Hearn's hemispheric orientation as an American writer, and I have demonstrated that *Chita's* narrative, both in terms of geographical movement and the development of its title character, follows the author's gaze toward the Caribbean. I consider a final passage from the novella in

hopes of further establishing the importance of directionality in Hearn's vision of New Orleans and Louisiana as not just a peripheral part of the United States but as central part of the Americas. The passage concerns a group of men, mostly "country gentleman" under the leadership of "Captain Harris of New Orleans." They are searching for bodies and chasing looters in the days after the hurricane when they discover the child Lili in the care of Feliu and Carmen. It is the Creole in the group that eventually gets the girl to talk—they speak a patois together—and Hearn narrates their interaction with repeated attention to the object that inspires the girl to confide in the man: "She began to play with some trinkets attached to his watch chain—a very small gold compass especially impressed her fancy by the trembling and flashing of its tiny needle" (58). Upon leaving, "Laroussel turned, detached the little compass from his watch chain, and gave it to her. She held up her pretty face for his farewell kiss" (59). The author's choice of a compass to cement the bond between Laroussel and the girl cannot be overlooked. Because the men, "nearly all Americans," as Captain Harris remarks, choose not to take the girl with them but instead leave her in the care of the Spanish couple, it is at this moment that Lili begins her transformation into Chita. Outside of this island, the future clearly belongs to American navigators, men-of-action such as Captains Smith and Harris. Yet, there is an alternative future posited when the Creole Laroussel gives the compass to Lili. That she becomes Chita suggests that she represents a shadow navigator of an American future, and her compass is definitely pointing away from the United States.

### **“O, fair paradise of the South,” or the Troubling Place of Landscape**

Up to this point, my discussion of Hearn has proceeded from his well-known remark that he would rather live in New Orleans “in sackcloth and ashes, than to own the whole State of Ohio.” I have so far pursued the geographic implications of this statement, and I will now deal more directly with the aesthetic judgment that is embedded here as well. Clearly, there is a correspondence between the two—the further Hearn travels physically and imaginatively into the tropics, the more aesthetic pleasure he derives from what he sees. To again illustrate the interconnected geographic and aesthetic imperatives of Hearn’s literary life, I turn to another letter he wrote to his friend Krehbiel:

I fancy the idea of the fantastics is artistic. They are my impressions of the strange life of New Orleans. They are dreams of a tropical city. There is one twin-idea running through them all—Love and Death. And these figures embody the story of life here, as it impresses me. I hope to take a trip to Mexico in the summer just to obtain literary material, sun-paint, tropical colour, etc. There are tropical lilies which are venomous, but they are more beautiful than the frail and icy-white lilies of the North. (Bisland 220-1)

The “fantastics” he speaks of were a series of sketches—later collected by Charles Woodward Hutson in *Fantastics and Other Fancies*—he wrote for the *City Item* in the early 1880s. Individually, the sketches are fragmentary and diffuse, but taken as a whole they began to generate a coherent, yet impressionistic and dream-like vision of the city. Nevertheless, the sketches contain few explicit markers that designate New Orleans specifically, and the sum result is an image of a tropical city that could just as well be Havana or even Port-au-Prince. Read together, the collected sketches become less about a specific place and more about an aesthetic location bounded roughly by

the idea of the tropics. To connect this to my previous discussion, this aesthetic location is likewise hemispheric in its geography and in its trajectory, and Hearn's gaze in these stories tends to look away from the U.S., through New Orleans, and into the Gulf of Mexico or the Caribbean. In the case of the letter above, his imaginative gaze reaches into Mexico, and the passage is rich in the aesthetic judgments that it contains, from the idea that a perception of New Orleans can produce writing that is purely artistic—a form of art for art's sake—to the idea that Mexico, presumably its people and places, is there to provide even more “literary material” of a similar kind. In the following section, I consider the gaze that Hearn casts on the New Orleans and Louisiana landscape as a writer, and consider the implications of that gaze as it relates to questions of ‘local color’ and empire. In short, I consider how Hearn's picturesque and, therefore, aesthetic view of this landscape depends on its perceived similarity to the Caribbean, and I examine to what extent that picturesque view contributes to its commodification.

Just as the work of Kelman provided the ground for my consideration of New Orleans as a geographical location, the work of W.J.T. Mitchell provides a backdrop for my analysis of Hearn's vision of New Orleans and Louisiana as a landscape. In the introduction to *Landscape and Power* (2002), Mitchell states, “Landscape as a cultural medium thus has a double role with respect to something like ideology: it naturalizes a cultural or social construction, representing an artificial world as if it were simply given and inevitable, and it also makes that representation operational by interpellating its beholder in some more or less determinate relation to its givenness

as sight and site” (2). With these ideas as a starting point for my discussion of Hearn’s landscapes, I proceed—following Mitchell—on the assumption “that landscape is best understood as a medium of cultural expression [including ‘local color’ or travel writing], not a genre of painting or fine art” (14). In respect to writing, or the reading of writing, the same double interpellation holds true. Hearn, when he describes the people and places of Louisiana, is already interpellated by the landscape as a construction, and readers in turn are interpellated by Hearn’s depiction of that landscape. Though my discussion touches on the complexities of these relationships between landscape, writer, and reader, I focus mostly on the things that Hearn and, thus, readers take for granted as we gaze together.

My consideration of Hearn’s writing in the context of landscape begins with a long passage from “Memphis to New Orleans,” a piece he wrote for the *Cincinnati Commercial* in 1887 upon his arrival in the city. On the sights he encountered on his journey down the Mississippi, Hearn observes,

The magnificent old mansions of the Southern planters, built after a generous fashion unknown in the North, with broad verandas and deliciously cool porches, and all painted white or perhaps a pale yellow, looked out grandly across the water from the hearts of shadowy groves; and, like villages of a hundred cottages, the negro quarters dotted the verdant face of the plantation with far-gleaming points of snowy whiteness.

And still that wondrous glow brightened in the south, like a far-off reflection of sunlight on the Spanish Main.

—“But it does not look now as it used to in the old slave days,” said the pilot as he turned the great wheel. “The swamps were drained, and the plantations were not overgrown with cottonwood; and somehow or other the banks usen’t to cave in then as they do now.”

I saw, indeed, signs of sad ruin on the face of the great plantations; there were splendid houses crumbling to decay, and whole towns of tenantless cabins; estates of immense extent were lying almost untilled, or had shot up in whole forests over fields once made fertile by the labor of ten thousand slaves.

The scene was not without its melancholy; it seemed the magnificence of wealth; of riches, and the luxury of riches.

O, fair paradise of the South, if still so lovely in thy ruin, what must thou have been in the great day of thy greatest glory!" (Starr 5)

By referring to the Spanish Main, Hearn is again conflating his vision of the South with the Caribbean—his imaginative gaze is already extending through New Orleans into the Gulf and beyond—but his explicit attention to the landscape of the picturesque ruined plantation complicates an understanding of Hearn's invocation of the South as a paradise. In this case, the aesthetic value of the landscape is linked to the past, but it is the troubling past of slavery that was the source of its "greatest glory." Though readers do glimpse the labor of slaves in the passage, the reference concerns the "fields that they once made fertile." The suggestion, then, is that the labor of slaves produced abundance (and its memory) as well as the former beauty of the plantation, still apparent in its ruins. That what is left of this legacy is a form of aesthetic pleasure for the observer and the writer must be considered, because Hearn, of course, is writing this for a newspaper audience back in Ohio.

Looked at in this way, the ruined plantation landscape of Louisiana does become a commodity, and when we link this to its hemispheric relationship to the Caribbean, established earlier, the nature of this commodification becomes more complex. To return for a moment to Hearn's preference for New Orleans in "sackcloth and ashes" and his insistence that his "fantastics" of New Orleans are purely "artistic," his vision of the ruined southern plantation might be placed in the same aestheticizing category. The actual landscape of Louisiana, like the comparative value of living there and his pure imagination of it, all become part of an aesthetic

economy in Hearn's writing. According to Mitchell, "As a fetishized commodity, landscape is what Marx called a 'social hieroglyph,' an emblem of the social relations it conceals. At the same time that it commands a specific price, landscape represents itself as 'beyond price,' a source of pure, inexhaustible spiritual value" (15). The depiction of Louisiana landscape in much of Hearn's writing participates in this process of concealment, and *Chita* is no exception. By considering a passage from the story that also centers on the vestiges of the South's plantation past, I will better establish the interconnectedness of Hearn's commodification of the landscape and that landscape's geographical and ideological proximity to the Caribbean.

Hearn's novella, to repeat, begins with a narration of the journey one must take from New Orleans by steamboat in order to reach the Gulf islands. Along the way, as explained previously, the landscape begins to take on tropical or Caribbean characteristics in its ecology and, in this case, its history:

Southwest, across the pass, gleams beautiful Grande Isle: primitively a wilderness of palmetto (*latanier*);—then drained, diked, and cultivated by Spanish sugar-planters; and now familiar chiefly as a bathing-resort. Since the war the ocean has reclaimed its own;—the cane-fields have degenerated into sandy plains, over which tramways wind to the smooth beach;—the plantation residences have been converted into rustic hotels, and the negro-quarters remodeled into villages of cozy cottages for the reception of guests. (7-8)

In the context of the present discussion, this passage is remarkable for the ease by which a primitive wilderness becomes a landscape of the plantation past and is then transformed into the present landscape of a vacation destination. More remarkable is the way that the Civil War and the activity of the ocean are conflated in a single sentence to suggest that this transformation was altogether a natural one. If this

passage is compared to Hearn's previous description of the plantations along the Mississippi, a question arises. How is it that the plantations on Grand Isle have been transformed into "rustic" and "cozy" resorts, while the others remain in ruined isolation? One possible answer, I think, has to do with Grand Isle's location. Such reappropriation of the plantation past for a pleasurable purpose is more acceptable in a locale in which one can gaze across the Gulf into an American colonial past that is not so fraught with associations of Civil War and regional strife. I would argue that the Gulf islands, due to their geographical and ideological proximity to the Caribbean, become sites upon which Hearn's gaze is easily able to naturalize their transformation from a plantation to a tourist economy. That Hearn employs picturesque description for both sets of plantations is equally significant because it will not be long before those along the Mississippi River Road will also be reappropriated for pleasure and absorbed into the economy of tourism.

In this context, Hearn's gaze serves to define the plantation landscape of Louisiana not just in terms of its difference from the rest of the U.S., but also in terms of its similarity to the landscapes of the Caribbean. In the first case, Hearn's gaze produces 'local color' writing; and, in the second, it produces travel writing. Because Hearn occupied both positions in regard to the Americas and produced writing in both genres, as we see above, it is worthwhile to consider the distinction. Jennifer Rae Greeson, in her discussion of Josiah Gilbert's publication of *The Great South* series in *Scribner's Monthly* (1875), describes the intersection of these two modes: "As 'local color' writing in its original formulation constructed geographical peripherality and

supposed biological inferiority in tandem, the genre—like its close relative, European imperial travel writing—created narratives that explained the underdevelopment of a region as a product of the inferiority of its native inhabitants” (503). While I do not suggest that Hearn’s writing in either genre is an exact fit for this model, it does participate to a degree in the same commodified view of the landscape that distances its people and places and separates them from the writer-observer and the reader. When Hearn’s work is considered in a hemispheric context, the landscape of South—Louisiana in this case—becomes subject to a gaze that we might associate with an imperial traveler to the colonies, and not just with a journalist writing for an American paper or a regional author writing ‘local color.’ For Smith and Cohn, however, establishing the link between the U.S., the South, and the broader colonial Americas is exactly the point of such hemispheric thinking, and they argue that “the plantation—more than anything else—ties the South both to the rest of the United States and to the rest of the New World” (6). For better or worse, as a journalist and novelist writing about the South, Hearn’s gaze unifies Louisiana and the Caribbean into an aesthetic vision of the tropics, and it prefigures as much as provides evidence for the necessity of thinking about American literature in these terms.

Before moving on, I would like to return to one of the questions from the Tennessee Williams Festival panel that I invoked at the beginning of the section, the question of “whether New Orleans is indeed a ‘Caribbean city.’” In light of the example set by Smith and Cohn, the direction I am following here, a better approach might be to ask why New Orleans *is* a Caribbean city, in what ways, and how it came

to be so. One might then better interrogate the perceptions of ‘Caribbean’ that we employ to arrive at that judgment in the first place. As I outlined in some detail above, this is definitely a matter of geography, but it takes more than just choosing the right part of the map to attempt to frame and answer the question. In the end, it is not the region or the hemisphere that we choose but our willingness to interrogate the relationships and interrelationships between the writers and the locations that we select to define our frames. Finally, the answer to the question of whether or not New Orleans is a Caribbean city is also an aesthetic one centered very much on the production of landscape and its representation. The writing of Lafcadio Hearn resonates in its relationship to both of these potential answers, and deserves continued attention as part of any hemispheric American literature.

### **George Washington Cable’s Wetlands and the Accumulation of the Creole Past**

Discussions of local color writing in New Orleans typically feature Lafcadio Hearn and George Washington Cable, and the connection between the two authors often hinges on “The Scenes of Cable’s Romances,” an essay Hearn wrote for the *Century Illustrated Magazine* in 1883. The following lines, which encapsulate the author’s aesthetic of the city, are often cited:

When I first viewed New Orleans from the deck of the great steam-boat that had carried me from gray north-western mists into the tepid and orange-scented air of the South, my impressions of the city, drowsing the violet and gold of a November morning, were oddly connected with memories of “Jean-ah Poquelin.” That strange little tale had appeared in this magazine a few months previously; and its exotic picturesqueness had considerably influenced my anticipations of the Southern metropolis, and prepared me to idealize everything peculiar and semi-tropical that I might see. (40)

The passage includes most every element discussed in the previous section: the impressionistic, initial view from afar, the unique combination of nostalgia and anticipation, the appeals to the picturesque, the South, and the tropics. “Even before I had left the steam-boat,” he writes, “my imagination had already flown beyond the wilderness of cotton-bales, the sierra-shaped roofs of the sugar-sheds, the massive fronts of refineries and store-houses, to wander in search of the old slave-trader’s mansion, or at least something resembling it.” What Hearn finds, however, and what he recounts in the pages that follow, is that his idealization of the setting for “Jean-ah Poquelin” would have to contend with Cable’s highly specific urban geography, and the same specificity would hold for the other stories later published as *Old Creole Days*. As he walked New Orleans, Hearn encountered any number of “old houses in the more ancient quarters of the city” that might have answered as the original of Poquelin’s; however, as he discovers by reading “The Great South Gate,” an article by Cable the *Century* likewise published in 1883, the author was not generalizing on a type.<sup>22</sup> Rather, as Hearn relates,

in the early years of the nineteenth century such a house existed precisely in the location described by Mr. Cable. Readers ... must have been impressed by the description therein given of “Doctor” Gravier’s home, upon the bank of the long-vanished Poydras Canal,—a picture of desolation more than justified by the testimony of early municipal chronicles; and the true history of that eccentric ... no doubt inspired the creator of “Jean-ah Poquelin.” An ancient city map informs us that the deserted indigo fields, with their wriggling amphibious population, extended a few blocks north of the present Charity Hospital; and that the plantation-house itself must have stood near the juncture

---

<sup>22</sup> The contents of “The Great South Gate” were also published as several chapters in *The Creoles of Louisiana*.

of Poydras and Freret streets,—a region now very closely built and very thickly peopled. (40)<sup>23</sup>

By following the story to its source, Hearn offers a lesson in local color writing that to a degree corrects his own aesthetic of New Orleans. After reading Cable's "Jean-ah Poquelin," he may have been prepared "to idealize everything peculiar and semi-tropical that [he] might see," but "The Great South Gate" subsequently convinced him that "the scenes of his stories are in no sense fanciful." Given the tendency of his own writing to dissolve the specificity of New Orleans and its environs into an abstraction of the tropics, Hearn's appreciation and recognition of Cable's insistence on the locally specific may at first appear contradictory, but it ultimately serves the author's ends: in "The Scenes of Cable's Romances," Hearn acknowledges the precedent of the other's writing, but he at the same time takes the occasion of revisiting Cable's literary settings as an opportunity to adapt them to his own, more diffuse, style. The difference between the two writers, I would argue, is in their orientation to the local. For Hearn, New Orleans's situation in respect to the tropics offers a point of articulation *to* the history of the Caribbean and the Atlantic world. For Cable, as I discuss in this section, New Orleans's site in the wetlands offers a point of accumulation *for* the same.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> This is now, more or less, on the site of the Mercedes-Benz Superdome.

<sup>24</sup> Speaking of John James Audubon, Christopher Iannini writes, "The formal organization of *The Birds of America* reflects back on the long and brutal history of 'Caribbean accumulation.' On one level, the term refers to a process of scientific collection and capitalist development ... that extended from the sugar revolution of the late seventeenth century to the decline of the West Indian sugar economy in the mid-nineteenth century and that drew its principal energy from Caribbean colonialism and slavery. ... the term refers primarily to the temporal compression that results from

Indeed, in respect to the Creole cultural context, Cable's fiction can be disorientingly local, as it is in much of the *Grandissimes*, where readers are often put into the position of the protagonist Joseph Frowenfeld, and find themselves just as bewildered as the American immigrant. However foreign it may be to Joseph, Cable nevertheless naturalizes Creole life as he introduces it to his readers. Put another way, even as he describes the unfamiliar, he takes for granted a certain familiarity with the people and places of New Orleans. While I will not discuss the novel at length, a handful of scenes illustrate Cable's process, which is intimately connected to the cultural and physical geography of the city. Early in the novel, the following passage prefaces the first meeting between Joseph and a stranger who is later confirmed to be Honoré Grandissime:

A Creole gentleman, on horseback one morning with some practical object in view,—drainage, possibly,—had got what he sought,—the evidence of his own eyes on certain points,—and now moved quietly across some old fields toward the town, where more absorbing interests awaited him in the Rue Toulouse; for this Creole gentleman was a merchant, and because he would presently find himself among the appointments and restraints of the counting-room, he heartily gave himself up ... to the surrounding influences of nature. (42)

While the passage is set up to draw attention to what follows, a romantic description of the “surrounding influences of nature” and their effect on Honoré, who thereupon finds himself in a particularly open and generous frame of mind, Cable does not

---

this process, as the effects of past action—economic, ethical, and epistemological—accumulate in specific geographic locations, including the former slave societies of the Americas, and port cities and financial entrepôts around the Atlantic world. As Caribbean theorists, poets, and novelists have long insisted, in a social world that continues to be shaped by the human catastrophe of slavery, ‘time does not pass, it accumulates.’ Audubon’s writings prefigure this philosophy of history” (255-6)

complete the equation between nature and man. Rather than attribute the merchant's emotional state solely to the harmony of his environment, the author reminds readers that "the matter of business which had brought him out had responded to his inquiring eye with a somewhat golden radiance; and your true man of business ... is never so generous with his pennyworths of thought as when newly in possession of some little secret worth many pound" (43). Ultimately, it was a pleasing business prospect that put him in mind to be receptive to nature in the first place, and this in turn prepared him to treat Joseph with generosity of spirit and candor. And what was this matter of business? To repeat, the Creole was out "with some practical object in view,— drainage, possibly." That Honoré displays an affective response to nature, as well as an instrumental attitude about the land, is typical of Cable's handling of his Creole characters: he resists reducing them to romantic exotics and endeavors to render them as actors in a fully realized world. Without question, in the early 1800s, land drainage would have been a typical preoccupation for a businessman in New Orleans; yet, it is a remarkably particular incident for Cable to choose as the contingency—the "possibly"—upon which the initial meeting between Honoré and Joseph, and therefore the entire novel, rests. The encounter, set in the cemetery where the latter has recently buried his family, initiates the plot, but it more importantly establishes slavery and social caste—or race relations—as the narrative's cultural and political undercurrent. In response to the suggestion that "he must get acclimated ... not in body only ... but in mind ... taste ... conversation ... and convictions" (46), Joseph almost immediately challenges the complacency of the other's attitudes, even as

Honoré alludes to his own complicated advocacy for the slave Bras Coupé, who rests in the same graveyard. Ultimately, even as Joseph looks to Honoré as a beacon of tolerance in the strange city, it is the former's unchanged convictions that provide the Creole with his bearings as he attempts to negotiate a life for himself at a remove from the tradition embodied by the family patriarch, his uncle Agricole. In my estimation, Cable's mention of drainage is not merely a narrative contingency, but rather a deliberate choice that demonstrates his awareness of the material concerns that organized life in New Orleans. Of these concerns, wetlands reclamation and land improvement, through drainage, would have been primary.

Moreover, as illustrated by a scene that mirrors Honoré's encounter with Joseph, Cable's attention to the material history of the city is complemented by his interest in dredging wetlands landscapes for their symbolic content. Following his choice to restore to Aurora Nancanou the estate won from her husband by Agricole Fusilier, Honoré laments that he in doing so has spoiled the prospect of marrying her. To be clear, Agricole—whose consent he would need—had killed Aurora's husband in a duel after being accused of cheating at cards. As he did before, Cable picks up the scene without introducing the character by name. “[A] noticeable figure stood alone at the corner of the rue du Canal and the rue Chartres,” Cable writes; “He had reached there and paused, just as the brighter glare of the set sun was growing dim above the tops of the cypresses” (347). As the passage unfolds, Honoré's emotions, in contrast to the uplift provided by the prospect of drainage, sink down to meet his surroundings:

One could think aloud there with impunity. In 1804, Canal street was the upper boundary of New Orleans. Beyond it, to southward, the open plain was dotted with country-houses, brick-kilns, clumps of live-oak and groves of pecan. At the hour mentioned the outlines of these objects were already darkening. At one or two points the sky was reflected from marshy ponds. Out to westward rose conspicuously the old house and willow-copse of Jean-Poquelin. Down the empty street or road, which stretched with arrow-like straightness toward the north-west, the draining-canal that gave it its name tapered away between occasional overhanging willows and beside broken ranks of rotting palisades, its foul, crawling waters blushing and gliding and purpling under the swiftly waning light, and ending suddenly in the black shadow of the swamp. The observer of this dismal prospect leaned heavily on his arm, and cast his glance out along the beautified corruption of the canal. His eye seemed quickened to detect the smallest repellent details of the scene; every cypress stump that stood in or overhung the slimy water; every ruined indigo-vat or blasted tree, every broken thing, every bleached bone of ox or horse ... for roods around. As his eye passed them slowly over and swept back again around the dreary view, he sighed heavily and said: "Dissolution," and then again—"Dissolution! order of the day—" (347-8)

At first glance, Cable seems to be aligning Honoré's feeling of "dissolution" with the traditional or typical wetlands imagery: the general impression of this "dismal prospect" emerges from "marshy ponds," a "willow-copse," and "the black shadow of the swamp." Upon closer inspection, however, as the character stands at the edge of the city gazing into the country, the dreary symbolic content of the swamp does not simply mirror the character's emotion. In addition, and more profoundly, Honoré is referring to the "dissolution" of a Creole way of life supported by plantation slavery and dependent on the nature of the wetlands. His gesture of restitution to Aurora signals a break with family and cultural tradition, and the details of the scene signal the waste and decay that accumulates from plantation agriculture: the "draining-canal ... beside broken ranks of rotting palisades," and every "cypress stump" in "slimy water," every "ruined indigo-vat or blasted tree," every "bleached bone of ox or

horse.” Far from the “golden radiance” of the earlier prospect, the shift in the character’s perspective is central to Cable’s critique of Creole New Orleans. That Honoré is able to see the darker side of the local economy suggests that it is he, contrary to his prior assertion to Joseph, that must “acclimate” himself to conditions in a changing city. Put another way, Honoré has become estranged from life as it is in New Orleans, and he has ceased to experience the city, including its wetlands, as second nature. For Cable, then, Creole identity may be linked superficially to the Louisiana landscape, but it more fundamentally derives from land use and how it shapes social life.

In *The Creoles of Louisiana* (1884), Cable’s history of the people, the author in fact introduces them in terms of the geography of their settlement in the lower Mississippi River valley. After first outlining the bounds of Louisiana’s delta lands and making a distinction from the territory of the exiled Acadians, Cable locates them in a very particular wetlands region: “Thus we have drawn in the lines upon a region lying between the mouth of Red River on the north and the Gulf marshes on the south, east of the Teche and south of Lakes Borgne, Pontchartrain, and Maurepas, and the Bayou Manchac. However he may be found elsewhere, this is the home, the realm, of the Louisiana Creole” (3).<sup>25</sup> From the founding of New Orleans to the

---

<sup>25</sup> “Take the map of Louisiana. Draw a line from the southwestern to the northeastern corner of the State; let it turn thence down the Mississippi to the little river-side town of Baton Rouge, the State’s seat of government; there draw it eastward through lakes Maurepas, Pontchartrain, and Borgne, to the Gulf of Mexico; thence pass along the Gulf coast back to the starting-point at the mouth of the Sabine, and you will have compassed rudely, but accurately enough, the State’s eighteen thousand seven hundred and fifty square miles of delta lands” (2).

yellow fever epidemic of 1853, Cable goes on to link the history of the Creoles to specific aspects of Louisiana topography, including chapters on “Inundations” and “Sauvé’s Crevasse.” Most compelling, however, because it speaks to Louisiana as a contact zone for nature and culture, is his discussion of the drainage of the Mississippi and its tributaries. As I argue in chapter two, the making of the wetlands has been a matter of land and language in translation, and Cable’s careful description supports this claim.

From Red River to the Gulf the early explorers of Louisiana found the Mississippi, on its western side, receiving no true tributary; but instead, all streams, though tending toward the sea, yet doing so by a course directed *away from* some larger channel. Being the offspring of the larger streams, and either still issuing from them or being cut off from them only by the growth of sedimentary deposits, these smaller bodies were seen taking their course obliquely away from the greater, along the natural aqueducts raised slightly above the general level by the deposit of their own alluvion. This deposit, therefore, formed the bed and banks of each stream, and spread outward and gently downward on each side of it, varying in width from a mile to a few yards, in proportion to the size of the stream and the distance from its mouth.

Such streams called for a new generic term, and these explorers, generally military engineers, named them bayous, or *boyaus*: in fortification, a branch trench. The Lafourche (“the fork,”) the Boeuf, and other bayous were manifestly mouths of the Red and the Mississippi, gradually grown longer and longer through thousands of years. From these the lesser bayous branched off confusedly hither and thither on their reversed watersheds, not tributaries, but, except in low water, tribute takers, bearing off the sediment-laden back waters of the swollen channels, broad-casting them in the intervening swamps, and, as the time of subsidence came on, returning them, greatly diminished by evaporation, in dark, wood-stained, and sluggish, but, clear streams. The whole system was one primarily of irrigation, and only secondarily of drainage. (5-6)

In terms of nature, this passage speaks to the dynamic interplay between land and water that forms and re-forms Louisiana’s wetlands; in terms of culture, it treats the adaptation of European language to local hydrological and topographical conditions.

When these New World conditions were not analogous to those found in the Old World, language—as in the movement from *boyau* to *bayou*—was made to fill in the gap. Building on such particular knowledge of the region, Cable’s fiction allows him to site Creole history in the wetlands in and around New Orleans, while at the same time compressing the Caribbean and Atlantic World history that has accumulated in this particular region. As Hearn’s appreciation suggests, no story illustrates the city’s place in an expanded American tropics more effectively than “Jean-ah Poquelin.”<sup>26</sup>

The story is set, Cable writes, “[i]n the first decade of the present century, when ... the Anglo-American flood that was presently to burst in a crevasse of immigration upon the delta had thus far been felt only as slippery seepage which made the Creole tremble for his footing.” One of these Creoles was “old Jean Marie Poquelin, once an opulent indigo planter, standing high in the esteem of his small, proud circle of exclusively male acquaintances in the old city; now a hermit, alike shunned by and shunning all who had ever known him” (88-9). The cause of the mutual disdain was the mysterious disappearance of his younger half-brother, seven years before, after he accompanied Jean on his last smuggling and slave-trading voyage to the Guinea coast. As the author explains, these were the pursuits to which Poquelin turned after “[t]he indigo-fields and vats of Louisiana had been generally abandoned as unremunerative” (90). While “certain enterprising men had substituted the culture of sugar,” this suited neither the reclusive “bookishness” of the younger

---

<sup>26</sup> For a historicizing view of this geography, see “Introduction,” *Surveying the American Tropics* (2013), eds. Maria Cristina Fumagalli, Peter Hulme, and Owen Robinson.

brother, nor the “roving character” of the older, who had gambled all but one of his slaves away, and who saw “equally respectable profits” in his chosen trades. Holed up in the old plantation house with his remaining slave, an “African mute” (91), Cable writes, “A dark suspicion fell upon the old slave-trader. ... his former friends died off, and the name of Jean Marie Poquelin became a symbol of witchery, devilish crime, and hideous nursery fictions” (92). The ghostly *feu follet* was rumored to haunt the house, and the narrator exclaims, “[w]hat wonder the marsh grew as wild as Africa!” (92-3). This is the background against which the story is set, and I quote many of the details to illustrate the microcosm of hemispheric history that Cable packs into a handful of paragraphs.

To draw a comparison to the present moment, what follows is a tale of gentrification, with the newly arrived Americans keen on developing Jean’s neighborhood, first by building a street through his property, which would require filling in his old canal. The plot unfolds the successful efforts of city officials and businessmen to do so, while the larger narrative expands the cultural gulf that exists between the Creole landowner and the recent immigrant communities. In the end, Jean is basically harassed to death—suffering a fall after being provoked to chase after a “ruffianly little Irish lad”—and only then is the gothic mystery of his decrepit house and his missing brother Jacques fully revealed. He contracted leprosy on their journey to Africa, and Jean had been hiding him ever since.

As the story develops, traces of hemispheric history continue to filter through Cable’s prose, but the author saturates the narrative with details about the site of

Jean's plantation. Many of these details concern the street-level geography of the city: "there stood, a short distance above what is now Canal-street, and considerably back from the line of villas which fringed the river-bank on Tchoupitoulas Road, an old colonial plantation-house half in ruin." Cable concentrates most of his attention, however, on the particulars of the plantation's wetlands site. The house, he writes:

stood aloof from civilization, the tracts that had once been its indigo fields given over to their first noxious wildness, and grown up into one of the horriddest marshes within a circuit of fifty miles.

The house was of heavy cypress, lifted up on pillars, grim, solid, and spiritless, its massive build a strong reminder of days still earlier, when every man had been his own peace officer and the insurrection of the blacks a daily contingency. Its dark, weather-beaten roof and sides were hoisted up above the jungly plain in a distracted way, like a gigantic ammunition-wagon stuck in the mud and abandoned by some retreating army. Around it was a dense growth of low water willows, with half a hundred sorts of thorny or fetid bushes, savage strangers alike to the "language of flowers" and to the botanist's Greek. They were hung with countless strands of discolored and prickly smilax, and the impassable mud below bristled with *chevaux de frise* of the dwarf palmetto. Two lone forest-trees, dead cypresses, stood in the center of the marsh, dotted with roosting vultures. The shallow strips of water were hid by myriads of aquatic plants, under whose coarse and spiritless flowers, could one have seen it, was a harbor of reptiles, great and small, to make one shudder to the end of his days.<sup>27</sup>

The house was on a slightly raised spot, the levee of a draining canal. The waters of this canal did not run; they crawled, and were full of big, ravening fish and alligators, that held it against all comers. (88-9)

With the allusion to "the jungly plain," the author's prose carries a tropical valence, as it does elsewhere, but the overall aesthetic belongs to the swamp. The passage bogs down in its descriptors: the "noxious wildness," the "horriddest marshes," the "impassable mud." Furthermore, and this will be an ongoing matter in the dissertation, the narrative aesthetic derives from the cyclical nature of the wetlands.

---

<sup>27</sup> This imagery recalls the imagery of Chateaubriand, and anticipates my discussion in chapter two.

“Jean-ah Poquelin,” in its representation of the swamp, does not feature the image of pristine nature, untouched by human hands; rather, the story turns and trades on the return of the swamp to lands once cultivated or improved. As it is in this case, the resulting landscape—rural or urban—is “half in ruin.”

If Cable’s anti-pastoral, yet picturesque treatment of these ruins recalls Chateaubriand’s *Atala* (1801), and thus looks ahead to the next chapter of my study, then his attention to the contradictory logics of plantation agriculture shares much in common with antebellum antislavery literature, and therefore anticipates the final chapter of the dissertation. While the vast and rich swamplands of southern Louisiana enabled large-scale, mono-crop agriculture, their cultivation and drainage was an uphill battle, especially when combined with the slave populations required to do so. It follows, then, that Cable depicts the house as a fortress, built of cypress harvested from the same swamplands, and “lifted up on pillars, grim, solid, and spiritless, its massive build a strong reminder of days still earlier, when every man had been his own peace officer and the insurrection of the blacks a daily contingency.” The image of slavery as race war is completed by the metaphorical transformation of the house into “a gigantic ammunition-wagon stuck in the mud,” and when Cable describes the waters of the drainage canal as crawling rather than running with “ravening fish and alligators,” the martial imagery expands even further. While these creatures “held [the house] against all comers,” it is just as easy to imagine them barricading the civilized occupants of the plantation from further intrusions into nature.

In the guise of civilization, however, it is the Americans that Cable figures as the primary threat to the urban nature of New Orleans, and it is here that the narrative takes on added complexity. While the author critiques the development of plantation agriculture, as well as its impact on the indigenous populations and natural environment of the Louisiana delta, he nevertheless has mixed sympathies for the Creole culture that emerged with this process. In this culture's relationship to the environment, he without question views it as part of an unproductive and stagnant ecology, but Cable does not view the arrival of the Americans as some sort of corrective. With the exception of Little White, a businessman who defends Jean after discovering the truth behind the ghost, the interlopers are unsympathetically depicted as blind to the value of Creole tradition. Furthermore, the progress they champion resembles a disease that comes to infect even the Creoles. As Cable writes:

The alien races pouring into old New Orleans began to find the few streets named for the Bourbon princes too strait for them. The wheel of fortune, beginning to whir, threw them off beyond the ancient corporation lines, and sowed civilization and even trade upon the lands of the Gravier and Girods. ... Everywhere the leveler was peering through his glass, rodsmen were whacking their way through willow brakes and rose hedges, and the sweating Irishmen tossed the blue clay up with their long-handled shovels. (93)

If at first the Creoles “[feel] the reproach of an enterprise that asked neither cooperation nor advice of them,” they nevertheless take solace and delight in the obstacle presented by their neighbor: “but wait till they come yonder to Jean Poquelin's marsh,” they laugh, and the narrator explains that “whether the street-makers mired in the marsh, or contrived to cut through old ‘Jean-ah's’ property, either event would be joyful” (94-5). However, once the developers begin to encroach on

the land surrounding Jean's house, when over the land comes "a sweet, dry smell of salubrity which the place had not known since the sediments of the Mississippi first lifted it from the sea," the Creoles change their tune. When Jean refuses to build, even "the common people began to hate him":

"The old tyrant!" "You don't mean an old *tyrant!*" "Well, then, why don't he build when the public need demands it? What does he live in that unneighborly way for?" "The old pirate!" "The old kidnapper!" How easily even the most ultra Louisianians put on the important virtues of the North when they could be brought to bear against the hermit. (102)

Stoked by the suggestion of the American developers, who lament that in "the country we come from" Jean would be "tarred and feathered" or "rid ... on a rail" (113), this resentment culminates in a *charivari*, a riotous musical mob that seeks to publically humiliate the landowner. Nevertheless, in spite of his representation of the Creoles as fickle and often buffoonish, Cable's ultimate critique comes through in his depiction of the aloof and coldly calculating Americans.

First of all, in his dealings with the new American officials, it is only Jean who comes across as worthy of respect. In part, Cable accomplishes this effect through straightforward description. In appearance, Jean is short but sturdy and possesses "a bronzed leonine face." His eye is likened to that of a "war-horse," his jaw is set with "the firmness of iron," and his gravity is heightened by his regional attire: "a suit of Attakapas cottonade," with "shirt unbuttoned and thrown back from the throat and bosom" to expose "a herculean breast, hard and grizzled." Most important, "There was no fierceness or defiance in his look, no harsh ungentleness, no symptom of his unlawful life or violent temper; but rather a peaceful and peaceable

fearlessness. Across the whole face, not marked in one or another feature, but as it were laid softly upon the countenance like an almost imperceptible veil, was the imprint of some great grief” (95). It is in the character’s speech, however, delivered in broken English, that Cable most establishes Jean’s dignity. In other places, the author seems to use dialect for comic effect, but in Jean’s dealings with the local officials, it slowly becomes clear that the joke may not be solely on the Creole. In respect to language, if readers embody an American perception—one that equates a frivolous-sounding language with the frivolity of an individual—then they in effect become the objects of the narrator’s contempt. For the story’s Americans, the superficial or apparent misapprehension of Jean’s language becomes a vehicle through which they willfully disregard an entire culture, including its relationship to the land. As Cable makes clear in Jean’s conversation with the American governor, the Creole’s identity is linked to the *marais*, and the governor’s disregard for Jean thus neatly mirrors his attitude toward the city’s wetlands. As their exchange suggests, neither is his concern:

The Governor bowed.

“*Parlez-vous Français?*” asked the figure.

“I would rather talk English, if you can do so,” said the Governor.

“My name, Jean Poquelin.”

“How can I serve you, Mr. Poquelin?”

“My 'ouse is yond’; *dans le marais là-bas.*”

The Governor bowed.

“Dat *marais* billong to me.”

“Yes, sir.”

“To me; Jean Poquelin; I hown 'im meself.”

“Well, sir?”

“He don’t billong to you; I get him from me father.”

“That is perfectly true, Mr. Poquelin, as far as I am aware.”

“You want to make strit pass yond’?”

“I do not know, sir; it is quite probable; but the city will indemnify you for any loss you may suffer—you will get paid, you understand.”

“Strit can’t pass dare.”

“You will have to see the municipal authorities about that, Mr. Poquelin.” (97)

That the governor cannot or will not act in the matter, is not able to appeal directly to the president if necessary, strikes the Creole as ineptitude. As a “Fr-rench-aman,” Jean is dumbfounded by the purely economic logic of the American.

While the governor ultimately views him as a curiosity—the object of the “odd stories” the Creoles tell—the city official to whom he is directed finds Jean’s “impudence ... refreshing.” In contrast to the first, this conversation is mediated by an interpreter familiar with both sides of the local parlance. Jean begins by re-asserting that the street must not pass:

“He says: ‘Why you don’t want?’” said the interpreter.

The old slave-trader answered at some length.

“He says,” said the interpreter, again turning to the officer, “the marass is a too unhealth’ for peopl’ to live.”

“But we expect to drain his old marsh; it’s not going to be a marsh.”

“*Il dit—*” The interpreter explained in French.

The old man answered tersely.

“He says the canal is a private,” said the interpreter.

“Oh! *that* old ditch; that’s to be filled up. Tell the old man we’re going to fix him up nicely.”

Translation being duly made, the man in power was amused to see a thunder-cloud gathering on the old man’s face.

“Tell him,” he added, “by the time we finish, there’ll not be a ghost left in his shanty.”

While the language of this exchange is supplemented “freely” by the interpreter, most often to soften the official’s condescension, the meaning nevertheless comes across to Jean, who storms off. Because it reveals a racist mindset, the concluding insult may be extended to an entire community. Through drainage and restitution, the “ghost” of Creole New Orleans will be exorcised, and like the governor, the official is only

interested in the economics of the matter, that “it will make his old place worth ten dollars to one.” Even when the interpreter insists that “’Tis not for de worse of de property,” he remains incredulous: “seems to me as if some of these old Creoles would liever live in a crawfish hole than to have a neighbor” (98-9).

Even less sympathetic than that of the governor and the city official, however, is Cable’s depiction of Little White’s employer, which he introduces with scare quotes: “A ‘Building and Improvement Company,’ which had not yet got its charter, ‘but was going to,’ and which had not, indeed, any tangible capital yet, but ‘was going to have some,’ joined the ‘Jean-ah Poquelin’ war.” To which the narrator adds, “The haunted property would be such a capital site for a market-house!” (104). At the end of the nineteenth century, Cable’s sneer suggests that local disdain for outside, speculative capital is transhistorical in New Orleans, and the episode furthermore recalls John Law and the economic bubble that enabled Louisiana settlement in the first place. Although the practice of land improvement, as well as the ideology that supports it, receives fuller treatment in the final chapter of the dissertation, Cable’s story offers a preview of the way improvement appeals to the common good while insinuating itself into common sense. Obscured by the ideology, naturally, is its tendency to serve the dominant or, in this case, the ascendant culture. Only after the fact does it become clear how improvement hierarchically organizes space according to race and class or, more simply, power. In this light, Little White’s interruption of the *charivari* as it heads towards Jean’s old house may be read as a momentary

interruption of the progress of American improvement. As the mob approaches, too late to accomplish their goal, White admonishes them instead to wait on a funeral:

“Gentlemen,” said little White, “here come the last remains of Jean Marie Poquelin, a better man, I’m afraid, with all his sins,—yes a better—a kinder man to his blood—a man of more self-forgetful goodness—than all of you put together will ever dare to be.”

There was a profound hush as the vehicle came creaking through the gate; but when it turned away from them toward the forest, those in front started suddenly. There was a backward rush, then all stood still again staring one way; for there, behind the bier, with eyes ast down and labored step, walked the living remains—all that was left—of little Jacques Poquelin, the long-hidden brother—a leper, as white as snow. [...]

“They are going to the *Terre aux Lépreux*” said one in the crowd. The rest watched them in silence.

The little bull was set free; the mute, with the strength of an ape, lifted the long box to his shoulder. For a moment more the mute and the leper stood in sight, while the former adjusted his heavy burden; then, without one backward glance upon the unkind human world, turning their faces toward the ridge in the depths of the swamp known as the Leper’s Land, they stepped into the jungle, disappeared, and were never seen again. (121-2)

The story closes on this scene, an unsubtle comment on those excluded from an American future in New Orleans, and Cable underscores this with an allusion to the existence of a swamp within the swamp that had re-enveloped Jean’s plantation. While the Creole had formerly been at the center of civilization in Louisiana, he is pushed beyond its margins and explicitly proscribed to the wetlands landscapes with which he once held a proper relationship. More precisely, the patrilineal possession of the *marais* that defined him is reversed. The swamp’s possession of Jean, through burial, is both a literal and figurative death.

At the same time, the group’s entry “into the jungle,” coupled with the proximity of the *Terre aux Lépreux*, places New Orleans within the space of the tropics. By afflicting Jacques with leprosy, Cable invokes this broader geography, but

the disease also figures as an exaggeration of long-held beliefs about Creole degeneracy in the Americas, a topic I examine at length in chapter three. In respect to Louisiana, Cable himself was not immune to such attitudes, which pop up from time to time in his commentary: “It was the fate of the Creoles—possibly a climatic result—to be slack-handed and dilatory” (*Creoles* 70). Historically a racist view of Americans, both native and transplanted, the concept of degeneracy was part of a broader understanding of environmental determinism, as illustrated by Cable’s description of the first generations of Anglo settlers in New Orleans. “Creole contact had been felt,” he writes:

The same influences, too, of climate, landscape, and institutions, that had made the Creole unique was de-Saxonizing the American of the “Second Municipality,” and giving special force to those two traits which everywhere characterized the slave-holder—improvidence, and that feudal self-completeness which looked with indolent contempt upon public co-operative measures. (*Creoles* 274)

The statement recalls Honoré’s first speech to Joseph, with the American determined to remain un-acclimated to the same forces that Cable describes here. Ironically, and in keeping with the circular logic of degeneracy, the process of acclimation to the soil and climate of Louisiana was nevertheless valued as the only protection from the epidemics of yellow fever that ravaged the region in the nineteenth century.

As this small sampling of Cable’s writing suggests, he often situates New Orleans and Louisiana within the tropics, but the city and the region are rarely dissolved or dislocated into tropical abstraction. The author’s commitment to the particulars of site, including Louisiana’s wetlands, is always primary, and a final look at “Belles Demoiselles Plantation” bears this out. The story opens with one of Cable’s

Creole genealogies, another demonstration of the way the colonial past accumulated in the years before the first arrival of the Americans. As the narrator explains, a count in the French king's court was granted original title to the land where the plantation would eventually sit. This Count De Charleu married a "Choctaw Comtesse," but left her behind when he was called back to France. While at court, he married again and returned with his new wife to the colony. In the meantime, however:

a famine had been in the colony, and the Choctaw Comtesse had starved, leaving nought but a half-caste orphan family lurking on the edge of the settlement, bearing our French gentlewoman's own new name, and being mentioned in Monsieur's will. (60)

As life in the Louisiana wilderness would have it, the new Comtesse was soon "led out of this vain world by the swamp-fever."

The story that follows concerns a convoluted rapprochement between the male heirs of the two lines of the De Charleu family: Jean Albert Henri Joseph De Charleu-Marot, scion of the plantation and widowed father to seven daughters, and old De Carlos—better known as "Injin Charlie"—the inheritor of the family's city property, whose household included only "an aged and crippled negress." To his annoyance, the former was labeled the "Colonel" by the first American governor, and the latter—in spite of his appellation and a surname transformed by "Spanish contact,"—was "plainly a dark white man, about as old as Colonel De Charleu" (64). For their part, the Colonel's daughters have reached an age to avail themselves of city society, and they pressure their father to act on his desire to acquire Injun Charlie's property and consolidate the family's estate. The plot, to put it simply, follows the Colonel's efforts to do so, but Charlie—out of pride—time and again refuses to sell, resulting in

a bitter stalemate. The main player, however, more so than in “Jean-ah Poquelin,” is the landscape. In this case, it is the river itself that looms largest:

The Count's grant had once been a long point, round which the Mississippi used to whirl, and seethe, and foam, that it was horrid to behold. Big whirlpools would open and wheel about in the savage eddies under the low bank, and close up again, and others open, and spin, and disappear. Great circles of muddy surface would boil up from hundreds of feet below, and gloss over, and seem to float away,—sink, come back again under water, and with only a soft hiss surge up again, and again drift off, and vanish. Every few minutes the loamy bank would tip down a great load of earth upon its besieger, and fall back a foot, sometimes a yard,—and the writhing river would press after, until at last the Pointe was quite swallowed up, and the great river glided by in a majestic curve, and asked no more; the bank stood fast, the “caving” became a forgotten misfortune, and the diminished grant was a long, sweeping, willowy bend, rustling with miles of sugar-cane. [...]

The house stood unusually near the river, facing eastward, and standing four-square, with an immense veranda about its sides, and a flight of steps in front spreading broadly downward, as we open arms to a child. From the veranda nine miles of river were seen; and in their compass, near at hand, the shady garden full of rare and beautiful flowers; farther away broad fields of cane and rice, and the distant quarters of the slaves, and on the horizon everywhere a dark belt of cypress forest. (61-2)

To predict the story’s outcome, all a reader needs to note is the location of the house and Cable’s choice to figure river erosion as swallowing, but the demise of Belles Demoiselles Plantation is predicated on more than the mutability of nature. A careful reader might pause over the snapshot of plantation geography that Cable offers in the second paragraph and take in the very particular organization of space required by this form of agriculture: a raised house on the natural levee, to offer river access and protection from floods, with farmlands sloping away towards the bottomlands behind. That the slave quarters are most distant, located on the edge of the swamp, is a fact that almost disappears in this picturesque vista. If a certain arrogance is suggested by the original De Charleu’s choice to site his house so close to the majesty of the river,

it is no accident, and with a broader glimpse of the landscape, Cable subtly alludes to the arrogance of Creole plantation culture as a whole.

The plot's climax therefore operates as a cumulative check on the De Charleu arrogance, and Cable is not subtle in forecasting its arrival. Sensing their father's frustration, the daughters ease up on their pressure, and the Colonel is content to resign his pursuit. With the coming of spring, as Cable puts it, "The cup of gladness seemed to fill with the filling of the river." Its height, in fact, "its tremendous current ... hustling the long funereal flotillas of drift," drew men to the levee day and night, "as every minute the river threw a white arm over the levee's top, as though it would vault over" (77). The threat passed, however, only to return in summer as the Colonel walked upon the levee, musing over his remaining blessings. With "a single plashing sound, like some great beast slipping into the river," his reverie was shattered:

"My God!" he sobbed aloud; "my God!" and even while he called, his God answered: the tough Bermuda grass stretched and snapped, the crevice slowly became a gape, and softly, gradually, with no sound but the closing of the water at last, a ton or more of earth settled into the boiling eddy and disappeared.

At the same instant a pulse of the breeze brought from the garden behind, the joyous, thoughtless laughter of the fair mistresses of Belles Demoiselles. (79)

Before reaching its foregone conclusion, the story nevertheless offers a couple of twists. The Colonel instantly resolves to offer a straight trade to Charlie, property for property, and the latter agrees, but only after humbling his relative. "[L]e Comte De Charleu have two familie," he says. "One was low-down Choctaw, one was high up *noblesse*. He give the low-down Choctaw dis old rat-hole; he give Belles Demoiselles to you gran-fozzer; and now you do don't be *satisfait*. [ . . . ] I rather wouldn't," he

concludes, “*mais* I will do it for you” (81). With Charlie’s speech, Cable encapsulates what he sees as the dilemma of Creole identity: stretching across the Caribbean and the Atlantic, family history and property may accumulate unevenly according to caste but, in the end, blood is blood. While chastened, the Colonel is nevertheless able to invite Charlie to the plantation to seal the deal, and he carries his guilt within sight of the house before he repents. The price of reconciliation is high, however, and as the two men look on in horror:

Belles Demoiselles, the realm of maiden beauty, the home of merriment, the house of dancing, all in the tremor and glow of pleasure, suddenly sunk, with one short, wild wail of terror —sunk, sunk, down, down, down, into the merciless, unfathomable flood of the Mississippi. (84)

Here, as he so often does, Cable paints hemispheric culture’s gamble on Louisiana nature in a single image. In a plantation that houses a surplus of unwed daughters, the weight of the Creole past is figured as beautiful yet unproductive, and the river in its seeming indifference collects its due and rolls on.

In his multiple returns to the founding scenes of New Orleans and Louisiana, Cable as a writer closes the loop on the nineteenth century and the colonial period, yet his imagination was open to the uncertain future of “the great south gate of the Mississippi” (*Creoles* 263). In this respect, his position is not unlike those who write about the region today, and his commitment to the place of New Orleans, its site in the river delta, offers a model for the work I accomplish in the dissertation. Even in his own time, writers had to reckon with Cable’s Louisiana, as Lafcadio Hearn does in “Scenes,” where he also revisits the site of “Belles Demoiselles Plantation.” While Hearn’s process is symptomatic of the obsession with “authentic” New Orleans

history—he might even share the blame for its origin—his textual return to the places of Cable’s writing is very much in keeping with the literary history of Louisiana. For the writers who have chronicled its history, in fact as well as fiction, it is a place of many returns, and like the ebb and flow of its wetlands, each return leaves behind another layer of sediment. With this in mind, I leave to Hearn the last word on Cable.

With apologies to the reader “for leaving the precise location of ‘Belles Demoiselles’ a mystery, authentic though it is,” the writer allows that it still may be visited. Nevertheless, he:

must journey far from the Creole faubourg and beyond the limits of New Orleans to a certain unfamiliar point on the river’s bank, whence a ferryman, swarthy and silent as Charon, will row him to the farther side of the Mississippi, and aid him to land upon a crumbling levee erected to prevent the very catastrophe anticipated in Mr. Cable’s tale. (47)

With the distancing allusion to Greek mythology established, Hearn through analogy carries out another dislocation of Louisiana’s landscape. “Fancy the wreck of a vast garden created by princely expenditure,” he writes,

a garden once filled with ... the rarest floral products of both hemispheres, but left utterly uncared for during a generation, so that the groves have been made weird with hanging moss, and the costly vines have degenerated into parasites, and richly cultured plants returned to their primitive wild forms. ... But for their tropical and elfish drapery, one might dream those oaks were of Dodona. And even with the passing of the fancy, lo! at a sudden turn of the narrow way, in a grand glow of light, *even the Temple appears*, [...]. It creates such astonishment as some learned traveler might feel, were he suddenly to come upon the unknown ruins of a Greek temple in the very heart of an equatorial forest; it is so grand, so strangely at variance with its surroundings! (47)

The reach of Hearn’s tropical imagination is here at its most apparent, with the passing of a single “generation” encompassing the decline of an entire civilization,

and the Creole house being figured as both “the ruins of a Greek temple in the very heart of an equatorial forest” and a “matchless relic of Louisiana’s feudal splendors.” This compression of Western history is startling, as is the image of its civilization overwhelmed by the tropical resources whose cultivation and extraction have sustained it. Nevertheless, the monument remains, and only with uncharacteristic attention to the building’s site is Hearn able to imagine an alternate fate. He returns, proleptically, to the outcome of the story that brought him to the plantation in the first place. “The river,” he concludes, “is the sole enemy to be dreaded, but a terrible one”:

it is ever gnawing the levee to get at the fat cane-fields; it is devouring the roadway; it is burrowing nearer and nearer to the groves and gardens; and while gazing at its ravages, I could not encourage myself to doubt that, although his romantic anticipation may not be realized for years to come, Mr. Cable has rightly predicted the ghastly destiny of “Belles Demoiselles Plantation.” (47)

## CHAPTER TWO

### *Marais Impraticable: Translating Colonial Louisiana in Chateaubriand's Atala*

#### **Preface. All the Lands Watered by the Mississippi**

In the opening passage of *Atala*, François-Auguste Chateaubriand meditates on the Mississippi River: “This last river, through a course of more than a thousand leagues, waters a delightful country, which the inhabitants of the United States call New Eden, and to which the French have left the soft name of Louisiana” (5).<sup>28</sup> Despite its poetry, by the time of the novella’s Paris publication in 1801, the author’s description of Louisiana was a commonplace. In fact, his metaphorical, riverine imagining of the territory is likely drawn from Pierre François Xavier de Charlevoix, author of *Histoire et Description Generale de la Nouvelle France* (1744). In the “Fastes Chronologiques du Nouveau Monde,” which precede the history, Charlevoix makes this entry for the year 1682: “The Sieur de la Salle descends the Mississippi to the sea, and takes possession in the name of the Most Christian king of all the countries watered by that great river, giving them the name of Louisiana” (59).<sup>29</sup> If

---

<sup>28</sup> *Atala; or the Love and Constancy of Two Savages in the Desert*, trans. Caleb Bingham (Boston, 1814). This is the second edition; the first was published in 1802. In the French of Chateaubriand: “Ce dernier fleuve, dans un cours de plus de mille lieues, arrose une délicieuse contrée, que les habitans des Etats-Unis appellent le nouvel Eden, et à qui les Francois ont laissé le doux nom de Louisiane” (2). *Atala, ou les amours de deux savages dans le desert* (1801). In general, I quote the Bingham translation and footnote the French. Page numbers refer to the fourth edition of *Atala*.  
<sup>29</sup> This translation is from *Shea's Charlevoix* (1900). In the original: “Le Sieur de la Salle descend le *Micissippi* jusqu’à la Mer, & prend possession au nom du Roy Très-Chrétien de tous les Pays, que ce grand Fleuve arrose, ausquels il donna le nom de *Louysiane*” (xxxvi). *Histoire et description generale de la Nouvelle France* (1744).

the poetry of Chateaubriand's phrasing belongs in part to the historian, then the description of Louisiana in riverine terms is likewise not a product of Charlevoix's imagination, but is rather a distillation of the *procès verbal* of April 9, 1682. Spoken by De La Salle on Louis XIV's behalf, the proclamation was recorded by Jacques de la Metairie, notary of Fort Frontenac in New France. In this document, the extent of the claim is fully described:

I, ... do now take, in the name of his Majesty and of his successors to the crown, possession of this country of Louisiana, the seas, harbors, ports, bays, adjacent straits; and all the nations, people, provinces, cities, towns, villages, mines, minerals, fisheries, streams, and rivers, comprised in the extent of the said Louisiana, from the mouth of the great river St. Louis, on the eastern side, ... as also along the River Colbert, or Mississippi, and rivers which discharge themselves therein, from its source beyond the country of the Kious or Nadouessious, ... as far as its mouth at the sea, or Gulf of Mexico, ... and also to the mouth of the River of Palms. (200-1)<sup>30</sup>

While the notary also records the necessary legal and political considerations, including proof of French priority and evidence of local Indian consent, I exclude those details in the cited passage in order to highlight the degree to which bodies of water, from the cartographic perspective of empire, defined the original extent of

---

<sup>30</sup> Jared Sparks, *Lives of Robert Cavalier de Salle and Patrick Henry* (1848). A transcription and translation, from the papers of E. J. Forstall (who visited the department De la Marine et des Colonies, at Paris, in 1841), was also printed in "Antiquities of Louisiana," *The Commercial Review of the South and West* (1846): 238ff. In French: "Ce ... prêt à la faire voir à qui il pourrait appartenir, ai pris et prends possession, au nom de sa Majesté, et des successeurs de sa couronne, de ce pays de la Louisiane, mer, havres, ports, bayes, détroits adjacens, et toutes les nations, peuples, provinces, villes, bourgs, villages, mines, minières, pêches, fleuves, rivières, compris dans l'étendue de la dite Louisiane, depuis l'embouchure du grand fleuve Saint Louis, du côté de l'Est, ... comme aussi le long du fleuve Colbert ou Mississippi et rivières qui s'y déchargent depuis sa naissance au de là du pays des Sioux ou Nadonessious ... jusqu'à son embouchure dans la mer ou golfe du Mexique, ... jusqu'à l'embouchure de la rivière des Palures" (246).

Louisiana. Inaccessible and unknown, the territory's lands are not themselves named in the claim, only the navigable and known waterways which bound and provided access to them. Though at first a matter of legal limits, water soon became the essential matter of a broader Louisiana discourse, and especially in regard to the Mississippi River, as the Charlevoix example indicates, water dominated the European colonial imaginary of the territory. Louisiana, by all accounts, was a *wet land*.

As Europeans began to fill in the map of Louisiana, on the ground through exploration and in books through circulation of written accounts, both the territory itself and the territorial imaginary were entirely dependent on and entangled with the Mississippi River. Over the course of the eighteenth century, the interdependency of land and water produced for settlers a contradictory bundle of benefits and disadvantages. While the situation of the lower Mississippi afforded seemingly endless commercial prospects, the necessity of siting settlements upon an unforgiving riverine terrain kept those prospects in check. The result was an enduring ambivalence about the territory as a whole, made apparent time and again in an emerging Louisiana literature.

In the century and more following the *procès verbal* of 1682, published and unpublished accounts of Louisiana proliferated. As illustrated below, these accounts primarily represented French and Anglo designs on the territory, but Spanish interests were also documented in texts including Antonio de Ulloa's *Noticias Americanas*

(1792).<sup>31</sup> Two documents, one published in 1720 and the other in 1803, nevertheless serve to frame the colonial period in Louisiana and provide a general sense of these contradictions and the ambivalence that came with them.<sup>32</sup> In *A Full and Impartial Account of the Company of the Mississippi, Otherwise call'd the French East-India-Company, Projected and settled by Mr. Law*, the reader finds a summary of the first organized effort to settle the colony. Printed in English and French on facing pages, the book contains a section titled, “A Description of Louisiana, otherwise call'd the Country of Mississippi, from a River of that Name which crosses it from North to South” (and, more simply as, “La Louïsiane, autrement appellée le Mississippi”). The author writes:

The Climate is very wholesome and temperate. That Part of Louisiana, which is as yet discovered, reaches from the 28<sup>th</sup> to the 45<sup>th</sup> Degree of Latitude. Its Entrance is defended by several Islands, which seem like so many dangerous Rocks. The Soil by the Shoars is quite drown'd, and is altogether useless and impracticable. Nevertheless it is one of the finest Countries in the World. The further you go upon the Continent, the pleasanter it appears. (75)<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> A scientist who participated in the French Academy of Science's Geodesic Mission to Ecuador (1734-44), Ulloa was also the first Spanish governor of Louisiana, from 1766-68, before being expelled by a creole rebellion.

<sup>32</sup> A French colony and territory through 1762, Louisiana was divided and parceled following the Seven Years' or French and Indian War: in brief, according to the terms of the Treaty of Paris (1763), Britain acquired the territory east of the Mississippi; Spain, according to the terms of the Treaty of Fontainebleau (1762), was given New Orleans and the territory west of the river. France only retained areas around New Orleans and Lake Pontchartrain. In 1800, with visions of a North American empire, Napoleon reacquired the Spanish territory through the Treaty of San Ildefonso, but sold it to the United States in 1803 after his failure in Haiti. With the Louisiana Purchase, the land was then divided into two territories: the Territory of Orleans, which became the state in 1812, and the vast District of Louisiana, which became the Louisiana Territory from 1805 until 1812.

<sup>33</sup> In French: “Le Climat est tre so sain & fort temperé. Ce qu'on a découvert de la *Louïsiane* jusques à present, s'étend depuis le 28. degré de Latitude jusqu'au 45. L'entrée en est desenduë par plusieurs Iles qui paroissent former une infinité

Here, concentrated into two lines, is the essential dilemma that defined Louisiana settlement on the ground, as well as the contradiction that colored the prevailing imaginary of the territory. It is a couplet worth repeating in French: “Le terrain du bord de la Mer est entièrement noyé & impraticable. Cependant c’est un des plus beaux païs du Monde.” More to the point, the lines illustrate the conflict between reality—*le terrain impraticable*—and expectation—*le plus beaux païs du Monde*—as it was the promise of the latter, and not the truth of the former, that fascinated the public and lured potential settlers.<sup>34</sup>

In his classic *History of Louisiana: The French Domination* (1854), Charles Gayarré finds it hard not to mock the hyperbole that inflated the Mississippi Bubble following the announcement of John Law’s scheme to settle Louisiana. In the pamphlets that “flooded” France, “the luxuriant imagination of prolific writers was taxed,” he writes, “to clothe Louisiana with all the perfections they could invent”:

It was more than the old Eden, so long lost to mankind. There, the picturesque was happily blended with the fertile [...]. The climate was such that all the vegetable productions of the globe existed [...]. To scratch the soil, would call forth the spontaneous growth of the richest harvests of every kind. ... There, dust and mud were equally excluded [...]. The seasons were so slightly marked that the country might be said to be blessed with a perpetual spring. ... it was beyond doubt that there was in the atmosphere a peculiar element which preserved from putrefaction;—and the human body, being impregnated with it ... could keep itself in existence almost indefinitely; and the Indians were known to retain the appearance of youth even after ... five or six hundred years. (209-10)

---

d’Ecueils. Le terrain du bord de la Mer est entièrement noyé & impraticable. Cependant c’est un des plus beaux païs du Monde. Plus on s’engage dans les terres, plus elles paroissent agréables” (74). John Law, *A full and impartial account of the Company of Mississippi* (1720).

<sup>34</sup> See May Rush Gwin Waggoner, ed., *Le Plus Beau Païs Du Monde* (2005).

Furthermore, he writes, “Those very Indians had conceived such an attachment for the white men, whom they considered as gods, that they would not allow them to labor” (210). And beyond the agricultural fecundity, there were of course the “inexhaustible mines of gold and silver,” which likewise required negligible labor: “the whole surface of the country was strewn with lumps and gold,” and “when the waters of the lakes and rivers were filtered, particularly the thick water of the Mississippi, it yielded an invaluable deposit of gold.” The French believed all of this, Gayarré claims, and the propaganda was so persuasive that, “from the towering palace to the humblest shed” (211), they dreamed of Louisiana.<sup>35</sup> It would make every settler a lord and the riches returned to the homeland would pay the national debt. France would own or conquer the rest of the world.

As Gayarré relates in equally lively terms, the hyperbole of the early Louisiana pamphlets was matched, even exceeded, by the frenzy of speculation that then consumed the French populace. To be a shareholder in the Company became everything, so property was sold or traded to acquire stock, which was soon backed only by the guarantee of state bonds. “Then happened what had been frequently seen since” (220), writes Gayarré. With much more paper money in circulation than hard currency in the banks, they had no choice but to cut the value of the notes in half,

---

<sup>35</sup> To close the loop on the expansionist ethos of his own historical moment, he adds, “What is written on California in our days would appear tame when compared to the publications on Louisiana in 1719: and the far-famed and extravagant description of the banks of the Mississippi given at a later period by Chateaubriand, would, at the time I speak of, have been hooted at, as doing injustice to the merits of the new possession France had acquired” (211).

which in turn decimated the value of the Mississippi stock. The subsequent rush for payment overwhelmed the banks, which quickly reached their limit: 2,235,085,590 livres in paper were now worth nothing. Not surprisingly, with the collapse of the Company of the Mississippi came “also a great revolution in the public estimate of Louisiana’s merits.” In Gayarré’s words, “She was no longer described as the land of promise, but as a terrestrial representation of Pandemonium”:

The whole country was nothing else ... but a vile compound of marshes, lagoons, swamps, bayous, fens, bogs, endless prairies, inextricable and gloomy forests, peopled with every monster of the natural and of the mythological world. The Mississippi rolled onward a muddy and thick substance, which hardly deserved the name of water, and which was alive with every insect and every reptile. ... At one epoch of the year, the whole country was overflowed by that mighty river, and then, all the natives betook themselves to the tops of trees and lived like monkeys [...]. (224)

Beyond “the mere deposit of mud” formed by the Mississippi, the rest of the colony was “the creation of the sea, and consisted in heaps of sand.” As Gayarré writes, it was therefore deemed “neither fit for the purposes of commerce nor for those of agriculture,” much less for “the habitation of civilized man.” The sun’s heat “at noon it could strike a man dead,” and “its fiery breath drew from the bogs, fens, and marshes the most pestilential vapors, engendering disease and death.” Furthermore, “the ear [was constantly] assailed by the croaking of frogs so big that they swallowed children,” and “myriads of mosquitoes ... thickened the atmosphere and incorporated themselves with the very air which the lungs inhaled.” Upon arrival, disease immediately “seized” the emigrant, and even if he survived, he was nevertheless “stultified into an indolent idiot” by “the enervating and baleful influence of the atmosphere.” In sum, according to the accounts Gayarré paraphrases, physical

degeneration was the only possibility in Louisiana for “the European race of men” (225), and their animals suffered the same diminution. “Fortunately,” he relates, death cut short this “miserable, sickly existence” (226).

While Gayarré goes out of his way to emphasize the full swing of French sentiment pre- and post-Mississippi Bubble, he does not essentially exaggerate the nature of these accounts, nor is there any question that they had an enduring effect on the colonial imaginary of Louisiana as it circulated in French, Spanish, and English discourse. Notwithstanding the hard lessons of Law’s Mississippi Bubble, the expectation of *le plus beaux país du Monde* extended to the Anglo-American imagination of Louisiana, and the endurance of this trope is borne out by a document published some eighty years later: Thomas Jefferson’s first official report on the newly acquired territory. In *An Account of Louisiana laid before Congress by direction of the President of the United States, November 14, 1803*, one finds a “General Description of Upper Louisiana”:

It may be said with truth that for fertility of soil, no part of the world exceeds the borders of the Mississippi [sic]; the land yields an abundance of all the necessaries of life, and almost spontaneously; very little labor being required in the cultivation of the earth. (15)

Just as in the account of Law’s project, the Mississippi River organizes the geography of the territory, and while the former report noted the fertility of the soil as well as its current and potential products, this one takes the description of Louisiana beyond “one of the finest Countries in the World” and into a realm of hyperbole. Though not named exactly as such here, by 1803 it had become increasingly common to figure Louisiana as a New Eden, as suggested by the description of unmatched soil, near-

spontaneous production, and low-labor cultivation. While the upper territories continued to brim with promise, the lowlands down river likewise continued to be filled in a much more material way, as the report on the “Settlements Below the English Turn” makes clear:

At the distance of 16 leagues below New-Orleans, the settlements on both banks of the river are of but small account. Between these and the fort of Plaquemines, the country is overflowed in the spring, and in many places is incapable of cultivation at any time, being a morass almost impassable by man or beast. (19)

Here, as in the earlier account, the description of an *impassable morass* undercuts expectations of the territory, revealing the dual nature of Louisiana’s wetlands landscapes, as well as its interdependent relationship with the Mississippi. While the river and its tributaries enrich and provide inland access to the territory’s fertile soil, the same river, in the network of drowned lands and morasses it forms at its mouth, hinders access and renders the soil difficult or impossible to cultivate.

Because they cast a particularly speculative eye on the territory, the Law and Jefferson examples seem extreme in their descriptions, but what becomes apparent after reading many accounts of Louisiana is that it is far from unusual for the soil and climate of the country to be figured simultaneously as a paradise and a wasteland. With an eye on each of these extremes, however, many of these narratives also look forward to improvement, to a pastoral middle ground in which the spontaneous bounty of the inlands could be tamed, and the lowlands, on the other hand, could be drained to support agriculture. Whether a potential Eden or Pandemonium, Louisiana was by no means unique in the European colonial imaginary of the New World: sites

as diverse and widespread as New England, Virginia, and Bermuda had long figured in similarly contradictory terms.<sup>36</sup> However, never before had the imperial eye gazed upon a region of such enormous scale, and one tied to such an extensive and navigable body of water. Aside from the Amazon (by and large unknown during the same period), the Mississippi and the valley it fertilized were without compare in the Americas, and the degree to which the territory stimulated European speculation may be measured by the repeated choice of the Nile river delta as its Old World analogue.

As colonial accounts of Louisiana were published and circulated in the Atlantic World, their ambivalent rhetoric was filtered into fiction, and the definitive example of this process is Chateaubriand's *Atala*, the wildly successful novella that put the territory on the map for metropolitan and colonial readers in the Europe and the Americas. In the eighteenth century, a particular by-product of this Louisiana rhetoric was the emergence of a coherent wetlands discourse. Shaped over three centuries by Spanish, French, and Anglo interests, the colonization of Louisiana offers a test case for tracing a historical process in which hundreds of texts—including Garcilaso de Vega's *Florida del Inca* (1605), Charlevoix's *Histoire de la Nouvelle France* (1744), and William Darby's *Geographical Description of Louisiana* (1816)—documented a range of colonial practices, from cartography and exploration, to natural history and ethnography, to land use and law. Located at a narrative intersection of these practices and published just before the 1803 Louisiana Purchase, *Atala* provides a literary node for examining the print culture that

---

<sup>36</sup> See Stephen Adams, *The Best and Worst Country in the World: Perspectives on the Early Virginia Landscape* (2001).

documented expansion into the contested territory and brought the wetlands into being. From sources such as Charlevoix, *Atala* translated representations of colonial Louisiana and its inhabitants, while the novella's many translations, including those of Boston schoolmaster Caleb Bingham and Mexican Dominican Fray Servando, circulated these representations throughout the Atlantic World.

### **Introduction. *Atala* and Atlantic World Print Culture**

The Prologue to *Atala*, narrated from an impersonal point-of-view, opens with a sublime, cartographic view of the North American continent, an epic tableau that momentarily distances readers from the French colonial past. The focus quickly shifts, however, to the banks of the Mississippi River, a vibrant landscape that is at once picturesque and primeval. In the midst of this scene, the narrator locates the action in a specific historical moment, Louisiana in 1725, where Chactas, an aged and blind Natchez Indian, relates the story of his youth to René, a self-exiled Frenchman who has been recently married to Celuta, a daughter of the tribe. Chactas, it must be noted, spent the 1680s in Louis XIV's France—at the height of its splendor—and returned with a great love for that nation, which he extends to René. The preamble complete, the two are set in a *pirogue* ascending the Mississippi, and the novella's central *Récit* is delivered from the perspective of Chactas. While floating through the wilderness, he recalls the defeat of his people by the Spanish and his adoption by Lopez, a kind Castilian; his capture by a band of Muskogees and Seminoles; his rescue by Atala, a Christianized Indian maiden later revealed as the daughter of

Lopez; and their subsequent flight into the wilds, where Father Aubry, a French missionary, shelters them from their passion and promises to sanctify their union in marriage. For Atala, alas, the promise comes as a condemnation, and she poisons herself rather than break a vow, made on her mother's deathbed, to remain a virgin. As a romantic love plot turned tragic, the story of Chactas and Atala moves from the wilderness to the pastoral middle landscape of Father Aubry's mission, and that movement is reflected in the novella's first two parts, "Les Chasseurs" and "Les Laboureurs," which set up "Le Drame." The tale concludes with "Les Funérailles," Chactas's telling of Atala's burial and his return to the wilderness, an event he underscores with a lesson on virtue and a warning against untutored passion.

If Chateaubriand's early writing was influenced by the *philosophes*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau in particular, then the death of his mother in 1798 (followed by that of a sister) inspired a philosophical reconciliation with his religion, if not an outright conversion.<sup>37</sup> With its fervent appeals to emotion and Christianity, as well as its

---

<sup>37</sup> Because the life of Chateaubriand mirrored the turmoil of the period in which he lived (1768 to 1848), and because critics and historians have inextricably tied his life and times to his work, a few words of biography are necessary. Born in St. Malo in Brittany as the second son in an aristocratic family, he at first prepared for the priesthood but ended up taking a military commission in 1786. Early in sympathy with the republican cause but not the violence of the revolution, he anticipated the fall of the monarchy and departed in 1791 for America, where he spent several months traveling the eastern seaboard and making it inland as far as Niagara Falls. Although he later made certain claims about this trip – one, that he had designs of seeking the ever-elusive northwest passage; and two, that he traveled as far as the Carolinas, the Floridas, and the Natchez territory on the Mississippi – they have been discredited. He returned to France in January 1792, joined the *Émigrés* army, and was wounded in a campaign against the revolutionaries. He subsequently fled to England in 1793, where he joined the emigrant colony in London and made a meager living teaching

introduction of René, one of romanticism's prototypical heroes, *Atala* pushed back against an age of reason and anti-religion, and the author created a sensation with its 1801 Paris publication. The book went through five editions in its first year and quickly appeared in numerous translations on both sides of the Atlantic. Though classical in form and published by itself, the novella was in fact conceived as part of two larger projects. In *Le Génie du Christianisme* (1802), the author's three-volume philosophical account of the Church's history, *Atala* exemplified Christianity's value as a source of aesthetic inspiration; in *Les Natchez* (1826), it appeared as an episode in his grand treatment of the 1729 Indian uprising in the Louisiana territory. Pushed and pulled by its formal and generic influences, *Atala* is sometimes an epic, sometimes a meditation on the "noble savage," sometimes a didactic religious text, but the novella's aesthetic appeal—comparable to that of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie* (1788)—was something new, and its lasting influence had a lot to do with its reliance on American sources and their specificity.<sup>38</sup>

Chateaubriand composed an enduring fictional panorama of Louisiana and its native inhabitants, and he did so primarily by drawing on eighteenth-century printed sources, mostly narratives of travel and exploration in North America, or histories themselves based on such books. While the respective *Travels* of Jonathan Carver and William Bartram (1778, 1791), as well as Charlevoix's histories of *Nouvelle France* (1744) and *Paraguay* (1756) are central to the author's literary vision of the

---

and translating French. It was during this time in England that he likely completed *Atala*. Upon his return to France in 1801 under amnesty, he published *Atala*.

<sup>38</sup> A potential counter-example, one founded on pure imagination of the Louisiana wilderness, is provided by Abbé Prévost's *Manon Lescaut* (1731).

Americas, the list is long and it gets longer as one researches the his later writings. Most of these colonial texts, including *Atala*'s sources, participated in a long tradition of wedding topographical description to reportage of native cultures, and narratives that edge into natural history are of special concern to my project. In the *Natural History of Carolina, Florida, and the Bahama Islands* (1731-43), printed in French and English, Mark Catesby's documentation of New World flora and fauna includes a first use of the term "wet Land," and many of these works also noted agricultural production, as illustrated by a 1774 translation of Le Page du Pratz's *Histoire de la Louisiane*, subtitled, "an account of the settlements, inhabitants, soil, climate and products."<sup>39</sup> It is difficult to generically categorize such texts, and Pratz's title is typical of pre-disciplinary works that blend everything from agriculture, to demographics, to economics. Just as eighteenth-century science begins to consolidate these descriptive practices into separate fields, so too does Catesby's use of "wet Land" begin to push the term from the descriptive to the nominative.

Beginning with Joseph Bédier's *Études critiques* (1903), a group of early twentieth century scholars, including Gilbert Chinard, have meticulously documented the specific passages in these works that provided Chateaubriand with source material, not just in *Atala*, but also in all of his work that deals the New World.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> In a taxonomical overview of "the Soyl of Carolina" in "An Account of Carolina and the Bahama Islands," Catesby describes the flora of the region's "Bay-Swamps"/ "Swamps à laurier": "On this wet Land grows a Variety of Evergreen Trees and Shrubs, most of them Aquaticks" / "Il croît sur ce terrain humide, une grande variété d'arbres & d'arbrisseaux toûjours verds. La plus part sont aquatiques" (Vol. II, iv).

<sup>40</sup> Bédier, *Études critiques* (1903); Chinard, *L'exotisme américain dans l'oeuvre de Chateaubriand* (1918).

These include *René* (1802), the aforementioned *Génie* and *Les Natchez*, as well as *Voyage en Amérique* (1827) and the posthumous *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* (1848). Through the side-by-side comparisons made by Bédier, Chinard and others, it becomes clear that in different works and at different times, Chateaubriand was sometimes just inspired by his sources, but he most often paraphrased or, on occasion, borrowed entire passages. When read together with such criticism, Chateaubriand's singular authorial voice does not become less distinct, but its originality seems to stem as much from the creative adaptation of other voices as from the author's particular genius. Chateaubriand's individual publications likewise become no less distinct, but his American oeuvre takes on the shape of one continuous narrative, subject to change and augmentation as the author over the years revisited the same material and no doubt incorporated new sources as he encountered them. As one considers that many of the author's sources also borrowed generously from others, Chateaubriand's picture of Louisiana—which was even criticized at the time for its inaccuracy—likewise becomes as much a product of individual fancy as a product of proliferation of sources and a confusion of narrative genres.

In terms of an emerging knowledge of Louisiana, readers in 1801 could find better, more accurate representations than the fiction of *Atala* and its translations. They could also find worse, however, often in narratives, like *Nouveaux voyages de Mr. Le Baron de Lahontan dans l'Amérique Septentrionale* (1703), framed as true accounts. The question of *vérité et fiction* in Chateaubriand, as pursued by Bédier and others, is therefore less significant than what their painstaking research reveals about

the network of texts, whose multiple editions and translations, brought Louisiana into being as a matter of discourse. Study of these texts reveals the making of Louisiana to be a transatlantic process, and when considered in relation to such works, *Atala* becomes differently legible as an Atlantic World cultural product, a material text sedimented out of ideas circulating about the Americas.<sup>41</sup> In this colonial and transatlantic context, as my analysis of *Atala* develops, it also moves with and against the novella's place in the romantic tradition. In this manner, I illustrate not only how the text adapts western conventions to its source material, but also how it allows the source material to articulate new narrative, figural, and aesthetic possibilities. At the same time, I ground these representational possibilities in ambivalent colonial encounters with Louisiana's wetlands landscapes. By tracking discrete encounters with Louisiana's *ciénegas*, *marais*, and swamps, by collating descriptions of soil and climate as they are filtered through Chateaubriand's prose and into the landscapes of *Atala*, I trace the emergence of the wetlands as a category of nature and culture shaped as much by colonial contact as by the dissemination of texts that documented and reported it.

In chapter three, I consider in detail what Antonello Gerbi has termed "the dispute of the New World," but it nevertheless provides context for my reading of

---

<sup>41</sup> A point of reference for the circulation of such texts around the turn of the nineteenth century may be established by comparing the contents of two libraries, that of Chateaubriand in Paris in 1817 and that of Don Miguel Gayoso de Lemos in New Orleans in 1799. See Marcel Duchemin, *La bibliothèque de Chateaubriand* (1932) and Irving A. Leonard, "A Frontier Library, 1799" (1943). Among other books, the libraries respectively held Carver's (London, 1779 and 1778), William Robertson's *History of America* (London, 1803 and 1777), and Buffon's *Histoire naturelle*, in his *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris, 1774) and in Spanish translation (Madrid, 1785).

*Atala*.<sup>42</sup> Though it would be overreaching to assign an active role in the controversy to Chateaubriand himself, the dispute and the novella similarly entangle race and landscape, natives and wetlands on the American continent. Despite the author's voyage to North America in 1791, his knowledge of a range of travel narratives, and his familiarity with Buffon and his followers, Gerbi remarks, "the basic issues of our dispute remain completely foreign to him. ... both his youthful belief in Rousseau and the attachment of his middle and later years to sumptuous and formal Catholicism keep him remote and immune from any argument that might cast doubt on the goodness of Nature or the Supreme Deity" (352-3).<sup>43</sup> However, it would be shortsighted to deny the novella's active contribution to the continental imaginary of the Americas and their inhabitants, even if critics contested the accuracy of this imaginary from day one. On this point, Chateaubriand is acknowledged "as the popularizer, if not the actual inventor (being preceded at least by Marmontel and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre), of American pathetic-religious exoticism," yet Gerbi goes on to say,

---

<sup>42</sup> Re-defined by Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon with the publication of his *Histoire naturelle*, beginning in 1749, but taken to extremes by Corneille de Pauw, Abbé Raynal, and William Robertson, the theory of American degeneracy sparked an Enlightenment controversy that carried into the nineteenth century. Buffon argued that human degeneracy on the American continent, in keeping with that of its flora and fauna, was inextricably entangled with the degeneracy of its climate and soil. In fact, the unsuitability of its cold air and damp land for cultivation and habitation was presented *a priori*, as the given upon which the rest of his theory rested. While the human aspect of Buffon's treatise has received more scholarly attention, the environmental aspect was not lost on his contemporaries in the New World, those responding in the midst of the revolutionary transition from colony to nation.

<sup>43</sup> Antonello Gerbi, *The Dispute of the New World* (1973). Certain passages in the *Génie* nevertheless suggest a familiarity with the rhetoric of the dispute.

America for him is never more than a marvelous decor, a brilliantly colored back-cloth for heroes and heroines of a confused and restless sentimentalism; ... His redskins are features of the landscape, and his landscapes, often nocturnal and always of exquisite literary craftsmanship, are mere melodious 'states of mind.' (352)<sup>44</sup>

While this is a reductive treatment of Chateaubriand's oeuvre, it certainly applies to certain aspects of his work, especially if individual texts are read in isolation. To be sure, many of *Atala*'s landscapes seem to be guilty of the superficiality Gerbi ascribes to them; yet, these "melodious 'states of mind'" cannot be completely divorced from the history, the actual colonial encounters and documentation that made these representations available to the author. The depiction of at least one of Chateaubriand's "redskins" thus runs contrary to Gerbi's overall assessment: when *Atala* is read as part of a network of texts, not only is the Indian Chactas placed into a new relationship with Louisiana's wetlandscape, he is also newly emplotted into the histories of the Natchez people and the Catholic church that intersect in the novella.

It follows that I am concerned with interpreting the shifting place of the Chactas in the author's American landscapes, where the Indian, I argue, is defined primarily by the change in his perspective in relation to the wetlands, even within the broader separation of wilderness and civilization that organizes the narrative. In *Atala*, the wetlands landscape grounds the sublime aesthetic that governs not only Chactas's changing point of view, but also the layers of perspective that determine the movement of the narrative as a whole. When *Atala* is read as part of a network of texts, not only is the Indian Chactas placed into a new relationship with Louisiana's

---

<sup>44</sup> Gerbi refers to Jean François Marmontel, *Les Incas* (1777) and Jacques-Henri Benardin de Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie* (1788).

wetlands, he is also newly emplotted into the histories of the Natchez people and the Catholic church that intersect in the novella. In particular, to read *Atala* as an integral part of the *Génie*, and not just as a stand-alone novella, is to effect a generic shift, one that brings the book into direct conversation and debate with the multitude of narrative texts—the travels, the natural and moral histories—that contributed to the wider European colonial project in the Americas. In *Atala*, Chateaubriand represents the French colonial encounter in the form of Aubry’s mission, which has its historical analogue in the Jesuit reductions of South America. The novella is not just a fiction set in Louisiana, but also a document of colonial settlement in Louisiana, one that extends the civilizing mission of the Church, as well as the epistemological mission of Europe, to America’s natives and its wetlands.

Within these entangled concerns, a point of departure for my study lies near the intersection of essays by Gordon Sayre, Monique Allewaert, and Luz Pimental. Hemispheric American Studies provides a broader context, and Mary Louise Pratt’s essential work on the Americas as a “contact zone,” a site of transculturation and “discursive reinventions” (4), shapes my analysis of the travel, narrative, natural history, and geography that translated the wetlands during the colonial era. The importance of natural history as a form of “contested knowledge making” (7) in the Americas, within a broader “practice of letters” (4), has more recently been elaborated by Susan Scott Parrish and Christopher Iannini, and in respect to the practice and dissemination of geography in early American literature, Martin Brückner has argued that “the realities of the land overwhelm the individual author or

fictional character to the point of reconfiguring his or her sense of identity” (6). In situating *Atala* within an American literature, my method is also informed by Peter Hulme’s transatlantic reframing of *The Tempest*.<sup>45</sup> What I depart from in general, however, and what makes my approach through a multi-language network of texts possible, is the work of Bédier, Chinard, and others to establish the intertextuality of *Atala* and its relationship to its sources. However, while critiquing Chateaubriand’s use of these sources as a matter of *mimesis*, as a matter of fidelity not just to these prior representations but also to New World nature they purport to represent, this scholarship fundamentally takes for granted the primacy of representation itself, as well as the centrality of authorship. What I find compelling about wetlands as a category, however, is how they work against, undermine, or exceed the limits of representation that would contain them in *Atala*, as well as in the novella’s source texts. As elements of narrative, as aesthetic objects, and as literary figures, wetlands carry persistent traces of their material beginnings in the colonial encounter. While I initially highlight variations in their linguistic translation, my analysis turns to wetlands themselves, figured in their many aspects, as landscapes in translation during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

---

<sup>45</sup> Sayre, “Plotting the Natchez Massacre: Le Page du Pratz, Dumont de Montigny, Chateaubriand” (2002); Allewaert, “Swamp Sublime: Ecologies of Resistance in the American Plantation Zone” (2008); Pimental, “The Representation of Nature in Nineteenth-Century Narrative and Iconography” (2004): 156-172; Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992); Parrish, *American Curiosity: Cultures of Natural History in the Colonial British Atlantic World* (2006); Iannini, *Fatal Revolutions: Natural History, West Indian Slavery, and the Routes of American Literature* (Chapel Hill: UNC P, 2012); Brückner, *The Geographic Revolution in Early America: Maps, Literacy, and National Identity* (2006); Hulme and William Sherman, eds., *The Tempest and its Travels* (2000).

## Translating *Atala*, Translating Wetlands

In *Atala*'s Epilogue, Chateaubriand writes of the Cherokee's murder of Father Aubry and Chactas's later visit to the site of the massacre. Caleb Bingham translates this scene as follows: "He traversed the desert, and arrived at the place where the mission was situated; but he could hardly recollect it. The lake had overflowed its banks; and the savanna was turned into an impassable morass" (173). Absent Aubry's civilizing influence, the return of the *impassable morass* starkly contrasts the pastoral "triumph of Christianity over the savage life," the picturesque "nuptials of man, and the earth," that Chactas first encountered at the mission. Although the author imbues these landscapes with Christian allegory, along with the "people of the chase" and the "husbandmen" who populate them, his narrative rests on the conflicts that shaped colonial settlement in eighteenth-century Louisiana: one was material, the contest for land-use between Native Americans and Europeans; the other was discursive, the dispute of the New World, or the transatlantic debate over the Americas as a site for civilization. More often than not, the physical and metaphorical ground beneath these conflicts was the *marais*, the marsh or morass, one of the many aspects of a terrain now known as the "the wetlands." In *Atala*, I argue, the material and discursive practices of colonial settlement explicitly come together in thought and print in this single wetlands figure.

The scene in the Epilogue, as well as the narrative as a whole, turns on the already cited passage, in which a colonized landscape is rendered unrecognizable by a return to its wetlands state: "Il traversa le désert, et arriva à l'endroit où étoit située la

mission, mais il put à peine le reconnoitre. Le lac s'étoit débordé, et la savane étoit changée en un marais impraticable” (201-2). Although I cite here the original 1801 Paris (Chez Migneret) printing, which quickly went through at least four editions, the novella within a year was translated and published in Spain, England, and the United States. With emphasis on *Atala*'s American Creole translators, I would therefore like to draw attention to the appearance of the same lines in several of those editions. Perhaps the first foreign-language translation was published in Spanish, in Paris the same year, under the name of S. Robinson, “Profesor de Lengua Española.” Robinson, the pseudonym of Simón Rodríguez and the Mexican Dominican, Fray Servando, renders Chactas's encounter with the *marais impraticable* as follows: “El atravesó el desierto y llegó al paraje donde estaba situada la misión, pero apenas pudo reconocerlo. El lago se había salido de madre, y la sabana se había mudado en un cenagal impracticable” (187).<sup>46</sup> The following year, a more widely circulated Spanish edition appeared in Valencia, in which the anonymous translator writes, “Atravesó el desierto, llegó adonde estaba situada la misión; pero apenas pudo reconocer el sitio. El lago había salido de madre, y la savana se había convertido en una laguna

---

<sup>46</sup> S. Robinson, *Atala ó los amores de dos salvages en el desierto* (Paris, 1801). As I discuss in chapter three, Servando Teresa de Mier y Noriega was born in Monterrey in 1763, took Dominican orders in 1779, and in 1794 became infamous for delivering a sermon that proposed a pre-Columbian date for the appearance of the Virgin Mary in Mexico. In one stroke, he thus undermined not just Spain's justification for the conquest, but also the Creole (and Mexican nationalist) attachment to the Guadalupan tradition. Tried and stripped of his privileges, he spent most of the rest of his life in prison or on the run from the Spanish Inquisition, all the while advocating, in writing, on behalf of Mexico and its people.

inaccessible” (158).<sup>47</sup> Like the Spanish translations, which vary from *cenagal impracticable* to *laguna inaccessible*, the contemporaneous English translations likewise render the figure without fixity. In England’s first edition of *Atala* (London, 1802), an anonymous translator writes, “He crossed the desert, reached the Christian village, and could hardly know it again: the lake was overflowed, the inundated savanna was become an impenetrable marsh” (128).<sup>48</sup> In the same year, as seen above, New England textbook author Caleb Bingham published his own English translation in Boston. His rendition, though similar, does not however locate Chactas in an *impenetrable marsh* but, rather, in an *impassable morass*.<sup>49</sup> When laid atop one another, these near-contemporaneous translations highlight the inter- and intra-linguistic instability of the *marais impracticable* as a literary figure. However, within an economy of print, the simultaneity of these varying translations also destabilizes the centrality of Chateaubriand’s 1801 text, as well as the originality of the *marais*

---

<sup>47</sup> *Atala ó los amores de dos salvages en el desierto*. Por Francisco-Augusto Chateaubriand. Traducción Castellana (Valencia, 1803). Servando called a later version of this translation a deficient imitation of his own: *Atala ó los amores de dos salvages en el desierto*. Novela escrita en Frances por Francisco Augusto Chateaubriand. Tercera Impresion (Valencia, 1813).

<sup>48</sup> *Atala. From the French of Mr. De Chateaubriant*. (London, 1802). In yet another English translation, one finds: “He crossed the desert and arrived at the place where the missionary village had been situated, but he was hardly able to recognise it. The lake had overflowed, and the blooming savannah was changed into an impenetrable morass” (158). *Atala; or, the Amours of Two Savages in the Desert*. Translated from the French of F. A. Chateaubriand, author of Travels in Greece, &c. (London, 1813).

<sup>49</sup> In *Beautiful Machine: Rivers and the Republican Plan* (1991), John D. Seelye, notes that Bingham was a Connecticut-born Congregationalist minister and teacher, whose Dartmouth education and Jeffersonian brand of republicanism made him a uniquely qualified conduit of conservative French ideology. For, when read closely, Chateaubriand’s pious little Indian story has a dark dimension, suggesting that savages and the Saviour are not a fruitful but a fated combination” (174).

*impracticable*: they participated equally in the transatlantic circulation of Chateaubriand's vision of Louisiana. With each translation's re-inscription of Louisiana—with the return of each to the site of the *marais impracticable*—the variable linguistic representations of the territory's wetlands, because they are themselves linked to French, Spanish, and English colonial encounters, begin to sediment into something more coherent and enduring.

### **Chateaubriand's Louisiana: Translating Colonial Practices into Print**

While Chateaubriand's sources for *Atala* have been scrupulously documented, and the book's influence on nineteenth-century romantic narrative in the New World (especially in Latin America) has been duly analyzed, less has been said about *Atala*'s position in a network of signification, or mimetic constellation, that also includes its translations. Setting aside the author's inspirations for the book's plot (which arguably are a mix of New and Old world precedents), and postponing discussion of the classical and European conventions that shape its narrative, what becomes apparent is that the majority of the texts that Chateaubriand sources for his depictions of the New World—the flora and fauna, the peoples and landscapes, the mores and customs—were written by American-born authors whom we would call “creole” if they had not hailed from the thirteen English colonies. With the exception of the French Jesuit Charlevoix and the English naturalist Mark Catesby, these native-born Americans—William Bartram, above all, but also Jonathan Carver, Thomas Hutchins, and Gilbert Imlay—provided Chateaubriand with most of his material.

Aside from Bartram, the naturalist from Pennsylvania who set out in 1776 to study and document the botany of the southern colonies, the others held military commissions prior to embarking on the projects or expeditions that resulted in their respective publications. Carver, a former captain and surveyor in the Massachusetts militia, was contracted in 1766 to seek the Northwest Passage; Hutchins, Geographer of the United States (and former officer in the British Army), contributed in 1774 to the mapping of a portion of the Mississippi River; and Imlay, an officer in the Continental Army and later a diplomat, was a land speculator and promoter of settlement in western Virginia (now Kentucky). As much as Bartram's scientific background, their military training shaped their views of North America's landscapes, and especially in terms of scale, traces of the different practices of these authors find their way into Chateaubriand's narrative, as he translates and adapts their prose. An analysis of novella's opening pages illustrates this process.

In the Prologue to *Atala*, Chateaubriand's panoramic view of the Mississippi quickly becomes kaleidoscopic in its focus on a variety of particulars. Though it seems fantastic, the author's initial view of Louisiana is almost entirely appropriated from his sources, and its fidelity to the original passages continues to fascinate critics. Beyond their status as stand-ins for landscapes that he never actually saw, however, the source passages themselves have been of less interest. Whether critics have celebrated or discredited it, *Atala* has nonetheless represented a total vision of Louisiana that subsumes its constituent parts. However, to read *Atala* as just one node within a network of Louisiana texts, it is necessary to disrupt this hierarchy and

consider the novella alongside its sources. Instead of thinking of it as a *fait accompli*, I consider the book's possibility at the time it was composed and published. Rather than think of the book as something borne aloft by its sources, or something that transcends them artistically, I consider how *Atala* and its sources as written and printed documents were the periodic yet continual sediment of more than one hundred years of exploration and settlement. The following discussion therefore places passages from Chateaubriand's sources ahead of his own prose adaptations and not the other way around, as is typically the case. In this way, emphasis may be placed on the language and imagery these passages made available to the author of *Atala*. At the same time, it is possible to consider the context in which the source passages were written, and how their language and imagery emerge from specific colonial practices.

In the introduction to *Travels through the interior parts of North-America, in the years 1766, 1767, and 1768* (London, 1778), Carver makes clear that one of the goals of the expedition was to ascertain, with more certainty than previously, the sources of the Mississippi. After lamenting the small scale of the existing French maps of the North American interior and discrediting their accuracy, he concludes that they "were only copied from the rude sketches of the Indians" (iii). He asserts that, in respect to the Indians of the interior as well as the heads of the continent's major rivers, his account contains discoveries never before published.<sup>50</sup> In the

---

<sup>50</sup> Both the authorship and the veracity of Carver's account (in regard to first-hand observation) have been questioned. Like almost all of these travel narratives, it is most likely a pastiche of original material and prior written sources, whether acknowledged or not. On the other hand, the formal histories, like Charlevoix's, are meticulously indexed and footnoted.

narrative itself, he writes, “From the intelligence I gained from the Naudowessie Indians, ... I say from these nations, together with my own observations”:

I have learned that the four most capital rivers on the Continent of North America, viz. the St. Lawrence, the Mississippi, the River Bourbon, and the Oregon or the River of the West (as I hinted in my Introduction) have their sources in the same neighborhood. ... This shows that these parts are the highest lands in North America; and it is an instance not to be paralleled on the other three quarters of the globe, that four rivers of such magnitude should take their rise together, ... For in their passage from this spot to the bay of St. Lawrence, east, to the bay of Mexico, south, to Hudson’s Bay, north, and to the bay at the Straights of Annian, west, each of these traverse upwards of two thousand miles. (76-7)

While Carver over and again emphasizes the immensity of what he describes, in describing it he simultaneously brings it down to size. By presenting it as a matter of fact, as something waiting to be discovered, he renders it static, as if he is describing it from the map folded into the book. What the passage somewhat obscures is the presumption upon which it rests, a vantage point that makes it possible to see the entire continent at once, and this vantage point was at the time as much of a discovery as the sources of the rivers. Nevertheless, whether it is the imagination of actually commanding such a view, or the reality of standing over a map, Carver’s description of North America and its implicit viewpoint provide Chateaubriand with the means to generate an effect not present to the same degree in the original. In the first lines of the Prologue, he writes, “France formerly possessed, in North America, a vast empire, which extended from Labrador to the Floridas, and from the shores of the Atlantic to the remotest lakes of Upper Canada”:

Four great rivers, having their sources in the same mountains, divide these immense regions; the river St. Lawrence, which loses itself in the East, in the gulf of its own name; the river of the West, which empties itself into unknown

seas; the river Bourbon which runs from South to North, and falls into Hudson's bay; the Meschaceba which runs from North to South, and empties into the gulf of Mexico.<sup>51</sup> (5-6)

As I discuss in more detail below, Chateaubriand creates an epic space by setting the story in an imperial past, but by filtering the detail out of Carver's language, by reducing the vastness of the continent to its rivers, he produces a cartographic sublime. Although the language is almost exactly the same, the difference lies in each author's relationship to the truth. If Carver's account depends on a one-to-one correspondence for its realism—it purports to describe what is really out there—then Chateaubriand's realism depends on reproducing the feeling or affect of occupying the vantage point itself. While Carver's reader may be impressed by the facts, Chateaubriand's is impressed by an experience, and this contrast is at the root of his overall aesthetic. The critics who have accused him of not always getting it right are therefore perhaps missing the point. The authors of his source material were after knowledge; the narratives and their publication were the means to practical ends. Chateaubriand may have transformed these narratives into wonder, but this does not erase their materiality. Rather, as another colonial document, his prose leaves behind another layer of sediment. As the New World encounter in Louisiana was in part

---

<sup>51</sup> “La France possédoit autrefois, dans l’Amérique septentrionale, un vaste empire, qui s’étendoit depuis le Labrador jusqu’aux Florides, et depuis les rivages de l’Atlantique jusqu’aux lacs les plus reculés du haut Canada. Quatre grands fleuves, ayant leurs sources dans les mêmes montagnes, divisoient ces régions immenses: le fleuve Saint-Laurent, que se perd à l’Est dans le golfe de son nom; la rivière de l’Ouest, qui porte ses eaux à des mers inconnues; le fleuve Bourbon qui se précipite du midi au nord dans la baie d’Hudson; et le Meschacebé, qui descendant du nord au midi, s’ensevelit dans le golfe du Mexique” (1-2).

about controlling waterways to access land, Chateaubriand's prose here reflects that effort, and the affect he creates depends on the interplay of water, soil, and the wetlands that mediate them.

Moving from the continental to the regional scale, Thomas Hutchins trains an even more pragmatic eye on the territory. In *An Historical Narrative and Topographical Description of Louisiana, and West-Florida* (Philadelphia, 1784), he participates in the ongoing project (of the French, the Spanish, and now the Anglo-Americans) to make known, for strategic purposes, the mouth of the Mississippi and its lower courses.<sup>52</sup> Like many before him and many yet to come, he is struck by the dynamism of the river below New Orleans. In a lengthy description, he in part writes, "it is certain that when La Salle sailed down the Mississippi to the sea, the opening of that river was very different from what it is at present":

The nearer you approach to the sea, this truth becomes more striking. The bars that cross most of these small channels, opened by the current, have been multiplied by means of the trees carried down with the streams; one of which stopped by its roots or branches, in a shallow part, is sufficient to obstruct the passage of thousands more, and to fix them at the same place. ... No human force being sufficient for removing them, the mud carried down by the river serves to bind them and cement them together. They are gradually covered, and every inundation not only extends their length and breadth, but adds another layer to their height. In less than ten years time, canes and shrubs grow on them, and form points and islands, which forcibly shift the bed of the river. (25-6)

---

<sup>52</sup> The full title makes this more apparent: *An Historical Narrative and Topographical Description of Louisiana, and West-Florida, Comprehending the River Mississippi with its Principal Branches and Settlements, and the Rivers Pearl, Pascagoula, Mobile, Perdido, Escambia, Chacta-hatcha, &c. The Climate, Soil, and Produce whether Animal, Vegetable, or Mineral; with Directions for Sailing into all the Bays, Lakes, Harbours and Rivers on the North Side of the Gulf of Mexico, and for Navigating between the Islands situated along that Coast, and ascending the Mississippi River.*

While certainly impressed by the river's power and immensity—he also notes that “[s]uch collections of trees are daily seen between the Balize and the Missouri, which singly would supply the largest city in Europe, with fuel for several years”—what draws most of his attention is the hydrology of the river and what this means for future settlement. As he explains, “The slime which the annual floods of the river Mississippi leaves on the surface of the adjacent shores, may be compared with that of the Nile, which deposits a similar manure, and for many centuries past has insured the fertility of Egypt.” Further, and this is where the description has been heading, he writes, “When its banks shall have been cultivated as the excellency of its soil and temperature of its climate deserve, its population will equal that, or any other part of the world. The trade, wealth and power of America will at some future period, depend and perhaps center upon the Mississippi” (27). Though Chateaubriand probably read it in Imlay's account—additional evidence of the proliferation and dissemination of this material--Hutchins's description found its way into *Atala*.

Following the novella's introductory passage, the scope of the narrator's gaze likewise contracts from the continental to the regional scale, and the extent of the territory is defined by the Mississippi in language that reaches all the way back to La Salle and the *proces verbal*. The author writes, “This last river, through a course of more than a thousand leagues, waters a delightful country, which the inhabitants of the United States call NEW EDEN, and to which the French have left the soft name of Louisiana.” These lines then give way to a passage that re-inscribes the prose of Hutchins:

A thousand other rivers, tributary to the Meschaceba, the Missouri, the Illinois, the Akanza, the Ohio, the Wabash, the Tennessee, &c. enrich it with their slime, and fertilize it with their waters. When all these rivers are swelled by the rains and the melting of the snows; when the tempests have swept over the whole face of the country, TIME collects, from every source, the trees torn from their roots. He fastens them together with vines; he cements them with rich soil; he plants upon them young shrubs, and launches his work upon the waters. Transported by the swelling flood, these rafts descend from all parts into the Meschaceba. The old river takes possession of them, and pushes them forward to his mouth, in order there to form with them a new branch. Sometimes he raises his mighty voice in passing between the mountains; expanding his waters; overflowing the loftiest trees, those colonnades of the forest; and deluging the pyramids of the Indian tombs. This is the Nile of the deserts.<sup>53</sup> (5-7)

Working with the source material provided by Hutchins, Chateaubriand washes it over with a layer of personification—time and the river have become the agents of this dynamic tableau—and Hutchins’s straight comparison between the Mississippi and the Nile has become in the latter’s prose an invocation of the ancient world. With these appropriately sublime figures and images, Chateaubriand remains in epic mode, though the details of the scene have become picturesque, as illustrated by his adaptation of the Hutchins’s utilitarian description of the rafts of trees: “No human force being sufficient for removing them, the mud carried down by the river serves to

---

<sup>53</sup> “Ce dernier fleuve, dans un cours de plus de mille lieues, arosé une délicieuse contrée, que les habitans des Etats-Unis appellent le nouvel Eden, et à qui les Francois ont laissé le doux nom de Louisiane. Mille autres fleuves, tributaires du Meschacebé ... l’engraissant de leur limon, et la fertilisent de leurs eaux. Quand tous ces fleuves se sont gonflés des déluges de l’hiver; quand les tempêtes ont abattu des pans entiers de forêts; le Temps assemble, sur toutes les sources, les arbres déracinés. Il les unit avec des vases, il y plante de jeunes arbrisseaux, et lance son ouvrage sur les ondes. Chariés par les vagues écumantes, ces radeaux descendent de toutes parts au Meschacebé. Le vieux fleuve s’en empare, et les pousse à son embouchure pour y former une nouvelle branche. Par intervalle, il élève sa grande voix, en passant sous les monts, et répand ses eaux débordées autour des colonnades des forêts, et des pyramids des tombeaux indiens: c’est le Nil des déserts” (2-4).

bind them and cement them together,” once it is filtered through Chateaubriand’s style, becomes, “TIME collects, from every source, the trees torn from their roots. He fastens them together with vines; he cements them with rich soil.” As was the case with its adaptation of the Carver passage, the truth or realism of *Atala* is not to be found in the accuracy of what it describes, even if the passage retains a general sense of how the mouths of the river are formed. Rather, the truth lies in his recreation of an emotion one might feel in the river’s presence. To produce this effect, if he must stray in his source material away from the Mississippi, then it cannot be said that it undercuts his particular realism.

That *Atala* is not absolutely bound to topographical or geographical accuracy is perhaps best illustrated by Chateaubriand’s repeated reliance on Bartram’s *Travels through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida* (1791). Though Bartram’s narrative touches only briefly on Louisiana, Chateaubriand nevertheless adapts an extended passage from the *Travels* for his description of the lower Mississippi. In narrating his descent of the river St. Juan’s in Florida, between Fort Picolata and Charlotteville—more or less due west of St. Augustine—Bartram writes:

It being a fine cool morning, and fair wind, I sat sail early, and saw, this day, vast quantities of the *Pistia stratiotes*, a very singular aquatic plant. It associates in large communities, or floating islands, some of them a quarter of a mile in extent, which are impelled to and fro, as the wind and current may direct. They are first produced on, or close to, the shore, in eddy water, where they gradually spread themselves into the river, forming most delightful green plains, several miles in length, and in some places a quarter of a mile in breadth. ... These floating islands present a very entertaining prospect: for although we behold an assemblage of the primary productions of nature only, yet the imagination seems to remain in suspense and doubt; as in order to enliven the delusion, and form a most picturesque appearance, we see not only flowery plants, clumps of shrubs, old weather-beaten trees, hoary and barbed,

with the long moss waving from their snags, but we also see them completely inhabited, and alive, with crocodiles, serpents, frogs, otters, crows, herons, curlews, jackdaws, &c. (93-4)

This detail of this passage is typical of the minutia that draws Bartram's attention as a practicing naturalist, but it also reveals his interest in framing his descriptions with aesthetic devices. Here, by controlling the "picturesque" and "entertaining prospect" presented by the floating islands, Bartram makes available a description of New World nature that operates on a scale more intimate than Carver's sublime. As Chateaubriand translates Bartram's description of the St. Juan's into his own of the Mississippi, the inherent scale of the former, governed by the naturalist's eye, articulates itself to Chateaubriand's general thesis about the harmony of nature, even in its wildest form:

But in scenes of nature, elegance is always united with magnificence; and while the middle current wafts towards the sea the carcasses of pines and oaks, you may see, all along each shore, floating islands of pistia and nenuphar, ascending the river, by the force of contrary currents; the yellow blossoms of which rise into the appearance of little pavilions. Green serpents, blue herons, flamingoes, young crocodiles, embark as passengers on board these vessels of flowers; and the little colony, displaying to the winds its golden sails, gently glides towards the shore, and sleeps securely in some retired creek. (7)

In this passage, which follows immediately the comparison of the Mississippi to the Nile, the author completes the contraction of his focus from a continental to a local scale, and the aesthetic device of the sublime has fully given way for a moment to the picturesque. At the same time, Chateaubriand's fidelity to Bartram's description and its specificity continues to link the seemingly fantastic prose of the Prologue to the colonial encounter.

The governing aesthetic, however, in keeping with the epic mode, is the sublime, and in passage that follows, Chateaubriand illustrates his particular gift for blending the grand with the grotesque. Here, the author evokes the ancient world but cloaks it in the particulars of the Americas by painting an ancient, slimy-bearded bison as the god of the Mississippi:

Sometimes a bison, borne down with years, cuts through the waves, and lands upon some island of the Meschaceba, to sleep quietly among the high grass. By his forehead, ornamented with two crescents, and his grisly beard, you would take him for the bellowing river god; who casts a look over the waters, and seems satisfied with the wild productions which its shores so abundantly yield. (8)<sup>54</sup>

Beyond the frame of the Prologue, however, the total narrative is not able to completely sustain the sublime aesthetic, and just as Chactas's story gets bogged down in the swamp, so does the epic get sidetracked when it enters the territory of the romantic. Given the author's choice of subject matter, the shift in registers is not unexpected if not entirely inevitable. By wedding what Victor Hugo defines as "the grotesque and the sublime," the novella's total effect is not epic but thoroughly modern, and the landscape that achieves this effect in the narrative is the swamp.<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> In Chateaubriand's French: "Quelquefois un bison chargé d'années, fendant les flots à la nage, se vient coucher parmi les hautes herbes dans un île de Meschacebé. A son front orné de deux croissons, à sa barbe antique et limoneuse, vous le prendriez pour le dieu mugissant du fleuve, qui jette un oeil satisfait sur la grandeur de ses ondes, et la sauvage abondance de ses rives" (5). Charlevoix is the source of this image.

<sup>55</sup> See the "Preface to Cromwell" (1827), Hugo's manifesto of the new poetry of the new age; or, what would become, in retrospect, romanticism.

## History and Narrative: *Atala's* Emplotments

As *Atala's* Epilogue begins, the reader has been twice distanced from the action of the *récit*: first, by the framing device of the Prologue's outside narration and, second, by the internal device of Chactas relating his tale retrospectively at the end of his life. The story, then, is made to seem remote, already fading into legend, and this effect is at first maintained, even as the Prologue's impersonal narrator is transformed into a particular figure: "a traveller to distant lands" (158) who has recorded Chactas's tale as told him by a Seminole who, in turn, had heard it as it was handed down within his clan. However, the Epilogue quickly reveals a narrative complexity that was only hinted at in the Prologue: Chactas's tale, while the novella's focus, also functions to set up the story of the "voyageur," who having heard the tale (and having retold it), still desired to discover what had become of Father Aubry, something no one could tell him. With the help of "Providence," he explains, he did, and he tells the reader, "Observe how it happened" (159). Suddenly, the reader is right at hand to the narrator, a step closer to Chactas's story, and that immediacy is heightened as he relates the circumstance of his discovery, which reveals the sublime (and the desire for spectacle) to be the governing aesthetic of the entire narrative: "I had travelled all over the country, bordering on the Meschaceba, which formed, on the south, the magnificent boundaries of New France; and I had the curiosity of seeing on the north, the other wonder of this empire, the cataract of Niagara."<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup> "J'avois parcouru les rivages du Meschacébé, qui formoient au midi les magnifiques barrières de la Nouvelle-France, et j'étois curieux de voir au nord l'autre merveille de cet empire, la cataracte de Niagara" (186).

Once there, the narrator relates, “with admiration bordering on terror, I contemplated this spectacle of nature’s mighty work” (168). However, notwithstanding the extended description that precedes this statement, his emotion in this scene has been tempered by another encounter, immediately prior, with an Indian woman mourning her dead child. She, it turns out, belongs to a refugee band of Indians—the only survivors of the Natchez after their uprising against the French—and is none other than Celuta, “la fille de la fille de René.” Upon the narrator’s inquiries, she relates, “Chactaw, who had received baptism, and René, my grandfather, perished in the massacre” (171). Aubry, as Celuta explains, fared no better: prior to the events at Natchez, he was tortured, burned to death by the Cherokees, apparently as part of the general animosity against the intruding French colonists.

The Natchez Massacre occurred in 1729, so the Prologue’s designation of 1725 for Chactas’s tale becomes newly significant. By placing the Epilogue’s action within two generations of René—effectively allowing the narrator to enter the novella’s central romance—the date structures the narrative as a whole, but it also ties the story to the historical event that would receive epic treatment in *Les Natchez*.<sup>57</sup> Because the reader is linked through the narrator to Celuta, the Epilogue performs most of the novella’s narrative work. Following her account of the murder, Celuta describes the return of Chactas to Aubry’s mission, and she therefore provides the coda to this story, by bringing full circle Chactas’s journey from the wilderness of Louisiana to the civilization of France and then back again. *Atala*, however, does not

---

<sup>57</sup> For readers who choose to associate the narrator with Chateaubriand, the author was himself at Niagara in 1791.

end there. Her final words, as the narrative's final move, bring the narrator and thus the reader into direct contact with the novella's central protagonist: "O stranger, thou canst contemplate these bones, with those of Chactaw himself" (176). Along with the uncanny revelation of Chactas's bones (in the sublime setting of Niagara no less), the seeming eruption of both legend and history into the already disrupted narrative is what concerns me here: with the appearance of Atala, Aubry, and Chactas's remains, have the narrator and reader entered the space of romance, tragedy, or epic history? Or is it a mix of all three?

In the Preface to *Atala*, Chateaubriand writes, "I was very young when I first conceived the idea of writing an epic poem on man, as he exists in a state of nature, or in other words, of delineating the manners of savages, by connecting them with some well known incident. I could not find any one so interesting (particularly to Frenchmen) after the discovery of America, as the massacre of the colony of the Natchez in Louisiana, in the year 1727."<sup>58</sup> As Gordon Sayre notes, the novella "did not fulfill this epic pretension" (381), which instead fell to *Les Natchez*, a more complete treatment of the topic not published until 1826. In writing his "epic on the Man of Nature," however, Chateaubriand was not the first to consider the dramatic potential of the Natchez uprising and the French retaliation, and he owed a debt, as Sayre explains, to both Dumont de Montigny's *Mémoires historiques sur la Louisiane* (1753) and Le Page du Pratz's *Histoire de la Louisiane* (1758), two colonial works whose narratives were built, to different ends, around this episode. Sayre discusses

---

<sup>58</sup> The accurate date is 1729.

this debt and “aims not only to recover a long-ignored French colonial literature of Louisiana, but to reveal what Hayden White called the ‘emplotment’ of historical events into meaningful narratives” (383). In White’s words, “Historical situations are not inherently tragic, comic, or romantic. ... How a given historical situation is to be configured depends on the historian's subtlety in matching up a specific plot structure with the set of historical events that he wishes to endow with meaning” (383, qtd.). Although the French were not victors in the colonial contest for the Americas, it is not difficult, Sayre suggests, to imagine an “alternative historiography” in which the Natchez would have taken on a mythic significance similar to that of Montezuma in Mexico or Metacom in New England. For “political and literary reasons,” he explains, the colonial writers each conceived of a conspiratorial Natchez plot to justify the French reprisals, and Dumont “brought a mock-epic, even hudibrastic tone to many scenes” (388), while “Le Page du Pratz made them, by the rules of Aristotle, fit subjects for tragedy” (392). The case is more complex for Chateaubriand, who Sayre calls a “recovering Rousseauvian, an aristocrat, and a defender of the French *ancien regime*” (402), someone who could have imagined the Natchez as representative of either side in the French Revolution. Ultimately, Sayre argues, “Because it uses the Natchez massacre for its climax,” *Les Natchez*:

is an epic of the tribe's defeat and of the French colony's vengeful victory. But as a romance about the entire French colonial experience in North America, it follows Rene's (and Chateaubriand's) exile, wandering, and defeat. *Les Natchez* combines not only epic and romance, but revolutionary and reactionary, Native and Christian, in an uneasy, sometimes absurd mix. (402)

While *Les Natchez* remains a little-read text, and the significance of the Natchez uprising itself was “subsumed in the histories of subsequent colonial wars and

revolutions” (407), evidence of the author’s “uneasy, sometimes absurd mix” of history and narrative modes endures in *Atala*, which was published alone but conceived as an episode in this larger work. The novella’s Prologue and Epilogue, especially, operate as links to *Les Natchez* and remain imbued with the epic impulse. At the same time, *Atala*’s melodramatic central plot may be tied to the author’s *Génie*, for which it was designed to exemplify the “the harmonies of the Christian religion with the scenes of nature and the passions of the human heart.” For the narrative on its own, the tension between these modes is most apparent as a stylistic contrast, and the epic grandeur of the framing device struggles and ultimately fails to contain the romantic excess of the core plot. In the Epilogue, especially, something more profound occurs when the layers of the narrative collapse and the *marais impraticable* oozes back, not just into the other parts of novella, but also into the narratives of the *Génie* and *Les Natchez*, the two works for which *Atala* was conceived as an integral part.

### **In and Out of the Slime: *Atala*’s Sublime Landscapes**

In the interior of the North American continent, in the heart of New France, Chateaubriand imagines the wetlands, and the first part of *Atala*, “Les Chasseurs,” reaches its climax in a swamp. In perhaps the novella’s most over-determined scene, twenty-seven days after Chactas and Atala have plunged into the wilderness, effectively severing any link to human society, the author brings together Chactas’s desire, Atala’s temptation, and the revelation of Lopez as their common bond. Taking

its cue from the characters' suppressed passion, nature rouses itself in a magnificent display of the pathetic fallacy. "Every thing announced a storm," Chactas begins. "All the voices of the solitude ceased":

the desert was hushed; the mute forests rested in a universal calm. Presently, the rolling of far distant thunder, extending into these woods, as old as the world, forced from them sounds which were truly sublime. Fearing that we should be buried in the deep, we strove to gain the shore, and to seek shelter in a thicket. (74-5)<sup>59</sup>

In effect, these "sublime rumblings" press the lovers into the mire, where they find themselves entangled among vines, blinded by insects and bats, and surrounded by the hissing of snakes and the roaring of innumerable beasts. As Chactas explains, "The place where we landed was a marshy piece of ground. ... The humid ground made a rumbling noise all around us, and every moment we were in danger of being swallowed up in quagmire" (75).<sup>60</sup> As the setting for their desire and temptation, placed beneath a violent thunderstorm whose lightning sets fire to the forest, this "swampy terrain" is entirely appropriate for the Christian allegory that Chateaubriand is pushing in this scene. However, the allegory is undermined by Chactas's individuality as a narrator, which comes from his unique perspective, a standpoint that is at once inside and outside of the wilderness landscape. As the author explains in the Preface,

---

<sup>59</sup> "Tout annonçoit un orage, ... Toutes les voix de la solitude s'éteignirent, le désert fit silence, et les forêts muettes demeurèrent dans un calme universel. Bientôt les roulemens d'un tonnerre lointain, se prolongeant dans ces bois aussi antiques que le monde, en firent sortir des bruits sublimes. Craignant d'être submergés dans le fleuve, nous nous hâtâmes de gagner le bord, et de nous retirer dans une forêt" (84).

<sup>60</sup> "Ce lieu étoit un terrain marécageux. ... Le sol humide murmuroit autour de nous, et à chaque instant nous étions près d'être engloutis dans des foudrières" (84-5).

Chactas ... is a savage, endowed with genius, and more than half civilized, because he is acquainted with the living and with the dead languages of Europe. He therefore expresses himself in a manner which is adapted to the particular situation in which he is placed, viz, between a state of society and a state of nature. This situation was very advantageous to me, as it enabled me in the delineation of characters, to make him speak like a savage, and in the descriptions, like an European. If he had always spoken as an Indian, *Atala* would have been unintelligible to the reader. (xiv-xvi)<sup>61</sup>

What he calls a “mixed style” appropriate to Chactas’s place between culture and nature, I attribute less to narrative voice and more to narrative position or point of view: by telling the story from the perspective of the Enlightened Indian (post-journey-to-France), the author gestures towards an irrecoverable viewpoint. In the scene under examination, from the reader’s perspective, Chactas is at once an object, the Indian bogged down in the slime of nature, and a subject, the European outside of it, who recollects the sublime power of the storm and shouts, “Quel affreux et magnifique spectacle!” (86).

Chactas’s passage into the slime of the swamp mirrors William Bartram’s representations of similar landscapes in southeastern North America, and here the *Travels* provide Chateaubriand with much of his source material.<sup>62</sup> By appropriating for Chactas a white male, in this case, Creole subject position, Chateaubriand establishes his narrator’s retrospective and subjective relationship to the aesthetic of

---

<sup>61</sup> “Chactas est un Sauvage, qu’on suppose né avec du génie, et qui est plus qu’a moitié civilisé, puisque non-seulement il sait les langues vivantes, mais encore les langues mortes de l’Europe. Il doit donc s’exprimer dans un style mêlé, convenable à la ligne sur laquelle il marche, entre la société et la nature. Cela m’a donné de grands avantages, en le faisant parler en Sauvage dans la peinture des moeurs, et en Européen dans le drame et la narration” (xviii).

<sup>62</sup> See Rod Giblett, “Philosophy (and Sociology) in the Wetlands: The S(ub)lime and the Uncanny” (1992).

the swamp. Monique Allewaert, however, denies Bartram's *Travels* (1791) its easy place in the catalogue of eighteenth-century texts through which white colonial subjects were produced as citizens of the republic of letters. If Chactas's perspective is inscribed upon Bartram's, then Allewaert's reading undermines the stability of the original surface. For Bartram, she argues, the distance that separates subject and object was never cut and dry. By situating the author and his text in the "plantation zone," a tropical space in which rationalizing taxonomies are supplanted by an "an assemblage of interpenetrating forces" she calls an "ecology," Allewaert reads the *Travels* against "an eighteenth-century political and aesthetic tradition distinguishing persons ... from the objects and terrains they surveyed" (341). Transformed by this ecology, his objectivity threatened, Bartram was stymied by the swamp, the most "paradigmatically tropical" space of the plantation zone. As "unmappable" spaces, Allewaert explains, swamps undermined the production of "state, economic, and scientific order," and by "repeatedly suck[ing] Anglo-Europeans into their dense networks," swamps "confounded efforts to mine American landscapes to produce commodities, to further science, and to fulfill conventional aesthetic categories—ranging from the picturesque to the sublime." Yet, however "intractable" swamps were for their own purposes, colonials nevertheless recognized them as "navigable terrain for Africans and Indians" (343). If "metropolitan centers" produced "subjects who gained power through an abstract and abstracting print culture," she observes, then "the plantation zone witnessed the emergence of agents who gained power by

combining with ecological forces” (341).<sup>63</sup> Bartram, in Allewaert’s view, oscillated between these forms of subjectivity and agency, neither entirely one nor the other.

Caught between, unable to produce the “useful knowledge” that was the goal of his expedition, Bartram was nevertheless able to use his travels to pursue his “aesthetic ambitions,” as demonstrated by “his turn to the rhetoric associated with the sublime” (344). According to eighteenth-century aesthetic theory, as Allewaert explains, the sublime experience required distance and “thus confirmed the basic assumption of Enlightenment naturalism: that the subject stand apart from the object world that he or she would master.” Furthermore, she writes, “Burke insists that sublime spectacles should give subjects only the idea of danger, for ‘when danger . . . press[es] too nearly,’ it is ‘incapable of giving any delight’ and is, instead, ‘simply terrible.’ Swamps, although in theory “quintessentially sublime spaces,” complicated the practice of this requirement. First, in their immeasurable “magnitude and power,”

---

<sup>63</sup> To explain, she summarizes Michael Warner’s thesis in *Letters of the Republic*: “print culture and the resulting public sphere catalyzed the enlightenment revolutions that birthed the citizen-subject of modern nationalism.” In a culture that privileged public identities over private, and one that also required “private bodies” to be subsumed by the material proliferation of “presses, typefaces, and print artifacts,” the “aim of representative men like Benjamin Franklin was to produce themselves as exemplary citizen-subjects who existed primarily in print and in relation to others who also circulated in print.” Against Warner’s example of Franklin, Allewaert presents Bartram as someone who “had a tortured relation to his printed book” (and the print culture of the public sphere more broadly) and thus exemplifies “the emergence of a mode of agency not equivalent to subjectivity” that developed outside of the metropole. Unlike the “disembodied” (and ideal) subjectivity that defined the citizen-subject, the agency that Allewaert reads in Bartram’s account is embodied as well as “possessed” by the landscapes it encounters: “Bodies so penetrated could not be diffused into singular yet abstract corpuses like that of a republic sustained by print culture; they were pulled instead into the sprawling (and overlapping) biological, economic, and social systems of the plantation zone” (342-3).

swamps do not just “seem dangerous; they are dangerous,” as Bartram’s account demonstrates. Moreover, swamps do not offer the foothold or vantage point requisite for the sublime spectacle:

white men who move through swamps do not gain ground firm enough to sustain conceptualizations that will confirm that their (subjective) capacities for empiricism, reason, or aesthetic appreciation are greater than the threat of the swamps. In swamps, the subjective and objective converge, making clearly delimited human subjectivity impossible.

For Allewaert, this impossibility is revealed by Bartram at least once as a wish for annihilation. Overcome by his surroundings, he finds himself “deprived of every desire but that of ending my troubles as speedily as possible” (345, qtd.). Though he tries to frame his appeal with sublime rhetoric, she writes, “his inability to produce a subjectivity that bounds sublime scenes ... devolves into an impassioned fusion of human, animal, and vegetable life, and here the aesthetic project of colonialism is as deeply compromised as its scientific one” (345). When read in the shadow of Allewaert’s analysis of Bartram’s aesthetics, the “mixed style” of Chactas’s voice becomes less a matter of bridging the nature/culture divide, and more a recognition that the side of culture or society is not as intelligible as Chateaubriand suggests.

### **The Louisiana Pastoral and the Missions of Paraguay**

Following the climactic scene in the swamp, Father Aubry leads Chactas and Atala out of the wilderness and up to his mountain retreat. From Chactas’s narrative point of view, that of the Enlightened Indian, the change in scene signals his move out of the landscape and into a subject position. As one of “Les Chasseurs,” or

“Hunters,” Chactas—even in his telling—has no clear point of view, is embedded in the wilderness, nearly swallowed by the sublime landscape, but the intervention of Aubry enables him to see “Les Laboueurs,” or “Husbandmen,” within the new frame of the pastoral. Just as he witnesses for the first time the “divine mystery,” Chactas gets his first glimpse of enclosure upon entering Aubry’s village. His inscription by religion is immediately paralleled by the inscription of the land. “Surveyors with long chains measured the land, and arbitrators established the first rights,” he narrates. “I rambled with delight over a part of these landscapes,” Chactas explains, admiring “the triumph of Christianity over the savage life.” He “saw man becoming civilized at the voice of religion” and “assisted at the first nuptials of man, and the earth” (103).<sup>64</sup> By introducing the pastoral, Chateaubriand participates in one of Western literature’s oldest traditions, and within the romance of the core narrative, “Les Labourers” functions as the idyll that sets up the climactic action of “Le Drame,” which quickly dashes all the hope and promise generated by the chance meeting with Aubry and arrival at the mission. In the context of New World narrative, however, the author also participates in a complementary tradition, coeval with the colonial period, of superimposing ancient and European pastoral landscapes upon those in the Americas in order to tame the wilderness.

---

<sup>64</sup> “Là régnoit le mélange le plus touchant de la vie social et de la vie de la nature: au coin d’une cyprière de l’antique désert, on découvroit une culture naissant. [...] Des arpenteurs, avec de longues chaines, alloient mesurant le désert, et des arbitres établissoient les premières propriétés. L’oiseau cédoit son nid” and “le repaire de la bête féroce se changeoit en une cabane” (118). [...] “le triomphe du christianisme sur la vie sauvage” [...] “l’homme se civilisant a la voix de la religion” [...] “noces primitives de l’homme et de la terre” (119).

Somewhat different than the pastoral of Rousseau, as well as that of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, the author to whom he is often compared, Chateaubriand's pastoral presents an image of nature that is not primitive or pure, untouched in its harmony with man. Rather, it is an image of nature that has been brought into harmony with man through the intervention of civilization, in this case the gentle hand a religious community. Likewise, on the question of the Indian, the author does not perpetuate the image of the pure or even noble savage. Instead, he takes a measured position that is in keeping with the novella's preface, where he distances himself from Rousseau, that "enthousiaste des Sauvages," and suggests that when he has had the chance to see "la pure nature," supposedly the most beautiful thing in the world, he has found it very ugly. Noting that he has perhaps less cause than Rousseau to complain about society, he is nonetheless far from the opinion that thinking man is an "animal dépravé" (xvi). Thought, he believes, is what makes the man. While the narrative itself does not exactly echo these sentiments, it explores their limits, and Father Aubry gives them voice when explaining his mission to Chactas and Atala: "Quand j'arrivai dans ces lieux, je n'y trouvai que des familles vagabonds, dont les moeurs étoient féroces et la vie fort misérable" (105). With an understanding of "la parole de paix," he explains, their customs have gradually softened, and they have come together in a small Christian society at the foot of the mountain. "J'ai tâché," he continues, "en les instruisant dans la voie du salut, de leur enseigner les premiers arts de la vie; mais sans les porter trop loin, et en retenant ces honnêtes gens dans cette simplicité qui fait bonheur" (106). Though Chateaubriand's opinion of "la pure

nature” accords with Aubry’s first encounter with “la vie fort misérable” of the Indian, the author is less consistent with his character’s patriarchal pedagogical philosophy. By not carrying Indians too far in their education, Aubry goes against Chateaubriand’s remark that “thought makes the man,” that is, unless the Indian belongs to a separate category. Due to the facelessness of the population that Aubry describes, it would be easy to establish this category, to reach the conclusion that, for the author, “*some* thought makes the Indian,” but this claim does not account for the complexity of Chactas (and to a lesser degree Atala), which depends on the character’s varying relationship with the landscape.

Chateaubriand’s possible sources for the depiction of Father Aubry’s mission have also been established, and especially when *Atala* is read as part of the *Génie*, it becomes apparent that he was inspired by the Jesuit accounts of the missions to Paraguay and the establishment of settlements, or reductions, that of Loretto in particular. An additional image is thus added to the composite landscape of the novella, and Chateaubriand’s imagination of Louisiana expands beyond the borders of North America. As already noted, *Atala* appears in full in Part III of the larger work, in a book entitled, “Harmonies de la religion chrétienne avec les scènes de la nature et les passions du coeur humain.” Immediately following this section, Chateaubriand takes up more explicitly the praxis of the Church in the fourth and final part of the *Génie*, entitled “Culte,” or “Worship,” which dedicates a book or section to a history of the missions, both in the Old and New Worlds.

Arguing against the cultural hegemony of the classical world, and in keeping with his ongoing claim for the superiority of the Christian ethos, he writes, “The ancient philosophers themselves never quitted the enchanting walks of Academus and the pleasures of Athens, to go actuated by a sublime impulse, to civilize the savage, to instruct the ignorant, to cure the sick, to clothe the poor, to sow the seeds of peace and harmony among hostile nations; but this is what [C]hristians have done, and are still doing every day” (Kett 95).<sup>65</sup> At the same, the author grounds this ethos in the physical travails of the missionaries, and it is in this context that Father Aubry, as a character, becomes properly legible:

When regenerated Europe presented to the preachers of the true faith but one great family of brethren, they turned their eyes towards those distant regions, where so many souls still languished in the darkness of idolatry. They were filled with compassion upon beholding the deep degradation of man; they felt within them an irresistible desire to sacrifice their lives for the salvation of these benighted strangers. They had to penetrate immense forests; to traverse almost impassable morasses, to cross dangerous rivers, to climb inaccessible rocks; they had cruel, superstitious, and jealous nations to encounter; in some they had to struggle with all the ignorance of barbarism, in others with all the prejudices of civilization; all these obstacles were incapable of daunting them. (Kett 96)

Here, as a necessary item in Chateaubriand’s list of topographical obstacles, the *marais impraticable* begins to move out of the realm of rhetoric, as it is encountered in *Atala*, and becomes increasingly a fact of history as the author develops his account. It must be noted, however, that in the *Génie* and the relations from which Chateaubriand draws his material the “impassable morasses,” the “dangerous rivers,” the “inaccessible rocks” never completely shed their status as figures, inasmuch as the

---

<sup>65</sup> Here and below, I quote from Chateaubriand, *The Beauties of Christianity*, trans. Frederic Shoberl, ed. Henry Kett (London, 1813).

American continents seem to provide these obstacles as matters of revelation, that is, as material impediments to spiritual progress. Here, again, the work of Chateaubriand in both its fictional and historical adaptations of the Jesuit relations may be positioned at a turn from a typological to a topographical realism.

In his brief synthesis of the Jesuit relations, Chateaubriand makes reference to the *Lettres édifiantes*, but he relies primarily on Charlevoix's *Histoire du Paraguay* (1756) for drawing the South American landscape, and Charlevoix, in turn, draws on the history of Father Pedro Lozano, among others. In describing the river Paraguay, or "crowned river" in the language of the natives, Chateaubriand writes, "Before it swells the Rio de la Plata it receives the waters of the Parana [sic] and Uruguay [sic]. Forests, in which are embosomed other forests, levelled by the hand of time, morasses and plains completely inundated in the rainy season, mountains which rear deserts over deserts, form part of the vast regions watered by the Paraguay" (Kett 119).<sup>66</sup> As his account continues, the familiar and contradictory tropes of Nature begin to appear.

---

<sup>66</sup>Compare Charlevoix: "This vast country, besides Chaco, which is as it were the center of it, though not as yet reduced, contains the lake of the Xarayes, the provinces of Santa Cruz and las Charcas, with Tucuman to the west; all the course of the Parana and the Rio de la Plata to the east; and to the south all the rest of the continent as far as the streights of Magellan, where the Jesuits have of late begun to found some missions. It is pretty evident, that in so great an extent of land, watered by an infinite number of rivers, covered with immense forests, intersected by long chains of mountains, most of them very high, and some even reaching to the clouds; where all the low-lands are subject to inundations, for extent and duration superior to those of any other country we are acquainted with; where there are every where great numbers of lakes and marshes, whose putrefied waters cannot but greatly infect the air; where the lands, in fine, that have been cleared and cultivated, are nothing in comparison to those, that still remain in a state of nature; it is pretty evident, I say, that in such a vast country, there must be a great variety in the temperature of it's air, as well as in the manners and character of its inhabitants" (*History of Paraguay* 7-8).

From the *Lettres*, he cites a first-hand relation: “I continued my route without knowing whither it would lead me, and without meeting any person from whom I might obtain information. In the midst of these woods I sometimes found enchanting spots. All that the study and ingenuity of man could devise to render a place agreeable, would fall short of the beauties which simple Nature has here collected.” And, to contrast this European encounter with a paradise in the midst of the wilderness, he immediately follows this meditation with an opinion of the natives in the same landscape: “The Indians who were found in these retreats resembled other tribes only in their worst points. This insolent, stupid and ferocious race, displayed an example of primitive man degraded by the fall in all his deformity. Nothing affords a stronger proof of the degeneracy of human nature than the littleness of the savage amid the grandeur of the desert” (Kett 120). The correspondence between the intractable native and the impracticable landscape established, Chateaubriand then describes the arduous task faced by the Jesuits: “The ancient accounts pourtray [sic] them with a breviary under the left arm, a large cross in the right hand, and with no other provision than their trust in the Almighty. They represent them forcing their way through forests, wading through morasses where they were up to the waist in water, climbing rugged rocks, penetrating into caverns and precipices, at the risk of finding in them serpents and ferocious beasts instead of the men whom they were seeking.” In the Christian context, the missionary—who understands his fallen status—would recognize these “enchanting spots” as revelations in the wilderness: in figural terms, they offer glimpses of both the paradise lost and the paradise to be

regained. In their ignorance of God, the natives on the other hand are simply fallen, and they are subject only to “the degeneracy of human nature,” unable to differentiate the “beauties” of Nature from its “grandeur.” While the suggestion here is that the Jesuits would save the natives from their nature and elevate their status as humans, in Chateaubriand’s treatment it is impossible to escape the aesthetic judgment that is bound up in this process. To be fully human, for Chateaubriand, is to be able to differentiate oneself from Nature by seeing, understanding, and experiencing the landscape of Nature in very particular ways.

### **A Melancholy Return: Unsettling *Atala*’s Middle Landscape**

As a defining trope of the pastoral, the *locus amoenus* or “pleasant place” was adapted with ease to New World landscapes by European writers, and Luz Pimental attributes the durability of the scheme to its readiness to inscribe itself upon emerging discourses. In an extended discussion of Saint-Pierre’s *Paul et Virginie* (1787), she demonstrates how the trope, by abstracting the local specificity of tropical flora and fauna, participated in the development and the rhetorical domestication of the exotic as well as its portability. If the scheme that organizes nature is generalizable to multiple locales, and the Mexican *maguey* figures exoticism no more or less than the generic palm, then it is no wonder that “Romantic nature may often take on such strong allegorical overtones.”<sup>67</sup> As Pimental argues, this is exactly what happens in *Paul et Virginia*: “Nature, as the extension of the human soul, is played out almost as

---

<sup>67</sup> She identifies a *maguey* in a Hipólito Salazar illustration for a Mexican edition of *Pablo y Virginia* (1843).

an allegory of the course of human life; the myth of the *locus amoenus* dynamically interacts with its opposite, the wasteland, as two poles in this pre-Romantic meditation on nature.” To paraphrase her take on the narrative, nature in the form of a tropical storm pollutes “the initial unity and perfection of Virginia’s fountain spring,” a move that reflects “the lovers’ impending separation,” as well as “Virginia’s growing into maidenhood” (162). “Appropriately,” Pimental concludes, “the novel ends with a description of nature that works as the rhetorical antithesis of the *locus amoenus*, a vision of the wasteland in which, significantly, what little remains of the idyllic world has now been expelled from the paradisiacal middle course” (163). Because she pairs the *locus amoenus* with the wasteland, Pimental organizes Saint-Pierre’s landscape in a way that is important for my reading of *Atala*. However, the positing of the two as polar opposites too easily reconciles the complexity of their relationship, at least as it relates to the middle landscape of Father Aubry’s mission and the return of the *marais impraticable*.

By defining the *locus amoenus* as a classical topos, Pimental builds on the work of Ernst Robert Curtius. “As a discursive scheme,” she explains, “the components of *locus amoenus* may reach a high degree of fixation, even at the lexical level, thus becoming conventionalized set pieces or expressions employed as a resource for the composition of subsequent texts belonging to the same genre, usually the pastoral.” The scheme is so fixed, she adds, that it may be reduced to seven elements (“water, grass, trees, flowers, fruits, birds, and domestic or tame animals”), each “located in the middle range of the scale of intensity” and contributing to an

overall semantic “mildness” (158-9). At the center of this idyllic world, of course, is man, who in turn is characterized by *otium*, his contemplative ease and/or idleness.<sup>68</sup> In *Atala*, as I have noted, the mission, with Father Aubry at its center, figures as a kind of expanded *locus amoenus*, a landscape from which Chactas is excluded. Instead, he looks on with wonder, an irony that is later compounded by the narrative of his return to the mission’s ruins, when the author fully incorporates him into the landscape. Oddly enough, Chateaubriand only gives full and focused expression to the *locus amoenus*, in the classical sense, when he has turned that landscape inside out. As a full citation of the passage demonstrates, each of the trope’s seven components is in evidence, along with a contemplative human figure, yet there is something uncanny at play in both their presentation and interaction:

The natural bridge, in falling down, had buried in its ruins the tomb of Atala, and the groves of death. Chactaw wandered about, for a long time, in these solitary places. He visited the hermit's grotto, which he found full of briars and raspberry bushes and in which a doe was suckling her fawn. He sat down upon the rock, near which had rested the body of Atala, during the funeral wake; where he found nothing but a few feathers fallen from the wing of the bird of passage.

While he wept there in silence, the tame serpent of the missionary crept out from among the neighbouring brambles, and twined itself at his feet. He caressed and warmed in his bosom his old friend, which remained alone in the midst of these ruins. The son of Outalissi has declared, that, many times, in the dusk of the evening, he saw the shade of Atala and that of father Aubry, in these solitudes. These visions filled him with a religious awe, and a melancholy joy.

After having sought, to no purpose, for the grave of the hermit, and tried in vain to discover that of Atala, he was about to abandon these places, when the doe of the grotto set to bounding and skipping before him, in the most unusual

---

<sup>68</sup> She expands its significance to an “all pervading myth in the Western imagination,” and edges into Erich Auerbach’s notion of *figura* when she says, “the myth of the *locus amoenus* is, in fact, the spatial/topographical side of the timeless yet time-bound myth of the golden age” (160).

manner. She stopped at the foot of the great cross of the mission. This cross was then half surrounded by water; its wood was overgrown with moss; and the birds of the desert loved to light upon its ancient branches. (173-75)

While no longer a pleasant place, the mission nonetheless carries shades of what Aubry's intervention had wrought, even if the agreeable enclosures and gentle movements that had characterized the landscape have become undifferentiated and stagnant: where there was once grass beside water, there is now an "impassable morass," and the hermit's grotto is filled not with the flowers and fruits of the harvest but with a tangle of berries and brambles. Contributing to the not uninviting effect of the scene, the deer and the serpent of the grotto remain tame, but even the harmony that exists between man and beast is rendered uncanny by the behavior of the former and the very presence of the latter. The author's interpolation of a *marais* into the narrative, therefore, does not in the Epilogue turn the world upside down, as Pimental argues for Saint-Pierre's use of the hurricane in *Paul et Virginie*. Instead of disorder or cacophony, it seems Chateaubriand has wrought the harmony of the *locus amoenus* in a minor key, and the difference between the two registers is best measured by the final image in the passage, in which the doe leads Chactas to the foot of the mission's cross.

In translating the *locus amoenus*'s tree of repose into a single cross, in fact conflating the two symbols with images of old branches and wood "corroded by moss," Chateaubriand demonstrates the allegorical portability of the schema by adapting the ancient form to his modern project of rehabilitating Christianity, but this scene does more than simply move the solitary figure from beneath a tree to beneath a

cross, and shift from nature to God the target of his contemplation. Because the *marais* does not represent a wilderness in which Chactas is lost, the author has not just used the *locus amoenus* to make the leap into a more recognizable Christian allegory. Instead, as the partial return of the landscape that preexisted Aubry's pastoral mission, the *marais* figures as a wasteland, not as the opposite of the *locus amoenus* (as Pimental would have it), but as an alternate middle ground from which the author is able to extract the mutability that is compatible with the contemplation or worship of both nature and God. Because the return of this landscape does not completely erase the settlement, just as the settlement did not completely erase the *marais*, Chactas's encounter is imbued with melancholy, a sentiment that shadows the nostalgia that is typically associated with the pastoral. As a wasteland, the swamp operates not as an opposite to the *locus amoenus* but instead as an inversion, much in the same way it activates the sublime not at the heights or expanse of the wilderness, as in the narrator's descriptions of Niagara and the Mississippi, but in its depths, as in Chactas's description of his flight with Atala into the heart of North America's "marais corrompus" (73). Just as the wild swamp produces an intensity of feeling equal to that of nature at its most majestic, so too does the return of the swamp to a once-cultivated landscape produce a melancholy that matches the measure of the nostalgia effected by the pastoral. Ease turns into unease, not as one opposite replacing the other, but much in the same way that "the savanna was turned into an impassable morass." In this form, nature meets and anticipates Chactas's melancholy,

but with a depth that exceeds the emblematic limits of the allegory itself, as well as its universal application.

Chateaubriand's *marais impraticable* is not Bunyan's "slough of Despond," in other words, and the depth of sentiment or intensity of feeling generated by Chactas's encounter with the swamp is due to the specificity of the landscape itself. Quoting Leo Marx, Pimental notes that "in the age of discovery ... a note of topographical realism entered the pastoral," but she extends his observation to include its converse: "we could also say that a note of the pastoral modified perception of the new reality" (158). In *Atala*, a text located at the chiasmic turn that Pimental describes, both hold true for Chateaubriand's translation of the pastoral into an impassable morass, where fiction melds New and Old World landscapes. As a palimpsest, the landscape of the *marais impraticable* is indelibly marked by Bartram, to whom Chateaubriand's debt has been noted, but it carries other traces, including Charlevoix's *Histoire du Paraguay* (1756), as well as the author's own account, in the *Génie* of the origins of the Catholic church.

### **Tracking the *Pélican des Bois*, or Translating Enlightenment Ecology's Limits**

Beyond its appearance in Chateaubriand's adaptation of the *locus amoenus*, because it is a figure that can be tracked into the author's sources and through a broader network of Atlantic texts, *l'oiseau du désert* (or, "the birds of the desert" in Bingham's translation) deserves further attention. Without a doubt, the original of this bird—the wood pelican (or *le pélican des bois*)—may be found in Bartram's *Travels*,

and Bédier has noted its place in Chateaubriand's *Génie*, which lends it additional significance in the Christian context, especially when one considers the coeval development of the two texts.<sup>69</sup> However, before considering the pelican's more symbolic meanings, it is necessary to first encounter it in the wild in the pages of Bartram:

Behold, on yon decayed, defoliated cypress tree, the solitary wood-pelican, dejectedly perched upon its utmost elevated spire; he there, like an ancient venerable sage, sets himself up as a mark of derision, for the safety of his kindred tribes. (64)<sup>70</sup>

In this passage, Bartram performs rhetorical work of his own by offering a version of the ancient figure in a New World context, but the image is nonetheless born of an actual encounter upon the Altamaha river, which in turn lends Chateaubriand's a material base or depth that I will attempt to recover. Though Bartram's description sublimates the figure of the pelican, and this version is certainly the literary precedent of Chateaubriand's, his language elsewhere brings it back down to earth and water.

Later, as Bartram narrates his approach to New Smyrna, he pauses to remark more in more detail about this particular species: "Since I have turned my observations upon the birds of this country I shall notice another very singular one, though already most curiously and exactly figured by Catesby, which seems to be

---

<sup>69</sup> In subsequent editions of *Atala*, at least as soon as the 1805/9 editions that paired it with *René*, and definitely in Saint-Beuve's *Oeuvres Complètes* (quoted here) the passage under consideration reads: "Cette croix étoit alors à moitié entourée d'eau; son bois étoit rongé de mousse, et le pélican du désert aimoit à se percher sur ses bras vermoulus" (69). Moving in the other direction, the "marais impraticable" in later editions is changed to the more simple "marais."

<sup>70</sup> Here and below, I quote from William Bartram, *Travels and other writings: travels through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida* (1996).

nearly allied to those before mentioned; I mean the bird which he calls the wood pelican or, as he footnotes, the *Tantalus loculator* of Linnaeus. As the description unfolds, it is not empty of the poetry of the prior passage—the pelican continues to be personified—but Bartram’s eye is now much more that of the naturalist, and the poetry of his language emerges from observations of behavior and habitat, as well as from scientific comparison:

This solitary bird does not associate in flocks, but is generally seen alone; commonly near the banks of great rivers, in vast marshes or meadows, especially such as are caused by inundations; and also in the vast deserted rice plantations: he stands alone on the topmost limb of tall dead cypress trees, his neck contracted or drawn in upon his shoulders, and beak resting like a long scythe upon his breast: in this pensive posture and solitary situation, it looks extremely grave, sorrowful, and melancholy, as if in the deepest thought. ... I take this bird to be of a different genus from the *tantalus*, and perhaps it approaches the nearest to the Egyptian ibis of any other bird yet known. (137)

My interest is foremost in Bartram’s handling of the pelican’s habitat, because it is in this expanded context that it is possible to see that Chateaubriand’s bird of the desert is not drawn from Bartram as a figure in isolation but, rather, as part of a broader figuration, as I have already introduced as an inversion of the *locus amoenus*. To return to the ruin of Aubry’s mission, to the setting of the “impassable morass,” there can be no mistake that Chateaubriand distills these two passages from Bartram, imbues them with Christian symbolism, and transforms them into the following: “This cross was then half surrounded by water; its wood was overgrown with moss; and the birds of the desert loved to light upon its ancient branches” (173-75). Within the context of *Génie*, one could certainly argue that Chateaubriand’s bird serves primarily as a Christian symbol, with its biblical precedent to be found in Psalms

101:6 (6-7): “I am become like to a pelican of the wilderness: I am like a night raven in the house.”<sup>71</sup> While this reading matches up perfectly with the content of the scene, it too easily erases the degree of naturalist realism that Chateaubriand derives from Bartram.<sup>72</sup> A more appropriate reading, I think, recognizes that the biblical symbolism and the realist imagery accommodate or articulate themselves to one another, and provide evidence that Chateaubriand’s style was in transition as he drafted *Atala* and brought it to print. The author who had embraced the *philosophes* and natural philosophy prior to his conversion in 1798 found the American imagery of his sources nevertheless suitable for the demonstrations of the divine in nature, the evocations of nature as evidence of the divine, that he would didactically develop in the *Génie*.<sup>73</sup>

---

<sup>71</sup> This is “*Domine, exaudi*. A prayer for one in affliction: the fifth penitential psalm.” I quote the Douay-Rheims Bible Online, which includes “revisions and footnotes (in the text in italics) by Bishop Richard Challoner, 1749-52, [and was] taken from a hardcopy of the 1899 Edition by the John Murphy Company IMPRIMATUR: James Cardinal Gibbons, Archbishop of Baltimore, September 1, 1899.”

<sup>72</sup> One could also argue that Bartram’s image is already embedded in (or imbued with) a commonplace Christian symbolism that his readers would readily recognize.

<sup>73</sup> In *The Beauties of Christianity*, Part I (Tenets and Doctrine), Book V (The Existence of God Demonstrated by the Wonders of Nature), Chapter VIII (Sea Fowl—in what Manner serviceable to Man.—In Ancient Times the Migrations of Birds served as a Calendar to the Husbandman), Chateaubriand writes: “O! how dry, how barren is nature, when explained by sophists; but how productive and how rich, when a simple heart describes her wonders with no other view than to glorify the Creator! If time and place permitted, we should have many other migrations to describe, many other secrets of Providence to reveal. We should treat of the cranes of Florida, whose wings produce harmonious sounds, and who steer their flight over lakes, savannas, and groves of orange and of palm-trees; we should exhibit the pelican of the woods, visiting the solitary dead, and stopping only at the ruins of Indian villages, and the hillocks of graves; we should state the reasons of these migrations, which in every instance have relations to man; we should mention the winds, the seasons chosen by the birds for changing their climate, the adventures they

Nevertheless, to excavate the pelican's place in the sediment of American natural history is to locate another descriptive layer beneath that of Bartram and Chateaubriand. As Bartram indicates, Catesby's depiction of the bird is the precedent for his own, and to Catesby belongs the American original, as well as the naming rights. Just as Chateaubriand distills Bartram, Bartram adapts Catesby, whose description of the *Pelicanus Americanus* or Wood Pelican will by now sound familiar. In part, Catesby writes, "In the latter end of Summer there usually fall great rains in Carolina, at which time numerous Flights of these Birds frequent the open Savannas, which are then under water, and they retire before November. ... They sit in great numbers on tall Cypress and other Trees in an erect posture, resting their ponderous Bills on their Necks for their greater ease" (81). If Bartram's eye, as that of a naturalist, is complemented at times by the voice of a poet, one finds much less of the same in the prose of Catesby, whose artistry and eloquence comes across in his illustrations. Between the above lines, for instance, he writes, "They are very good Eating Fowls, tho' they feed on Fish and other Water-animals. It is a stupid Bird and void of fear, easily to be shot."<sup>74</sup>

For Chateaubriand's purpose it is not the prosaic details that matter but, rather, the Christian connotations of the core elements of the total figuration: the watery wasteland, the ancient cypress become the cross, the solitary bird perched on its

---

meet with, the obstacles they encounter, the disasters they undergo; how they sometimes land on unknown coasts, far from the country to which they were bound; how they perish on their passage over forests consumed by the lightnings of heaven, or plains fired by the hands of savages" (Kett 164-5).

<sup>74</sup> Catesby, *The natural history of Carolina, Florida and the Bahama Islands*, vol. 2 (London, 1731).

mossy branches. I contend that these elements, despite their rhetorical abstraction and sublimation in Chateaubriand's prose, retain a certain stickiness deriving from the material encounters of Bartram and Catesby. The full effect of the author's figuration comes as much from the state of nature, the perceived American wilderness in which Bartram and Catesby observed the pelican as it does from the deeply meaningful but superficial imagery of Christian allegory.

In respect to the further abstraction of the prose generated by Catesby's field encounter, something similar might be said about its reception and subsequent citation in the contemporary scientific literature or natural history. In a widely circulated example, Buffon's take on the *pélican des bois* or Couricaca, as he names it, augments and corrects Catesby's description:

This bird is a native of Guiana, of Brasil, and of some countries of North America, which it visits. ... the back of the head and the arch of the neck are covered with small brown feathers, stiff, though loose: ... the front is bald, and only covered, like the orbits, by a dull blue skin: the throat, which is equally naked of feathers, is invested with a skin capable of inflation and extension; which has induced Catesby to term it, very improperly, *the Wood Pelican*.<sup>75</sup> In fact, the small bag of the Couricaca differs little from that of the Stork, which also can dilate the skin of its throat; whereas the Pelican carries a large sac under its bill, and, besides has its feet palmated. Brisson has committed an oversight in referring the Couricaca to the genus of Curlews, to which it bears no sort of resemblance. Piso appears to be the cause of this error, by the comparison which he draws between this bird and the *Indian Curlew of Clusius*, which is the Red Curlew, (Scarlet Ibis, *Lath.*) and this mistake is the less pardonable, as in the preceding line, Piso had represented it as equal in bulk to the Swan. He had better reason to compare its bill to that of the Ibis, which differs in fact from the bill of the Curlews.

---

<sup>75</sup> Though not completely clear in the translation (nor in the original for that matter), Catesby's nomenclature derives from the wood-like appearance of the pelican's head and neck and not from its habitat, as seems to be suggested by Buffon's translation of wood pelican as *pélican des bois*.

This large bird is, according to Marcgrave, frequent on the river of Seregippa or of St. François. It was sent to us from Guiana, and it is the same with what Barrere denominates the *Curved Bill Crane*, and the *Great American Curlew*; an appellation which might have deceived those who reckon this bird a Curlew, but which Brisson, by another mistake, refers to the Jabiru. (268-9)<sup>76</sup>

If Bartram briefly comments on classification—“I take this bird to be of a different genus from the *tantalus*, and perhaps it approaches the nearest to the Egyptian ibis of any other bird yet known” (137)—then Buffon’s account is interesting for the sustained turn, punctuated by “in fact,” that it takes into naming, which is typical of the genre. The reduction of the pelican and similar birds to a set of scientific signifiers, superficial but deeply meaningful to a certain audience, is not unlike Chateaubriand’s reduction of the pelican to an element in a rhetorical schema, whether the *locus amoenus* and/or a figuration of Christian allegory. And, while presented in narrative form here, the logic of scientific signification can of course be further abstracted, as illustrated by Thomas Jefferson’s schematization of similar information in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*:

<i>Linnaean Designation.</i>	<i>Catesby’s Designation.</i>	<i>Popular Names.</i>	<i>Buffon</i> <sup>77</sup> <i>oiseaux.</i>
Tantalus loculator	Pelicanus Americanus	I. 81 Wood pelican	13.403

Ultimately, in these top-down approaches to the wood pelican, whether classical, Christian, or scientific, the particularity of the encounters become lost, and only traces remain of the historical conditions that make them possible. Beneath it all,

<sup>76</sup> Georges Louis Leclerc Buffon, *The natural history of birds From the French of the Count de Buffon ... by the translator* [William Smellie], vol. 9 (London, 1793).

<sup>77</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (London, 1787).

however, as Buffon once again reminds us, is the cycle of the wetlands, which determines the migration pattern of the birds:

Catesby tells us, that every year, numerous stocks of Couricacas arrive in Carolina about the end of summer, which is the rainy season in that country. They haunt the Savannas, which are now overflowed; they fit in great numbers on the tall cypresses. Their attitude is very erect, and their ponderous bill is supported by resting it on their neck reclined. They retire before the month of November. (268-9)

Without the return of the flood, the inundation of the savannas, there is no Couricaca to observe in the cypress tree; without the wetland, there is no opportunity for the sublimation of the figure into allegory or science. By blending the two in a unique Christian ecology, Chateaubriand's representation in *Atala* of the wood pelican's return is thus strangely correct in its realism.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Disputing American Degeneracy: New World Wetlands and the Print Culture of *Atala's* Creole Translators

#### Preface

In the First Part of the Second Book of *La Florida del Ynca* (1605), Garcilaso de la Vega describes in Chapter XIII an especially difficult portion of the de Soto expedition. In a journey fraught with difficulty, this by itself is not remarkable, yet Garcilaso's commentary in this chapter—his coincidental and particular attention to language, landscape, and identity—is distinct. As the army navigates the dense forests between Hirrihigua's village and the province of Acuera, Garcilaso relates, it reaches an impasse at the great swamp that lies beyond the town of Urribarracuxi.<sup>78</sup> The swamp or "la çienega," he writes, "estava tres leguas del pueblo, la qual era grande, y muy dificultosa de passar por ser de una legua en ancho, y tener mucho çieno (de donde toman el nombre de çienega) y muy hondo a las orillas."<sup>79</sup> Los dos tercios a una parte y otra de la çienega eran de çieno, y la otra tercia parte en medio de agua tan honda, que no se podia vadear" (52) / "This swamp, which lay three leagues from the town, was broad and very troublesome to cross, for besides being a league in width and very deep at its banks, it contained a great amount of *cieno* or slime (from whence it takes the name of *ciénaga* or swamp). Two-thirds of its area, along the

---

<sup>78</sup> Garcilaso's "great swamp," northeast of Tampa Bay, is probably today's Green Swamp, with de Soto's passage made in the Hillsborough River corridor.

<sup>79</sup> With minor typographical adjustments—I have changed "u" to "v" and "f" to "s"—the Spanish is transcribed verbatim from the 1605 Lisbon edition.

edges, was mud, and the other third, which was at its center, consisted of water that was too deep to be forded” (104).<sup>80</sup> Following the topography of de Soto’s route, from peninsular Florida along the Gulf Coast to the mouth of the Mississippi, the landscapes of Garcilaso’s narrative are saturated with swamps; yet, this is the first encounter with a wetlands landscape that the author describes in detail. In a book in which *çienega* (and its plural) appear no less than ninety-seven times, moving it beyond the realm of description and further abstracting this landscape into a kind of literary *topos*, his parenthetical explanation of the word’s etymology begs attention.

When Garcilaso was writing, *çienega* appears to have been an uncommon word, one that arguably came into usage in the New World context, thus necessitating its definition by linking it to the more familiar *cieno*. The placement of the definition in the narrative, however, is just as interesting as the word’s etymology.<sup>81</sup> In terms of chronology, it comes early in the account of de Soto’s overland expedition, but the definition of *çienega* is also located curiously close to the author’s explanation of New World caste. One may even argue that his attention to landscape and to the swamp in particular, which is predicated by the topography of de Soto’s route, generates Garcilaso’s discussion of *mestizos*, *mulatos*, and *criollos*. To return to the

---

<sup>80</sup> I am citing the English translations from Garcilaso de la Vega, *The Florida of the Inca*, trans. and ed. John Grier Varner and Jeannette Johnson Varner (1951).

<sup>81</sup> Martín Alonso, *Enciclopedia del Idioma* (1958): “Ciénaga (l. *coenicum*). f. s. XVI al XX. Lugar o paraje lleno de cieno o pantanoso. Ercilla: *La Araucana*, 1569, cant. XXII, oct. 40 // 2. fig. s. XVII. Conjunto de vicios y errores. [Bernardo] Aldrete: *Antig.*, 1606, I, p. 3. // Cfr. *Palet*, 1604; *Oudin*, 1607; *Perciv.*, 1623” (1058).

narrative, after a reconnaissance of eight days, de Soto's native guides discover a passage through the swamp, and the army accomplishes the crossing, though it requires an entire day. After arriving at a clearing, the route beyond is found to be further obstructed by a seemingly interminable swamp, and dissatisfied with the reports of his scouts, de Soto himself (with a party of two hundred horsemen and foot soldiers) sets out to find a route. A three-day's search takes the party back through the passage just accomplished and up another side of the swamp, where they are subject to almost continual Indian attacks. After capturing a number of Indians, conscripting them as guides, and setting the dogs upon those who prove treacherous, the Spaniards succeed in intimidating one, through fear of death, to be faithful. Via an Indian road, he leads them back toward the swamp,

donde hallaron un passo que a la entrada y salida estava limpio de çieno, y el agua se vadeava a los pechos una legua de largo salvo en medio de la canal q por su mucha hódura por espacio de cien passos no se podia vadear, donde los Indios tenian hecha una mala puente de dos grandes arboles caydos en el agua, y los que ellos no alcáçavan, estava añadido con maderos largos atados unos con otros, y atravesados otros palos menores en forma de varandillas. Por este mesmo passo diez años antes passó Pamphilo de Narvaez con su exercito desdichado. (52-3)

where they found another passage. This passage had no mud at its entrance and exit, and could be waded for a distance of one league in water that came only to the chest. For a space of a hundred feet in the center of the channel, the water was too deep to ford, but here the Indians had constructed a rude bridge of two large fallen trees. Where these trees did not join, they had added long pieces of wood, some tied to others and smaller ones laid crosswise in the form of rails. Ten years previously Pámphilo de Narváez had passed along this same route with his ill-fated army. (105)

Up to this point, Garcilaso's representation of the *çienega* or swamp suggests a savage and undifferentiated wilderness, untouched by the Indians who inhabited it. At

times, the boundary between the landscape and its inhabitants seems to disappear completely: “En todos los tres dias nũca faltaron Indios, que saliendo del monte que avia por la orilla de la çienega sobresaltavan los Españoles tirandoles flechas, y se acogían al monte” (52) / “During these three days, Indians were never lacking. Emerging from the forests lining the banks of the swamp, they would rush up and fire their arrows at the Spaniards only to take refuge again among the trees” (105). The description of the native-built bridge, however, suggests otherwise. In this instance, the necessity of differentiating the Indians from their environment, and the necessity of treating them not only as objects in a hostile landscape but also as actors upon it, seems to spark the need to unfold the complexity of New World identity.

Having drawn attention to the landscape as a product of native knowledge, as well a help and a hindrance to the Spanish expedition, the author returns to de Soto’s negotiation of the passage offered by the bridge. I read this passage on both the narrative and lexical levels as a process of translation. In both cases, this process is facilitated by *mestizos*. As Garcilaso explains, “El Governador Hernãdo de Soto cõ mucho cõtétõ de averlo hallado, mandò a dos soldados naturales de la isla de Cuba, mestizos” (53) / “Happy at having discovered a new passage, the Governor issued an order to two soldiers, *mestizos*, who were natives of the island of Cuba” (105).<sup>82</sup>

What the order was, however, has to wait, because here the author momentarily steps

---

<sup>82</sup> As Varner and Varner note, “The expressions in this paragraph are all common in English: mestizo, mulatto, creole, quadroon. The Inca adds to the list in his *Comentarios Reales, Part I* (Book IX, chapter xxxi) and speaks of his own great pride in the name mestizo. Since he is defining Spanish words, we have left them in the easily comprehended original” (fn. 105)

outside of the narrative, just as he did when defining *çienega*, to explain the structure of caste in the Americas. De Soto, as Garcilaso was saying,

mandò a dos soldados naturales de la isla de Cuba, mestizos, q assi nos llamã en todas las Indias Occidentales a los que somos hijos de Español y de India, o de Indio y Española, y llaman mulatos como en España a los hijos de negros y de India o de Indio y de negra. Los negros llaman criollos a los hijos de Español y Española: ya los hijos de negro y negra, que nascé en Indias, por dar a entender que son nascidos allà, y no de los q van de acá de España. Y este vocablo criollo, han introduzido los Españoles y a en su lenguaje, para significar los mismo que los negros. Llamam assi mismo quarteron, o quatratuo al que tiene quarta parte de Indio, como es hijo de Español y de mestiza, o de mestizo y de Español al que lo es. Todos estos nombres ay en Indias para nombrar las naciones intrusas no naturales della. (53)

issued an order to two soldiers, *mestizos*, who were natives of the island of Cuba. In all of the West Indies, those of us who are born of a Spanish father and an Indian mother or vice versa are called *mestizos*, just as in Spain those who are born of a Negro father and an Indian mother or vice versa are called *mulatos*. The Negroes designate all persons *criollos* who have been born in the Indies of either pure Spanish or pure Negro parents, thus indicating that they are natives of the Indies and not Spain. Likewise, the Spaniards have already introduced the word *criollo* into their language, attaching to it the same significance. The man who is a fourth part Indian, such as the son of a Spanish father and a *mestiza* mother or vice versa is known as a *quateron* or *quatrelvo*, whereas a native of Guinea is simply called a Negro, and a native of Spain, a Spaniard. All of these names, as one can surmise, are used in the Indies to distinguish intruding from indigenous races. (105-6)

From a practical standpoint, by drawing attention to unfamiliar terms early in his account, the author's digression into American caste—like his explanation of *çienega*—is necessary for the intelligibility of the unfolding narrative. However, this digression is more than a matter of definition. Because it bridges the New and the Old Worlds and carries meaning from one to the other, Garcilaso's definition of the terms is also an act of linguistic and cultural translation. As a *mestizo* himself, the author makes it clear that he has stake in this process, as indicated by his shift to "somos,"

the first-person plural, to describe the “hijos de Español y de India, o de Indio y Española.” At the same time, while Garcilaso seems to emphasize the comparability of American and peninsular terms (*mestizo* is similar to *mulato*) and the adaptability of New World terms to Spanish usage or contexts (the African-American roots of *criollo*), the overall effect of the passage seems to be that of difference and taxonomic finality rather than linguistic and cultural fluidity: “All of these names, as one can surmise, are used in the Indies to distinguish intruding from indigenous races.”

However, after underscoring difference in the last sentence of the passage, Garcilaso returns to the narrative and the source of his digression—the matter of *mestizos*—only to recast cultural difference (and hybridity) as a source of continuity. “Como deziamos,” writes Garcilaso, “el Governador mandó a los dos Isleños, que avian por nóbre Pedro Moron, y Diego de Oliva, grandissimos nadadores, que llevando sendas hachas corrassen unasta mas, que se atravessavan por la puente, y hiessen todo lo que les pareciesse cóvenir a la comodidad de los que avian de passar por ella. Los dos soldados con toda presteza pusieron por obra lo que se les mando” (53) / “But as we were saying, the Governor commanded the two islanders, whose names were Pedro Morón and Diego de Oliva, to take axes and clear away some branches that were obstructing the bridge, moreover to do everything else they thought necessary for the convenience of those who were to use it. Thus these two soldiers, both of whom were very good swimmers, made haste to execute his command” (106). The author’s repeated reference to the soldiers as *mestizos* or *isleños* suggests that their status holds more than a passing or descriptive significance,

that perhaps their status contributes in some way to the unfolding of the journey and, therefore, the narrative. Garcilaso's subsequent use of "grandísimos nadarores" as an appositive for "isleños" would seem to confirm that this in fact is the case. If—by the logic of the narrative—to be one is to be the other, then to be a *mestizo* is to by extension possess a form of native knowledge or expertise not available to the Spanish. In other words, de Soto chooses Pedro Moron and Diego de Oliva to repair the bridge because they can swim, because they are *mestizos*.

On the narrative level, Garcilaso's *mestizos* thus operate as mediators of indigenous knowledge for de Soto and the Spanish, and their intervention allows the journey to proceed; yet, on the descriptive or lexical level, the term *mestizos*, like the term *ciénega* that preceded it, also operates as a mediator of meaning for the author's peninsular and European readers. Through the process of representation, New World identities and landscapes are therefore both in translation in Garcilaso's book, and Garcilaso's meaning-making through representation rests on the broader and fundamental processes of transculturation in the Americas. As a *mestizo* himself, a subject in translation, the author exists as a node that links these interrelated processes. Like Moron and de Oliva, whose indigenous knowledge mediated the Spanish army's crossing of the *ciénega*, Garcilaso's racial status is linked, albeit more subtly, to the translation (or in this case mistranslation) of the New World landscape.

As indicated by the title of his book, *La Florida del Ynca*, Garcilaso's authorial persona grows out of his indigenous American roots, and it is as a *mestizo* that he authors a narrative of de Soto's journey. While an overt bias does not arise

from the narrative voice assumed by the author, his sympathies are sometimes more freely offered to the natives and more reluctantly or critically to the Spanish.

Evidence of the latter may be found in Garcilaso's assessment of Spanish attitudes about the land they traversed and the quality of the records of the landscape they left behind. At the conclusion of Chapter XVII (immediately preceding the relation of the army's encounter with the great swamp), the author pauses to describe the direction taken by the army: "De la baía de Espiritusanto al pueblo de Urribarracuxi, caminaron siempre al Nordeste, que es al norte torciédo un poco hazià donde sale el Sol" (51) / "From the Bay of the Holy Spirit to the village of Urribarracuxi, the Spaniards traveled always to the northeast, that is to say to the north and turning a little toward where the sun rises" (103). On a practical level, while it offers a moment for writer and readers to reestablish their bearings, this seemingly simple description also gives rise to the more complex matter of how knowledge about the New World was acquired and disseminated. In a passage that is part caution, part regret, and part complaint, Garcilaso writes:

En este rumbo y en todos los de mas qe en esta historia se dixerén, es de advertir que no se tome precisamente para culparme si otra cosa pareçiere despues quando aquella tierra se ganare siendo Dios servido: que aunque hize todas las diligencias necessarias, para poderlos escrevir con certidumbre, no me fue possible alcançarla: porque, como el primer intento que estos Castellanos llevavan era conquistar aquella tierra, y buscar oro, y plata, no atendian a otra cosa que no fuesse plata, y oro: por lo qual dexaron de hazer otras cosas, que les importavan mas, que el de marcar la tierra. Y esto basta para mi descargo de no aver escrito con la certenidad, que he desseado, y era necessario. (51)

This direction and any other that you will find in the course of my history, I must warn you not to take precisely lest you blame me if contrary information should appear after, God being served, the land is won; for although I have

taken the utmost care to be able to write with certainty, it has not been possible for me to do so. The first idea in the minds of these cavaliers was to conquer that kingdom and seek gold and silver, and they paid no attention to anything that did not pertain to these metals. Thus they failed to accomplish other things of more import such as tracing out the limits of the land. Their negligence, therefore, suffices to exonerate me for my failure to write with the certainty which I have desired and which I know to be essential. (103)

This apology, contingent on the future condition that new information *may* come to light not *if* but *when* the Spanish succeed in their enterprise, exemplifies the complexity of Garcilaso's role as mediator of the de Soto expedition. Although he ultimately admonishes the "Castellanos" for their single-mindedness, Garcilaso in effect backs his way into the critique after acknowledging (albeit obliquely through the invocation of divine sanction) his support for the imperial project. Writing in the persona of a *mestizo*, he may be of the Spanish in part, but he is not with them, at least in this case.

While distancing himself from the Spanish, Garcilaso at the same time rests his critique on their inattention to the land and their failure to describe the landscape. As he asserts, in their monolithic pursuit of silver and gold, they "failed to accomplish other things of more import such as tracing out the limits of the land," and this leaves him with no recourse but to write from a place of uncertainty. Put another way, because they misread the land, the Spanish failed to describe a landscape. Unlike Moron and de Oliva, the *mestizos* whose successful intervention he narrates, the *mestizo* writer Garcilaso is unable to translate this landscape with certainty. Nevertheless, mired in this same uncertainty, he remains entangled with this

landscape in a way impossible for the Spanish, who view the swamp only as an external obstacle to overcome in their pursuit of riches.

As an early modern chronicler of the New World, Garcilaso's interest in matters of race and landscape is not unusual, and his is just one of the multitude of Spanish texts that eighteenth-century scholars like William Robertson mined to write the first synthetic histories of the Americas. In fact, it was the abundance of detail on these matters that led European historians to conclude that these continents, both their peoples and their landscapes, existed in a savage, uncultivated state. Furthermore, if historians already held these preconceptions about the Americas, the narratives of Garcilaso and others, when viewed through this distorted lens, did little to discourage them. However, what is unique in *La Florida del Ynca* is the author's attention to race and landscape—and I use these and the following terms in a critical sense—as matters of transculturation and translation. What the Enlightenment scholars miss, in their efforts to place New World natives and their wetlands landscapes outside the progress or development of Old World history, is that Garcilaso, an American *mestizo* author, had preemptively countered their arguments: by aligning himself, albeit subtly, with the swamp or wetlands, he demonstrates that New World race and landscape were not static or stagnant. Rather, they were in process, dynamic and productive. As a native-born commentator writing against Spanish attitudes about the Americas, Garcilaso offers a genealogical point of origin for the eighteenth and nineteenth-century critics of European thought, mostly Creoles like Fray Servando,

who took up the defense of New World nature and culture.<sup>83</sup> As my reading of these authors and texts demonstrates, this transatlantic debate was most often grounded by America's wetlands landscapes.

## **Introduction**

In the introduction to *Creole Subjects in Colonial America* (2009), Ralph Bauer and José Antonio Mazzotti pinpoint the New World origin of the term *creole* and trace its translation and circulation in the Americas during the early modern period. The word “[m]ost likely derived from a Latin root (*creare*, to make, to create, that is, something new),” and it first appeared “as a Portuguese neologism (*crioulo*) ... to distinguish black slaves born in Brazil from those brought from Africa” (3). In sixteenth-century Spanish usage, they explain, the significance of *criollo* expanded beyond the denotation of American-born slaves of African ancestry to also include colonists of European parentage born in the New World. In both cases, the word's meaning rested on the change supposedly undergone by those of Old World descent born in the Americas. In respect to this change, when compared to their African-born counterparts, *crioulo* slaves were both favored and condemned: if they were seen as “seasoned in the New World environment and therefore less susceptible to disease,” then “they were more often seen as prone to rebelliousness and moral vice” (3). At the same time, in the Spanish context, the rarely favorable difference perceived in native-born Americans of European descent was noted in print as early as 1570 in the

---

<sup>83</sup> For recent discussion of Garcilaso's *Florida*, see Raquel Chang-Rodríguez, ed., *Beyond Books and Borders: Garcilaso de La Vega and La Florida Del Inca* (2006).

*Geografía y descripción universal de las Indias*.<sup>84</sup> Of the Spanish born in the Indies, “who are called creoles,” Juan López de Velasco observes that they “turn out like the natives even though they are not mixed with them [by] declining to the disposition of the land” (qtd. 4). Although an isolated example, it is not unique that López de Velasco, the royal chronicler, yokes the creole’s decline to the influence of the environment. On the contrary, as Bauer and Mazzotti make clear, he was expressing a prevailing sixteenth-century opinion or theory about the New World—shared with Bernadino de Sahagún, Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdes, and José de Acosta—that linked creolization, “the process of cultural change in different geographic locations” (1), with degeneration.

In this chapter, I read the Enlightenment theory of American degeneracy as part of a broader transatlantic discourse that unevenly entangled a New World of race—the indigenous, the creole, and the European—with an emerging wetlands imaginary of the Americas. Wetlands landscapes, I argue, were linked to this process of racialization. While I focus on the development of this discourse during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it is necessary to establish that its early modern origin has its own roots in classical antiquity. As Bauer and Mazzotti note, “the idea that human bodies and minds degenerated in the New World” was based, first, on the “humoral theory [which] derived from the scientific thought of Aristotle, Hippocrates, Galen, and others who held that a person’s physiological and psychological constitution was determined by the qualities of the natural environment

---

<sup>84</sup> As Bauer and Mazzotti explain, this occurred earlier in manuscript letters: *creole* in this sense was documented in the 1560s (4).

or astrological constellation.” Second, it derived from “Greco-Roman notions of barbarity and corroborated by early modern travel reports, [which] alleged the savagery of the Americas’ indigenous peoples.” According to these ethnocentric Old World logics, creole difference in the Indies was interpreted as degeneration, and indigenous difference was interpreted as savagery, and “early modern natural philosophers concluded that the natural environment and the skies of the New World were inhospitable to the development of human culture” (1-2). While the scheme’s astrological component—“which placed a premium not only on the time but also on the place of an individual’s birth within the early modern matrix of ... constellations” (5)—fell out of scientific favor in the eighteenth century, the role of environmental determinism became paramount for Enlightenment philosophes, first and foremost Montesquieu and Buffon, who sought general principles for understanding the development of humankind.<sup>85</sup> As Bauer and Mazzotti put it, “Human beings were now seen to be like plants, entirely dependent on their climate and soil,” and “the term *creole* frequently came to refer not only to persons born in the New World but also to those who had been transplanted there and, thus, been subject to its peculiar natural influences for an extended period” (5-6). The significance of *creole* was therefore intrinsic to the circular logic of the theory of American degeneracy, and it was symptomatic of a larger shift in European thinking about the New World.

---

<sup>85</sup> For an in-depth discussion of the central role of astrology in the early modern natural history of the Americas, see Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *Nature, Empire, and Nation: Explorations of the History of Science in the Iberian World* (2006).

Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra argues that along with “the rapid development in the eighteenth century of the ‘bourgeois public sphere,’” a rupture occurred within the tradition of European historiography of the Americas.<sup>86</sup> “Unlike Renaissance arts of

---

<sup>86</sup> See *How to Write the History of the New World* (2001), which originated “as an effort to locate the ‘dispute over the New World’ in the context of more recent literature on the history of science” (4). As part of this effort, he discovered that Gerbi’s book, in spite of cataloguing examples of the Peninsular and Spanish American historiographical traditions, did not question Western European Enlightenment authority (and sources) as the basis for writing a history of the New World. Cañizares-Esguerra also cites as an influence “what Lorraine Daston has called ‘historical epistemology,’ a new field that traces the social and cultural roots of such new early modern categories as ‘facts,’ ‘experiments,’ and ‘objectivity.’ It suggests that our modern (and postmodern) historiographical sensibilities might have originated in seemingly peripheral debates in the eighteenth century. In this light, the New World was as significant in eliciting the fundamental tenets of contemporary historians as it was in shaping the economies of the Atlantic world” (7). In *Objectivity*, coauthored with Peter Gallison (2010), and the much more digestible, “Objectivity and the Escape from Perspective” (1992), Daston’s work on the history of objectivity, specifically what she terms “aperspectival objectivity” (and its ascendancy as an ideal in nineteenth-century science), is of interest to me inasmuch as she traces the origin of this concept (and practice) not to the natural sciences but rather to “the moral and aesthetic philosophy of the latter half of the eighteenth century” (600), the period with which I am concerned. In short, as a subjective way of looking at the world (including peoples and landscapes), objectivity was at root anything but impartial, and as a mode of thought it surely informs the kind of philosophical travel and history that I am considering. In summarizing the background to her discussion of nineteenth-century science, Daston writes, “This gallop through the eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century usage of the word ‘objectivity’ and its variants in English, French, and German (all deriving and the diverging from the Latin terminology of scholasticism) is intended to make three points. First, ‘objectivity’ concerned ontology, and, post-Kant, to some measure epistemology in a transcendental vein. It had little or nothing or nothing to do with emotional detachment, restraint from judgment, method and measurement, or empirical reliability. Second, its inseparable opposite, subjectivity in the sense of the mental, had yet to become a matter for regret or reproach. On the contrary: Coleridge branded our instinctive belief in the existence of things independent of us a “prejudice,” and thought “[t]he highest perfection of natural philosophy would consist in the perfect spiritualization of the laws of nature into the laws of intuition and intellect.” Third, the perspectival metaphor that so permeates our discussions of objectivity is (so to speak) nowhere on view” (602).

reading,” Cañizares-Esguerra writes, “this new art did not privilege eyewitnesses” (12), in fact found eyewitness testimony suspect, and instead valued the expertise of a new kind of “philosophical traveler,” who “judged [testimonies] by their internal consistency, not by the social standing or learning of the witnesses” (13). As he explains, the resulting historiography turned away from the cataloguing of New World wonders and towards a new genre, the “philosophical” compilation of different kinds of evidence from the existing colonial accounts. Framed by the emerging social science of the Enlightenment, this evidence included “linguistics, natural history, ethology, and geology” (4), all of which served to generate new conjectures about the history of the Americas and its peoples, whose perceived development (or lack thereof) was subject to renewed and aggressive scrutiny:

The deployment of such new techniques and evidence led to bold new hypotheses about the history of the Americas. The humidity of tropical America, its distinct animal species, and the alleged primitive and degenerate character of the Indians and Creole settlers (particularly Spanish American ones) was held to confirm that the continent had either witnessed catastrophic geological convulsions or recently emerged from the waters. (1-2)<sup>87</sup>

---

<sup>87</sup> In *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992), Mary Louise Pratt is guided by questions that frame a similar historical (dis)juncture: “How has travel and exploration writing *produced* ‘the rest of the world’ for European readerships at particular points in Europe’s expansionist trajectory? How has it produced Europe’s differentiated conceptions of itself in relation to something it became possible to call ‘the rest of the world’? How do such signifying practices encode and legitimate aspirations of economic expansion and empire? How do they betray them? The book also undertakes to suggest connections from travel writing to forms of knowledge and expression that interact or intersect with it, outside and inside Europe. [It] considers how travel writing and enlightenment natural history catalyzed each other to produce a Eurocentered form of global or, as I call it, ‘planetary’ consciousness. The classificatory schemes of natural history are seen in relation to the vernacular peasant knowledges they sought to displace. ... The outlines of this study are intentionally broad, but they open out from a point of departure that is quite specific. It is marked in the mid-eighteenth century, by two simultaneous and, as I argue, intersecting

It is in the context described by Cañizares-Esguerra that I read the wetlands, both as a corollary to New World identity but also as a category emerging under new conditions of knowledge between 1750-1830.<sup>88</sup>

---

processes in Northern Europe: the emergency of natural history as a structure of knowledge, and the momentum toward interior, as opposed to maritime, exploration. These developments ... register a shift in what can be called European 'planetary consciousness,' a shift that coincides with many others including the consolidation of bourgeois forms of subjectivity and power, the inauguration of a new territorial phase of capitalism propelled by searches for raw materials, the attempt to extend coastal trade inland, and national imperatives to seize overseas territory in order to prevent its being seized by rival European powers. From this point of departure, the book moves in roughly chronological order" (5, 9).

<sup>88</sup> Here, Luisa Calé and Adriana Craciun's essay, "The Disorder of Things" (2011), provides the periodization as well as a point of departure: "Our entry point is Michel Foucault's radical reconfiguration of the divisions of knowledge, not as a history 'of its growing perfection, but rather ... of its conditions of possibility' (*OT*, xxiii–iv). We work against the grain of the 'rise of disciplinarity' and in the spirit of radical historicity initiated by Foucault's seminal critiques of discursive practices in *The Order of Things* (1966), *The Archeology of Knowledge* (1969), and 'What is an Author?' (1969). Foucault explored the forms and rules that shape things into objects of knowledge—'how a culture experiences the propinquity of things, how it establishes the *tabula* of their relationships and the order by which they must be considered' (*OT*, xxvi). We go against the teleological short-circuits of a disciplined 'history of the Same—of that which, for a given culture, is both dispersed and related, therefore to be distinguished by kinds and to be collected together into identities' (*OT*, xxvi). Instead of distilling objects of knowledge purified from the disorder of things, we explore the unfamiliar contours of objects, practices, and identities that resist or escape current disciplinary mapping, unveiling the alternative forms and conjectural shapes of knowledge in the making. ... Departing from a systematic or territorial model of disciplinarity, [James] Chandler envisions 'a network of relatively autonomous practices in asymmetrical relation to each other. Properly understood, the disciplinary system will thus appear to have a different structure from the perspective of each discipline in it.' Within this asymmetrical network reconfigured by different observational points, traditional disciplinary histories trace their origins to the turn of the nineteenth century, when modern disciplines, including anthropology, geology, chemistry, philosophy, became embedded in their institutional associations and set off on their familiar trajectories of increasing professionalization. ... To avoid reproducing 'a traditional map of disciplines' as we recognize them today, [we foreground] a strategically predisciplinary stance. By this, we do not imply a prehistorical utopia of undifferentiated knowledge; rather, following Jan Golinski in

In drawing their generalizations about the New World, European philosophers relied primarily on reports from Spanish America, but French sources were also consulted. While Louisiana was rarely at the center of this picture, its landscapes often provided key details at key moments in their reasoning, as the treatises of Buffon illustrate. Early in his *Theory of the Earth* (Vol. I of the *Histoire naturelle*), lower Louisiana, a land formed from periodic floods and the earth deposited by the Mississippi as it flows towards its mouth, is compared to similar lands in Egypt and China, formed by the Nile and Yellow rivers respectively.<sup>89</sup> In this case, as the example of Louisiana is used to describe his method, Buffon's reasoning is somewhat measured. In deriving his theory, he is not interested in "those remote causes which stand above our comprehension; of those convulsions of nature, whose least effects would be fatal to the world." Instead, he argues, "effects which are daily repeated, motions which succeed each other without interruption, and operations that are constant, ought alone to be the ground of our reasoning," and "we will combine

---

*Making Natural Knowledge* [2008], our claim is 'not that disciplines as such were new, or simply that new disciplines came into existence, but that techniques for inculcating and perpetuating disciplines—for disciplining their practitioners—were transformed.' To that end, while several of our essays situate their inquiries ... upon the threshold of the nineteenth century, we also broaden the range in which to consider modern disciplinarity by including overlapping boundaries, temporalizations, and foundational figures from roughly 1750 to 1830" (1-2).

<sup>89</sup> The English citations of Buffon come from *Barr's Buffon* (1797). As he explains, "we know great rivers ... fill up seas and form new land, as the province at the mouth of the Yellow river in China; Louisiana at the mouth of the Mississippi, and the northern part of Egypt, which owes its existence to the inundations of the Nile; the rapidity of which brings down such quantities of earth from the internal parts of Africa, as to deposit on the shores, during the inundations, a body of slime and mud of more than fifty feet in depth. The province of the Yellow river and Louisiana have, in like manner, been formed by the soil from the rivers" (42-3).

particular effects with general causes, and give a detail of facts which will render apparent, and explain the different changes that the earth has undergone, whether by the eruption of the sea upon the land, or by retiring from that which it had formerly covered” (39). Here, as New World evidence of a long-term global effect, Louisiana lends credibility to Buffon’s immediate claim about the changes caused by rivers, as well as his broader claim about change, itself, as the permanent state of geological and hydrological nature on Earth.<sup>90</sup>

In this instance, if the Americas complemented and seemed to confirm a developing, unified theory of the Earth, then the New World in other contexts proved a source of disparity. Louisiana also figured in this latter case, in fact, as a point of departure for what would become the most controversial turn in Buffon’s reasoning. In the *Theory of the Earth*, he had argued—as a historian—that, “we must take the earth as it is, closely observing every part, and by inductions judge of the future from what exists at present” (40), but the New World (to the detriment of his theory as a whole) did not seem to accord with the “present” implicit in this statement. As he explained in “Of the Effects of Rain—of Marshes, Subterraneous Wood and Water”

---

<sup>90</sup> On these changes, Buffon explains, “The Danube and the Nile, and all great rivers, after bringing down much sand and earth, no longer come to the sea by a single channel; they divide into different branches, and the intervals are filled up by the materials they have themselves brought thither. Morasses daily dry up; lands forsaken by the sea are cultivated; we navigate countries now covered by waters; in short, we see so many instances of land changing into water, and water into land, that we must be convinced of these alterations having, and will continue to take place; so that in time gulphs will become continents; isthmuses, straits; morasses, dry lands; and the tops of mountains, the shoals of seas” (47-8).

(Vol. II, Article XVIII), “When the waters on the surface of the earth cannot find vent to flow,”

they form marshes and fens. The most famous marshes in Europe are those of Muscovy, at the source of the Tanais; and those of Savolaxia and Enasak, in Finland; there are also some in Holland, Westphalia, and other low countries: in Asia are the marshes of the Euphrates, of Tartary, and of the Palus Meotis; nevertheless, there are fewer of them in Asia and Africa than in Europe; but America may be said to be but one continued marsh, throughout all its plains, which is a greater proof of the modern date of the country, and of the small number of inhabitants than their want of industry. (211)<sup>91</sup>

For Buffon, then, the Old World/New World dichotomy held a particular temporal dimension, and from his Eurocentric perspective, the accumulated evidence could only suggest that the Americas occupied a *present* that corresponded to the Old World *past*. Buffon’s convoluted efforts to reconcile this disparity gave rise to a general theory of American degeneracy, which in turn initiated the enduring controversy that Antonello Gerbi encyclopedically documents in *The Dispute of the New World* (1955). As the preceding example illustrates, Buffon’s opinion of the newness of the Americas emerged from his perception of the continent as “one continued marsh, throughout all its plains,” and a wetlands element thus runs through both the theory and the subsequent dispute. Alternately, the theory and the subsequent

---

<sup>91</sup> For the French original, see *Preuves de la theorie de la terre*, Article XVIII, “De l’effet des Pluies, des Marécages, des Bois souëterrains, des Eaux souëterraines”: “Lorsque les eaux qui sont à la surface de la terre ne peuvent trouver d’écoulement, elles forment des marais & des marécages; les plus fameux marais de l’Europe, sont ceux de Moscovie à la source du Tanaïs, ceux de Finlande, où sont les grands marais Savolax & Énasak; il y en a aussi en Hollande, en Westphalie & dans plusieurs autres pays bas: en Asie on a les marais de l’Euphrate, ceux de la Tartarie, le Palus Méotide; cependant en général, il y en a moins en Asie & en Afrique qu’en Europe, mais l’Amérique n’est, pour ainsi dire, qu’un marais continu dans toutes ses plaines; cette grande quantité de marais, est une preuve de la nouveauté du pays, & du petit nombre des habitans, encore plus que du peu d’industrie” (575).

dispute both rest on precarious wetlands foundations, the “marais tremblantes” encountered by Le Page du Pratz, or the “prairie tremblant” described by *un habitant de la Louisiane*.<sup>92</sup> As a result, a wetlands discourse emerges, and Louisiana figured as a place and a textual source in its development.<sup>93</sup>

---

<sup>92</sup> See Le Page du Pratz, *Histoire de la Louisiane* (1758) and *Annales philosophiques, politiques et littéraires. Ouvrage utile aux amateurs de la vérité*, Par un habitant de la Louisiane, Numero Premier (Philadelphia: 1807). The latter, an obscure title held by the Newberry Library, lends a French creole perspective to the debate, and further establishes the currency of the dispute around 1800. The *habitant* writes, “Ces vérités, qu’on ne peut révoquer en doute, doivent nous éclairer à l’égard des folles hypothèses qu’on a mis au jour sur l’Amérique et le pouvoir des climats. On a été jusqu’à dire que les hommes et les animaux de l’ancien continent s’abâtardissoient et dégénéroient lorsqu’ils étoient transportés en Amérique. [...] C’est surtout dans un ouvrage intitulé: *Recherches Philosophiques sur les Américains* que l’on trouve le plus d’erreurs en tous genres, et de conjures les plus singulières et les plus improbables. Cependant ce livre a eu du succès, et a fait beaucoup de prosélites. Here, he of course refers to Cornelius de Pauw, and responds elsewhere to Buffon. The chapters in this publication include “Vues générales sur le continent de l’Amérique, son antiquité et ses principales révolutions;” “Essai sur la formation de la Basse Louisiane et autres terres nouvelles;” “Tableau comparatif de la Basse Louisiane avec la Basse Egypte;” and “Notices sur les indigènes de l’Amérique, leur origine, et les premières découvertes de ce continent.” Though I have not found any American publications that note or discuss this work, it was reviewed in Paris in *Mercur de France, Journal Littéraire et Politique*, Tome Trente-Huitième (Paris: Chez Arthus-Bertrand, 1809).

<sup>93</sup> Similar to the pelican I discuss in chapter two, the curious appearance of a frog in Dumont de Montigny’s *Mémoires historiques sur la Louisiane* (1753), offers another opportunity to trace Louisiana wetlands translation in a single figure. In Louisiana, Dumont relates, “on y trouve jusqu’à une espèce de grenouilles qui est monstrueuse, étant grosse comme un sceau, & ayant les yeux aussi grands que ceux d’un boeuf” (I:103); and, more specifically, when recounting a hunt, he writes, “Je cherchois cependant sans rien trouver au milieu des herbes qui étoient déjà assez hautes, lorsqu’un nouveau cri qui partit à mes oreilles me fit frémir; je regardai à côté de moi, & j’aperçus avec étonnement un monstrueuse sur laquelle j’avois mis le pied. Il est certain qu’elle avoit plus d’un pied & demi de diametre d’un flanc à l’autre, & deux grands pieds de longueur; à peine pouvois-je empoigner de mes deux mains une des ses cuisses. [...] Elle se trouva peser trente-deux livres” (II:267-8). Pauw, in his *Recherches* (Berlin, 1768), takes this example as evidence of America’s inundated and degenerate state: “Mr Dumont dit dans ses *Mémoires sur la Louisiane*, qu’il y croît des Grenouilles qui pèsent jusqu’à trente sept livres, & dont le cri imite le

While the debate was sparked in 1749, when Buffon began to publish the *Histoire naturelle*, the dispute on the European was soon supported by L'Abbé Raynal and William Robertson's corroboration, as well as Cornelius de Pauw's exaggeration of the theory, which claimed that America's cold climate and damp soil engendered the deficiency of its flora, fauna, and human inhabitants.<sup>94</sup> If there is a specific textual origin for the controversy, it is perhaps Buffon's discussion of the "Animals common to both Continents."<sup>95</sup> In Volume VII of *Barr's Buffon*, the discussion of begins blandly enough, by drawing proofs of the former contiguity in the north of the old and new continents. In spite of the numbers of animals exclusive to each continent, he explains, there are enough New World species able to support the cold and reproduce, despite their apparent differences from those in the Old, to

---

beuglement des veaux: il n'existe pas de monstres semblables dans le reste du monde" (5). And, when Dom Pernetty, in his *Dissertation sur L'Amérique et les Américains, contre les Recherches Philosophiques de M. De P\*\*\*\** (Berlin, 1777), counters Pauw, the figure of Dumont's Louisiana frog enters the discourse of the dispute: "M. Dumont dit dans ses mémoires sur la Louisiane, qu'on y voit des grenouilles, qui pesent jusqu'à trente-cinq livres, & dont les cris imitent le beuglement des veaux. M. de P. en conclut l'ingratitude de leur terre natale & un abatardissement général, qui avoit atteint jusqu'au premier principe de l'existence & de la génération (\*\*\*\*); je me serois donc bien trompé, en tirant une conséquence toute opposée. J'aurois cru raisonner philosophiquement en concluant de cette quantité prodigieuse d'êtres vivants, & qui plus est d'une taille gigantesque, que le principe de vie est dans ce pays-là, bien plus fecond & beaucoup plus actif que dans le nôtre, où tous ces animaux n'ont, ce semble, à l'égard de ceux de l'Amérique, de la même espece, qu'une demi-vie, & des corps à demi-perfectionnés, puisqu'on les trouve ailleurs bien supérieurs en grosseur & qualités" (II:37-8). Others, including Jedidiah Morse, who I discuss below, pick up this figure and deploy it to their respective ends.

<sup>94</sup> Cornelius de Pauw, *Recherches philosophiques sur les Américains* (1770); Raynal, *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissemens & ducommerce des Européens dans les deux Indes* (1774); William Robertson, *The History of America* (1778).

<sup>95</sup> *Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière, avec la description du cabinet du roi* (1761), Tome Neuvième, "Animaux communs aux deux Continens" (97 ff.).

conclude that “they cannot but be considered as the same animals; and this induces us to believe, they formerly passed from one continent to the other by lands still unknown, or possibly long since buried by the waves” (33). A purpose beyond establishing the erstwhile existence of a land-bridge, however, becomes apparent in the examples Buffon chooses to support his conjecture: “The Bears of the Illinois, of Louisiana, &c. seem to be the same with ours; the former being only smaller and blacker. The stag of Canada, though smaller than ours, differs only in the superior loftiness of his horns, number of antlers, and length of his tail. The roebuck, found in the south of Canada, and in Louisiana, is also smaller and has a longer tail than that of Europe” (34). As it relates to animals common to both continents, if diminution appears to be a new trend, Buffon reminds the reader that “We have already remarked, as a striking singularity, that the animals in the southern provinces of the new continent are small, in comparison with those of the warm regions of the old; ... And this general fact, as to size, is further corroborated, by all the animals which have been transported from Europe having become less.” Beginning with the relatively small bears of Louisiana, Buffon’s reasoning leads him, in three pages, to pose the hypothesis that would come to define his reception in the Americas: “In this new world, then, there must be something in the combination of elements, and other physical causes, which opposes the aggrandisement of animated nature; there must be obstacles to the development, and perhaps to the formation of the principles of life” (38). The New World’s climate, particularly its soil, was the cause Buffon would go on to substantiate in the subsequent thirty pages, and these thirty pages would be

distorted, by Pauw and others, out of all proportion to the hundreds that comprised his total system.

Ultimately, the New World example presented a closed system to Buffon's inspection, and herein emerges the paradox. "So we come back to the point of departure," Gerbi writes, "according to which nature in America is weak because man has not tamed it, and man has not tamed it because he in his turn is cold in love and more similar to the cold-blooded animals, closer to the watery putrescent character of the continent. And the erotic-hydraulic explanation of the singularity of American nature goes round and round in this same vicious circle" (8). The result of this cycle, whether one places man or nature a priori, is stagnation, and until this stagnation finds "vent to flow," in Buffon's words, there can be no progress. As he and the other philosophes make clear, this progress will rely on the industry of Europeans, even if they must first suffer, as creoles, their own period of degeneracy in the wetlands.<sup>96</sup>

---

<sup>96</sup> In "The Changing Definitions of America," the Introduction to *America in European Consciousness, 1493-1750* (1995), Karen Ordahl Kupperman cites "criolian degeneracy" as one of a complex of discourses through which European-Americans thought and experienced their place in the New World: "The best measure of their success in transplantation is the changing definition of the word 'American.' In the sixteenth century that name would always connote an Indian, a native of America. Increasingly through the later seventeenth century, and certainly by our closing date of 1750, the appellation 'American' was far more ambiguous: most often it referred to a creole, a person of Old World descent born in Europe's New World. Thus the Atlantic seemed to shrink, its American shore brought closer by the establishment of Euro-American societies. But this new familiarity also hid a greater distance. On every level this paradox reasserts itself: as America became more familiar, a common element in awareness, Europeans also realized the transforming power of that new environment, which reinforced the change in self-perception wrought by the decision to emigrate. The American was more (and less) than a transplanted European. ... 'Criolian degeneracy' became a theme of transatlantic discourse. In the middle of the eighteenth century the allegation that Old World plants

While the controversy in the United States context is most famously marked by Jefferson's rhetorical display of mammoth bones to reject Buffon's theory, the *disputados* in Latin America date from Las Casas and Oviedo, and by the time Chateaubriand published *Atala* in 1801, the partisans were firmly entrenched on both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>97</sup> As participants in the debate, much was at stake for the

---

and animals, including human beings, always degenerated in America became a generalized topic of discussion among intellectuals. Charles-Marie de la Condamine, who went to Peru in the 1730s with a French scientific mission, described Indians as 'the enemies of work, indifferent to all motives of glory, honour or knowledge.' Antonio de Ulloa, who accompanied Condamine and served long years in America, applied the same charge to Americans of European descent, describing them as intellectually feeble and enervated. French philosophes heatedly discussed whether the discovery of America had been beneficial. The charge of 'criolian degeneracy' allows us to see two key ways in which the effect of America on European consciousness was changing in the first half of the eighteenth century. One is that the charge was answered by Euro-Americans, who now saw themselves as participating in a related but separate culture across the sea. Massive European immigration had caused the most momentous change of all; it had accelerated and routinized contacts and had transformed the reality of America. Beginning in the seventeenth century and increasingly in the first half of the eighteenth, the new Americans celebrated their difference. As early as 1615 the Franciscan Juan de Torquemada, who spent his entire life from early childhood in Mexico, criticized such predecessors as Herrera, Acosta, and Gómara for their shallowness in describing Indian cultures. As a Euro-American, Torquemada adopted the Incas and Aztecs alongside the Spanish Christians as symbolic ancestors and celebrated them in his *Monarquía Indiana*. ... Whereas the defense of their societies as American indicates a break in the experience and expectations of transplanted Europeans and their children from the original assumption that undiluted Old world norms would dominate, the debate over creole culture reveals a powerful continuity in European response. European intellectuals, seeing difference as degeneracy, continued to treat America as a screen on which to project their own fears and fantasies. The projection became more provocative when the actors were men and women like themselves" (22-3).

<sup>97</sup> See Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1794): 64 ff. For biography and background on Pauw, see: Henry Ward Church, "Corneille de Pauw, and the Controversy over His *Recherches Philosophiques Sur Les Américains*" (1936). Church writes, "Jefferson did not mention De Pauw, probably for the very good reason that he had not heard of him when he wrote his *Notes on Virginia* [...]. But the ideas of Buffon that he attacked are so strikingly similar to the thesis of the

continent's defenders, both in North and South America, as they struggled for autonomy from Europe. Especially for those seeking to legitimize nationhood, like Jefferson, or for those looking for leverage to justify independence, like Juan Ignacio Molina in Chile, Buffon's theory spawned a discourse that could not be ignored; the Americans had no choice but to enter the fray. Although it is the given upon which the rest of the theory rests, the significance of New World soil and climate in Buffon's treatise has been overshadowed by its spurious portrayal of the Native American. However, it was not lost on contemporaries across the Atlantic, those responding in the midst of the revolutionary transition from colony to nation. To be sure, America's detractors most often pointed to its presumably infrahuman native inhabitants to make their case, and the partisans of the Americas in turn defended the flora and fauna of their continent as comparable and often superior to that of the Old World. The source of Buffon's theory and the ensuing dispute, however, was the New World landscape and the question of its suitability for human habitation, let alone civilization. As a metaphorical ground for this dispute, America's wetlands became tied to the same discourse that distributed racial identity in the New World. Yet, their widespread

---

*Recherches philosophiques* that we are quite ready to agree with one of De Pauw's contemporaries (Delisle de Sales), who says that a few lines from Buffon, germinating and growing in the ardent imagination of De Pauw, gave forth the latter's 'three volumes of paradoxes.' De Pauw's real source then is Buffon. The numerous authorities quoted by him seem merely to have been minutely examined for evidence to confirm the Buffon point of view, and when they disagreed with it they were ruthlessly rejected. That De Pauw drew more fire than Buffon (except from Jefferson), is explained by the fact that he isolated and exaggerated these views, and also by his provocative tone, which could not be disregarded by any whose opinions disagreed" (190-1). For more on Pauw and the response in Latin America, see: John Browning, "Cornelius de Pauw and Exiled Jesuits: The Development of Nationalism in Spanish America" (1978).

presence on both American continents also brought the wetlands into history as a global landscape during this period, as Old World practices of drainage and reclamation were translated to colonial conditions.<sup>98</sup> While much has been said about how America's inhabitants, both native and creole, were subject to Buffon's theory, less has been written about the landscapes that figure equally in the paradox of New World nature that Buffon established.

While wetlands landscapes developed material and discursive life during the colonial and Enlightenment periods, they remained objects externalized by European writing subjects, as illustrated by a title such as Volney's *Tableau du climat et du sol*

---

<sup>98</sup> Pratt informs my take on wetlands translation. "Transculturation," she writes, "is a phenomenon of the contact zone. ... While the imperial metropolis tends to understand itself as determining the periphery (in the emanating glow of the civilizing mission or the cash flow of development), it habitually blinds itself to the ways in which the periphery determines the metropolis – beginning, perhaps, with the latter's obsessive need to present and re-present its peripheries and its others continually to itself. Travel writing, among other institutions, is heavily organized in the service of that imperative. So, one might add, is much of European literary history. In the attempt to suggest a dialectic and historicized approach to travel writing, I have manufactured some terms and concepts along the way. One coinage that recurs throughout the book is the term 'contact zone,' which I use to refer to the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict. ... 'Contact zone' in my discussion is often synonymous with 'colonial frontier.' But while the latter term is grounded within a European expansionist perspective (the frontier is a frontier only with respect to Europe), 'contact zone' is an attempt to invoke the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historic disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect. By using the term 'contact,' I aim to foreground the interactive, improvisational dimensions of colonial encounters so easily ignored or suppressed by diffusionist accounts of conquest and domination. A 'contact' perspective emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other. It treats the relations among colonizers and colonized, or travelers and 'travelees,' not in terms of separateness or apartheid, but in terms of copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power" (6-7).

*des États-Unis d'Amérique* (1803).<sup>99</sup> However, when the same landscapes are considered from creole and native perspectives, that distance collapses, and the relationship between subjects and objects becomes muddy. As noted in chapter two, it would be overreaching to assign Chateaubriand an active role in the dispute of the New World. However, for examining the negotiation of creole identities in America's wetlands, *Atala* nevertheless presents a locus that includes Fray Servando Teresa de Mier and Caleb Bingham, the novella's first Spanish and English translators in the Americas. As a text network, if *Atala* and its sources provide one model of how a wetlands literary history may be organized by the Louisiana territory, then the works of these authors, linked as they were to the dispute, provide another. As Latin and Anglo American writers, Servando and Bingham translated Chateaubriand's wetlands image of New France, but the significance of this task is not assessed adequately by individual readings of their respective editions. Instead, to fully appreciate both Louisiana's place and the creole's position within the dispute of the New World, these editions must be read, first, in the context of *Atala* as a transatlantic literary phenomenon, and, second, in relation to the translators' broader literary milieus. As I

---

<sup>99</sup> Volney, perhaps, offers an example of what Pratt calls "the 'seeing-man,' an admittedly unfriendly label for the European male subject of European landscape discourse – he whose imperial eyes passively look out and possess. The 'seeing-man,' she explains, is "The main protagonist of the anti-conquest," a term she uses to "refer to the strategies of representation whereby European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony. The term 'anti-conquest' was chosen because, as I argue, in travel and exploration writings these strategies of innocence are constituted in relation to older imperial rhetorics of conquest associated with the absolutist era" (7). The first U.S. translator of Volney was Charles Brockden Brown: *A view of the soil and climate of the United States of America* (1804).

articulate a network of texts that encompasses Servando and Bingham's editions of *Atala*, I describe the European background of the dispute, as well as the theory of creole degeneracy upon which it rests, but I foreground authors and texts that identify America's landscapes, including those of Louisiana, as sites from which to counter Old World ethnocentricity. Upon precarious footing between the Native American and the European, creoles such as Servando and Bingham negotiated their positions according to their stakes in the debate and, to varying degrees, pushed back against a discourse that would leave them mired in the New World's wetlands.

### **Wetlands Theory and Practice: Improvement and the Americas**

For reading the cross-section of philosophical and practical concerns in which wetlands discourse developed in the eighteenth-century American context, a pair of essays by Gilbert Chinard provide a model.<sup>100</sup> In one, "Eighteenth Century Theories on America as a Human Habitat" (1947), Chinard outlines the dispute of the New World and the political stakes often obscured by the polemic; in the other, "The American Philosophical Society and the Early History of Forestry in America" (1945), he examines forestry in early America and the attitudes upon which it rested as a continuation and compression, both in time and space, of its European history. While wetlands, as such, are not treated explicitly in either of the essays, the histories Chinard traces depend, a priori, on the implicit presence of wetlands landscapes. In

---

<sup>100</sup> These essays were later published together as *L'homme contre la nature: essais d'histoire de l'Amerique* (1949).

the first case, such landscapes formed one of the bases for the ambivalent European view of the Americas; in the second, wetlands like forests necessitated improvement before European settlement could occur and expand.

Although it must be read against more recent scholarship, Chinard's work helps situate Louisiana within a general European view of the Americas in the second half of the eighteenth century. By this time, he explains, "the settlements of the New World had brought many disappointments; the value of the colonies was much questioned and this explains in part the perfectly logical indifference with which the French accepted the loss of both Louisiana and Canada" ("Habitat" 27). For the nations of Europe, in sum, the scale of political interest in the Americas had shifted: imperial dreams of mythic riches were being replaced by the more practical concerns of managing emigrant populations. At the same time, even as they looked to the emerging United States as a hope and model for democracy, the *philosophes* recognized that more than political theory was at stake: "If America proved unable to develop a large population, if the climate was not normally healthy and the soil normally productive; if the country did not become intellectually and morally independent; if there were insuperable obstacles to the growth of a large, stable and enlightened people, the American experiment would fail to fulfill the hopes and expectations of the European liberals." "These questions," Chinard stresses, "became, after 1776, political problems of vital importance" (28). It is here, then, that the dispute of the New World is recast in a way that is most significant to my project. While Chinard focuses on the American, United States context, in which Franklin,

Jefferson, Adams and the other envoys were pulled into the controversy in order to establish that “America was a ‘good risk,’” the U.S. case was not exceptional in terms of the intersecting questions of climate, soil, and population. On the contrary, the future of the Americas in general at this moment rested to a degree upon the resolution of these questions, and to bring Latin America into the picture is to see a more complex discourse emerge from the tension between them. Out of this discourse, a partial idea of the wetlands as a coherent whole begins to develop, and in retrospect this development provides a new way of understanding the political and philosophical legacies of the colonial period as it gave way to revolutionary change. Ultimately, to the degree that the questions of climate, soil, and population were resolved during this period, they were resolved in ways that fractured the American population along lines of race and class, and the wetlands (as they have come to be understood over time as particular instances of soil and climate) carry those legacies into the present.

As the dispute developed in the eighteenth century, a complex dialogue (or feedback loop) developed between the first-hand accounts of the New World and the philosophical disquisitions written from afar. In drawing their generalizations, Enlightenment thinkers certainly relied on the colonial narratives from the Americas (especially those of the Spanish), and as the century wore on, European travelers to the New World arrived ready for those generalizations to be fulfilled. The accounts these later travelers composed, then, were already pre-articulated to an existing narrative tradition. To trace how this dialogue developed on the topic of the

relationship between climate, soil, and population, Chinard turns to Montesquieu and Buffon.<sup>101</sup>

The relative lack of population in the New World was an ongoing puzzle for European philosophers and historians, and Montesquieu, in the *Spirit of the Laws* (1748), folded the New World example into a comprehensive synthesis of the subject. In “Of Laws in the Relation they have to the Nature of the Soil,” Montesquieu concludes (to paraphrase Chinard) that the sparse population in the Americas was due, paradoxically, to the very fertility of the soil: along with opportunities for hunting and fishing, the spontaneous production of the land necessitated only small-scale cultivation, which prevented the development of large-scale agriculture, which meant small nations.<sup>102</sup> As Montesquieu understood it, population in the Americas and in general was linked not simply to reliance on nature, which produces only a little subsistence, but also to the native way of life. The support of large populations,

---

<sup>101</sup> In this section, except where otherwise noted, I cite Chinard’s quotations of Montesquieu and Buffon and the page numbers refer to “Eighteenth Century Theories on America as a Human Habitat.” His sources are *The spirit of the laws, translated from the French of M. de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu*, 10<sup>th</sup> ed. (1773) and *Natural history, general and particular, by the Count de Buffon, Translated into English ... with occasional Notes and Observations, by William Smellie*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 9 vols. (1791).

<sup>102</sup> Montesquieu explains, “As the produce of uncultivated land is to the produce of land improved by culture, so the number of savages in one country is to the number of savages in another. And when the people who cultivate the land, cultivate also the arts, the number of savages is, to the number of this people, in the compound proportion of the number of savages to that of the husbandmen, and of the number of the husbandmen to that of the men who cultivate the arts. They can scarcely form a great nation. If they are herdsmen and shepherds, they have need of an extensive country to furnish subsistence for a small number; if they live by hunting, their number is still less, and, in order to find the means of life, they must form a very small nation” (qtd. 28).

on the contrary, depends on the labor of men and the ability to build on the labors of those who came before. Nations, in Montesquieu's words, are "raised by the industry of man," and here (as Chinard notes) he begins to counter in advance the thesis that Rousseau will put forth in the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (1754).<sup>103</sup> In exalting "the works of men," Montesquieu writes,

Men by their care, and by the influence of good laws, have rendered the earth more proper for their abode. We see rivers where there have been lakes and marshes. This is a benefit which nature has not bestowed; but it is a benefit maintained and supplied by nature. ... Thus as destructive nations produce evils more durable than themselves, the actions of industrious nations are the source of blessings which last when they are no more. (qtd. 29)

In respect to the portions of America already settled by Europeans, Chinard calls this statement both "a program and a prophecy." For, as Montesquieu states, "those countries which the industry of man has rendered habitable, and which stand in need of the same industry to provide for their subsistence, require a mild and moderate government," while "the barrenness of the earth renders men industrious, sober, inured to hardship, courageous and fit for war; they are obliged to procure by labour what the earth refuses to bestow spontaneously" (qtd. 29). In sum, if America was able to progress from the latter to the former stage, "to accomplish by themselves and in a short time what had been done in Europe through the efforts of countless generations" (qtd. 29), then within Montesquieu's scheme, in Chinard's words, "the whole course of history indicated that they would turn into a people comparable in every respect to the strongest nations of Europe" (29).

---

<sup>103</sup> Montesquieu's thought is important for my reading of Chateaubriand (and his preface to *Atala*), as it adds an additional branch to his intellectual genealogy. The passages from *The Spirit of the Laws* also support my discussion of Aubry's mission.

Here, I am interested in Montesquieu's choice of example. Of the many possibilities, is it an accident that he chose the transformation of lakes and marshes to rivers to illustrate man's improvement of nature? Or, does the choice of wetlands management, as it would be called today, point to something fundamental about the relationship between man and nature, and something definitive about the way man perceived his relationship with nature during the Enlightenment? Beyond the metaphorical possibility of man differentiating or distancing himself through reason from the mire of his baser needs and instincts, I argue that there was an emerging material and agricultural base to Montesquieu's choice.<sup>104</sup> Though it would soon find its fullest economic expression in the work of the physiocrats or *economistes*, the idea of deriving "benefit" or value, in this case social value, from the improvement of nature has a particular significance in respect to the wetlands because these landscapes lent themselves in both France and America most readily to the kind of improvement that Montesquieu describes.

Ultimately, for Montesquieu, soil and climate do not absolutely determine human population or ways of life, but they are two of a number of contributing

---

<sup>104</sup> Although a nineteenth-century title, see for instance Henry Pattulo, *Essai sur l'amélioration des terres* (1858). I have also located several practical treatises on drainage that lend to the idea of wetlands as sites in transatlantic translation. In an article that includes diagrams of drainage machines, see "Mémoire concernant le dessèchement des marais, & le moyen de faire des levées solides," *Journal Oeconomique* (1751), by the author of *Histoire de la Louisiane*, here identified as M. Le Page du Pratz, Ingénieur Machiniste & Hydraulique. See also Mr. Lescallier, *The Method for draining lands overflowed by the tides, such as is practised at Surinam, and Demerray* (1802), written in French and translated into English by the author.

factors.<sup>105</sup> In respect to the Native American population, however, what is to be made of Montesquieu's essential example of wetlands management? In terms of cultivation, had necessity not yet forced man's intervention into these landscapes, or had the landscapes themselves not encouraged the industry of men? These questions may not seem entirely relevant to Montesquieu's theory, and it may seem at this point that I am forcing the wetlands, as such, into his account: he, after all, only mentions marshes. However, the centrality of these landscapes to the dispute of the New World becomes apparent when Buffon is brought into the picture.

Because they comprise a general system subject to ongoing revision, Chinard warns against attempting to derive a definitive statement on America from any one of Buffon's many publications, dating from the *Theory of the Earth* (1749) to the *Epochs of Nature* (1779). In general, says Chinard, "Buffon refused to sentimentalize about nature in its raw state" (29-30), and he attributed the relative wildness of the new continent, not unlike Montesquieu, to its "undeveloped condition." His thoughts on waterways, which apply in general to America, are indicative of this attitude:

In every country where the number of men is too inconsiderable for forming and supporting polished societies, the surface of the earth is more unequal and rugged, and the channels of rivers are more extended, irregular, and often interrupted by obstacles. The Rhone and the Loire would require the operation of several ages before they became navigable. It is by confining and directing the waters, and clearing the bottoms of rivers, that they acquire a fixed and determinate course. In thinly inhabited regions, nature is always rude, and sometimes deformed. (qtd. 30)

---

<sup>105</sup> Buffon writes, "Men are influenced by various causes, by the climate, the religion, the laws, the maxims of government, by precedents, morals, and customs; from which is formed a general spirit, which takes its rift from these" (29).

In America, what then accounts for the undeveloped condition of nature (the absence of second nature); or, more to the point, why had man not intervened in nature to a measurable degree, and why had sufficient population not developed to support such intervention? Buffon points to climate and food as determining factors for the support of any society, but this did not for him adequately explain “the small number of men scattered over the immense territories of North America,” nor his perception that “they are all equally stupid, ignorant, and destitute of arts and learning” (qtd. 30).<sup>106</sup>

In fact, writes Chinard, “Buffon recognized that on the whole ‘the climates of America are not so unequal, with regard to heat and cold, as those of the Antient Continent’ and consequently that some other reason had to be found to explain the small size of the population” (30). He concluded, first, that the natives of America must be a new people, recently settled on the continent; second, that the still wild country therefore offered too few spots to support habitation and culture; and third, that the industry of the Europeans, in respect to changing the landscape, had not yet altered this basic situation. The second and third of these arguments basically come down to the first, that the Americans were a new people, arrived too recently to the continent to have effected permanent material change to their environment. By itself, the argument is not that controversial, but it proved difficult for Buffon to reconcile

---

<sup>106</sup> In more detail, he explains, “Coarse, unwholesome, and ill prepared food, makes the human species degenerate. All those people who live miserably, are ugly and ill-made. Even in France, the country people are not so beautiful as those who live in towns. ... The effects of climate and of food upon animals are so well known, that we need hardly mention them: And, though their operation is slower and less apparent upon men; yet, from analogy, we ought to conclude, that their effects are not less certain, and that they manifest themselves in all the varieties we find among the human species” (qtd. 30).

with the general deficiency he attributed to the New World, where “animated Nature is weaker, less active, and more circumscribed in the variety of her productions” (qtd. 31).

Through comparative analysis of the old and new continents, Buffon thus derived what became known as the theory of American degeneration. In general, whether the quadrupeds in question were exclusive to the new, or indigenous to both worlds, he argued that they were of smaller stature in the Americas and, further, that animals brought to the new world from the old certainly diminished in size. As Chinard observes, “Buffon, being a philosopher, much more than an observer, was primarily interested in discovering a general principle or ‘law’ which would provide a satisfactory explanation for the phenomena he had listed” (31). His hypothesis about the natives of the Americas, that they must be a people recently arrived to the continents, was inevitably subsumed by need to explain a broader generalization. Although eventually revised, Buffon’s explanation—not least because it is the source of Pauw’s distortions—needs to be quoted at length:

In this New World, therefore, there is some combination of elements and other physical causes, something that opposes the amplification of animated Nature. There are obstacles to the development and perhaps to the formation of large germs. Even those which, from the kindly influences of another climate, have acquired their complete form and expansion, shrink and diminish under a niggardly sky and an unprolific land, thinly peopled with wandering savages, who, instead of using this territory as a master, had no property or empire; and having subjected neither the animals nor the elements, nor conquered the seas, nor directed the motions of rivers, nor cultivated the earth, held only the first rank among animated beings, and existed as creatures of no consideration in Nature, a kind of weak automatons, incapable of improving or fecunding her intentions. She treated them rather like a stepmother than a parent, by denying them the invigorating sentiment of love, and the strong desire of multiplying their species. (qtd. 31)

Because it takes on multiple meanings, I will pause to stress Buffon's assertion that the male American savage is "incapable of fecunding [Nature's] intentions." In the rest of the passage, though he focuses on his sexual impotence, his lack of "the most precious spark of Nature's fire," one should not forget that Buffon's emasculation of the native extends to his inability to shape and cultivate Nature. The attributed impotence genders Buffon's view of the native and the structure of native society, and, ultimately, the root of that impotence is climate:

For, though the American savage be nearly of the same stature with men in polished societies, yet this is not a sufficient exception to the general contraction of animated Nature throughout the whole Continent. In the savage, the organs of generation are small and feeble. He has no hair, no beard, nor ardour for the female. Though nimbler than the European, because more accustomed to running, his strength is not so great. His sensations are less acute; and yet he is more cowardly and timid. The activity of the body is not so much an exercise or spontaneous motion, as a necessary action produced by want. Destroy his appetite for victuals and drink, and you will at once annihilate the active principle of all his movements; he remains, in stupid repose, on his limbs or couch for whole days. It is easy to discover the cause of the scattered life of savages, and of their estrangement from society. They have been refused the most precious spark of Nature's fire. They have no ardour for women, and, of course, no love of mankind. Unacquainted with the most lively and most tender of all attachments, their other sensations of this nature are cold and languid. Their love to parents and children is extremely weak. The bonds of the most intimate of all societies, that of the same family, are feeble: and one family has not attachment to another. Their heart is frozen, their society cold, their empire cruel. They regard their females as servants destined to labour, or as beasts of burden, whom the load unmercifully with the produce of their hunting, and oblige, without pity or gratitude, to perform labours which often exceed their strength. They have few children, and pay little attention to them. (qtd. 31)

In sum, Buffon concludes, "Every thing must be referred to the first cause: They are indifferent, because they are weak; and this indifference to the sex is the original stain which disgraces Nature, prevents her from expanding, and, by destroying the germs

of life, cuts the root of society. Hence man makes no exception to what has been advanced. Nature by denying him the faculty of love, has abused him and contracted him more than any other animal.” However, he allows an exception: “If Nature has diminished all the quadrupeds in the New World, she seems to have cherished the reptile and enlarged the insect tribes” (qtd. 31). This exception does in fact prove the rule; and, as Chinard points out, it leads Buffon to factor climate into (the first place in) his reasoning. “As far as he knew,” Chinard writes, “the ‘inert condition of nature,’ favoring the development of lower creatures and preventing the growth of ‘nobler’ organisms, could only be explained by the quality of the earth and atmosphere, the degree of heat and moisture, the quantity of running and stagnant waters, and the extent of forests” (31). According to Chinard, by

Tracing a dismal picture of the American scene, insisting upon the fact that the natives had never stopped the torrents, nor directed the rivers, nor drained the marshes, that the stagnating waters covered immense tracts of land, augmenting the moisture of the air and diminishing its heat, he attributed to the climate, in last analysis, the blight which affected men and beasts in the New World. (31-2)<sup>107</sup>

In Chinard’s analysis, Buffon certainly established a determinate relationship between climate and man and beasts, but it ultimately does not amount to a condemnation or a closed loop, even if contemporaries including Jefferson and Pauw, albeit to different

---

<sup>107</sup> Buffon: “Here the Earth never saw her surface adorned with these rich crops, which demonstrate her fecundity, and constitute the opulence of polished nations. In this abandoned condition, everything languishes, corrupts and proves abortive. The air, the earth, overloaded with humid and noxious vapours, are unable either to purify themselves, or to profit by the influence of the Sun, who darts in vain his most enlivening rays upon this frigid mass, which is not in a condition to make suitable returns to his ardour. Its powers are limited to the production of moist plants, reptiles, and insects, and can afford nourishment only to cold and feeble animals” (qtd. 32).

end, interpreted it as such. Instead, Chinard argues, Buffon's conclusions about America's native populations were not that far removed from Montesquieu's, as a closer reading of his conclusions reveals: "His main purpose was to illustrate the point that, in its original condition, Nature is not the kind and generous mother of the poets, but that, in order to survive and develop a civilization, man must curb and domesticate the blind forces around him" (32). If man in the New World was as yet stunted by climate, man nevertheless remains, in Buffon's words, "the only animated being on whom Nature has bestowed sufficient genius, strength, and ductility to enable him to survive and multiply in every climate of the earth" (32). "When all the available data are taken into consideration," Chinard argues, "the only philosophical conclusion which may be drawn from the real inferiority of the natives of America is," according to Buffon's, that:

the greatest part of the Continent of America is a new land, still untouched by the hand of man ... that the men are cold, and the animals small because the ardour of the former, and the magnitude of the latter, depend on the salubrity and the heat of the air; and that some centuries hence, when the lands are cultivated, the forests cut down, the course of the rivers properly directed, and the marshes drained, this same country will become the most fertile, the most wholesome and the richest in the whole world, as it is already in all the parts which have experienced the industry and skill of man. (qtd. 32)

The real distinction Buffon was making, according to Chinard, was the contrast between the passivity of the American savages, who "accept[ed] their natural surroundings [and] adapted themselves to natural conditions," and the activity of the European colonists, "who were making every effort to become the masters and not the servants of nature." If one reads Buffon as Chinard suggests, "the unfair criticism of America" becomes instead "a direct tribute to the industry of the British colonists."

If, despite his best efforts, his true thesis has been obscured, then it is due to the “sensationalist writers, who deliberately chose to overlook the second part of his demonstration and retained only his picture of the ‘desert and melancholy state of the New Continent’” (qtd. 32).

If man was relatively recently arrived to the Americas, and the Americas were in turn relatively new lands, “still untouched by the hand of man,” then Buffon’s theory gets closer than Montesquieu’s to answering *why* America’s natives had not affected their environment in a permanent way: in short, it was a matter of time.<sup>108</sup> However, given that necessary time, whether or not they would have done so is a question that was rendered moot by the arrival of the Europeans. As it was, at the time of the European arrival, the natives of the New World had not yet overcome the climatic determinant that bound them, in Buffon’s eyes, to the deficiencies inherent to the continents and their products as a whole. Buffon may have been misread by his peers, and perhaps deliberately, but this does not change the fact that he judged the natives, in his time, as being enfeebled by the climate and therefore incapable of effecting the change—through clearing, draining, and cultivating the land—that would ameliorate the climate and free them from its grasp. Put another way, Buffon did not allow that the natives had been, or were yet able to differentiate themselves like the Europeans from their environment, and he thus established the discrepancy that others, such as Pauw, would exploit to keep America’s natives embedded in the

---

<sup>108</sup> Though Chinard does not point it out, Buffon explicitly concludes that the Americas are more than just new; they are recently emerged from the seas. Pauw builds on this claim.

past, in a morass outside of history. In Buffon's estimation, the future of the New World, the future in which "this same country will become the most fertile, the most wholesome and the richest in the whole world," belonged to the colonists.

In deriving their universal laws and systems, Montesquieu invoked the American case to illustrate that man must cultivate Nature's benefits before he can establish society, while Buffon took it a step further to suggest that man must first cultivate himself. While just a suggestion in Montesquieu, Buffon seems to make it more clear through negative example that man becomes man by responding in positive ways to the demands put upon him by Nature. This eventually means agriculture, but tending waterways seems to be a prerequisite to this. Put another way, an aspect of wetlands management grounds both men's reasoning. In Montesquieu's estimation, wetlands management is fundamental to human society or civilization, but Buffon takes it a step further: to inscribe or differentiate the land—to drain swamps or to clear forests as a prerequisite to cultivation—in sum, to alter one's environment and/or climate, is to be differentiated from the land and inscribed as human. For both, the American case required that they account for the wetlands in a coherent way, no matter the sociological or scientific inconsistencies. The dispute of the New World, as it developed during the Enlightenment, was therefore marked by a strain of wetlands discourse, which had its partial origins in the kind of systematic thought Montesquieu and Buffon were attempting. Like their systems, this wetlands discourse was partial, incomplete, and subject to change and revision, but this did not mitigate the American response.

### ***Pantano Patriotism: Servando and the Mire of Thought about Spanish America***

Servando Teresa de Mier y Noriega was born 1763 in Monterrey, took Dominican orders in 1779, and in 1794 became infamous for delivering a sermon that proposed a pre-Columbian date for the appearance of the Virgin Mary in Mexico. In one stroke, he undermined not just Spain's justification for the conquest, but also the Creole and Mexican nationalist attachments to the Guadalupan tradition. Immediately tried and stripped of his privileges, he spent most of the rest of his life in prison or on the run from the Spanish Inquisition, all the while advocating, in writing, on behalf of Mexico and its people.<sup>109</sup>

In a series of manuscripts and publications, Servando exemplifies the early nineteenth-century defense of the Americas and her native peoples against the attacks of Enlightenment natural philosophy, and the Dominican singles out for particular ridicule the Dutch-born, Prussian philosopher Cornelius de Pauw, whose *Recherches philosophiques sur les Américains* was first published in Berlin in 1768. In one of the most idiosyncratic passages in his *Historia de la revolución de Nueva España* (1813), Servando may not explicitly accuse the Spanish authorities of enlisting Pauw to wage ideological warfare on New Spain, but he comes close. Citing a long tradition of eulogizing conquistadors in "romances épicos" treated as history, he argues that Pauw

---

<sup>109</sup> There is a great deal of scholarship on Servando in the creole context. In English, see: Kathleen Ross, "A Natural History of the Old World: The 'Memorias' of Fray Servando Teresa de Mier" (1989); Susana Rotker, "Introduction," *The Memoirs of Fray Servando Teresa de Mier* (1998); D. A. Brading, *The Origins of Mexican Nationalism* (1985). Brading provides the strongest historical and political context. Recent treatments in Spanish include Angel José Fernández, ed., *Memorias* (2009) and Manuel Ortuño Martínez, ed., *Memorias: un fraile mexicano desterrado en Europa* (2006).

presents the Spanish, in this case the Cadiz Cortes, with another opportunity “para justificar sus carnicerías.” The “Prusiano Paw trabajó 9 ó 10 años como un escarabajo para formar su pelletilla de quanto malo habian dicho de la America y habitantes sus tiranos, los Españoles dado en regodearse con esta putrefaccion, para echárnosla en cara como si todavia fuésemos los antiguos Indios” / The “Prussian Pauw worked nine or ten years like a beetle to form the pellet of shit that has been said of America and its inhabitants, [and] its Spanish tyrants have delighted in this putrefaction, throwing it in our faces as if still we were still ancient Indians.”<sup>110</sup> While the dung beetle metaphor may on the surface appear *ad hominem*, its logic lies in Servando's ironic reversal of one of Pauw's central claims against the American continent, in short, that it was a degenerate swamp. Pauw, in other words, is the one rolling in the filthy mire of his Eurocentric arguments, and Servando concludes: “Era pues necesario dar tambien algunas escobadas sobre tanto incómodo escarabajo, despachurrarlos sobre sus propias horduras, y proveer a mis paisanos de un manualito de exórcismos contra semejantes *antuérpias*” (xv-xvi). At this point, Servando's already singular prose becomes even more obscure. Given the metaphor being developed, it follows that Pauw, “the bothersome beetle, should be swept away, squashed in his own muck,” but what should be made of Servando's suggestion that “it is necessary to provide his countrymen with a little manual of exorcisms against

---

<sup>110</sup> Unless cited, these are my translations of Servando: where possible, I cite Helen Lane's English translation from the Rotker edition of the *Memoirs* (1998).

such *antuérpías*”?<sup>111</sup> Translated to English, the term connotes “absurdities” or “falsehoods,” but it denotes, more literally, “antwerpisms” or “antwerps.” Its connection to that city, however, has not always been apparent in the scholarship on Servando. Though explanation of the etymology of *antuérpías* has been reserved for a series of footnotes, because of the strange turn it takes into amphibious and wetlands matters, this discussion deserves further consideration.

Gerbi, for his part, cites Alfonso Reyes's explanation of the term, in which the latter presumably quotes or paraphrases from Antonio de Torquemada's *Jardín de flores curiosas* (1570): “The *Antuerpia* is a marine boar of which one specimen was seen in in ‘37” (fn. 314). The reference checks out. In “De un autor censurado [Torquemada] en *Quijote*” (1947), Reyes writes, “La Antuerpia es un jabalí marino de que se vio uno el año de 37” (378). However, Torquemada never names the beast as such, and due to Gerbi's certification of Reyes's attribution, it seems that in spite of this rather unlikely explanation, the citation entered the record and no one found it necessary to question its authority. What Torquemada does write, in Bernardo and Antonio's dialogue is this:

De ninguna cosa quiero maravillarme, ni dexar de creer que sea possible lo que se dize de las bestias o pescados grandes de la mar, aviendo entendido por cosa muy cierta y averiguada, y assi lo escrivé autores modernos, que el año de quinientos y treinta y siete se hallo en las riberas del mar de Alemaña un pescado de grandisima grandeza: tenia la cabeça de hechura de puerco javali con dos colmillos que salian mas de quatro palmas de la boca, y quatro pies, de la manera y hechura que pintan a los dragones, y de mas de los ojos de la

---

<sup>111</sup> In their critical edition of Servando's *Historia* (1990), André Saint-Lu, et al. explain that “*Hordura* es palabra francesa: *ordure* (basura); la h inicial quizá se deba a la fantasía de los tipógrafos, o a una reminiscencia de la etimología latina (adj. *horridus*)” (fn. 13). Jeremy Moyle translates it as “filth”; Helen Lane as “dung.”

cabeça, tenia otros dos muy grandes en los lados, y otro junto al ombligo, en el cerro unas espinas muy altas, fuertes y duras como de hierro or hazero: este puerco marino se llevo a Antuerpia como cosa maravillosa, para que todos le viesen, y hoy dia avra muchos testigos de los que entonces se hallaron presentes. (*Jardín* 504) <sup>112</sup>

For my part I will wonder at nothing, neyther leave to beleeve any thing that is possible, which is written of these great fishes, & Sea-monsters, seeing it is most approovedly knowne and verified, and nowe lately also written and published by sundry men of credit, that in the yere 1537 there was taken in a River of Germanie, a Fish of a huge & monstrous greatnes, the fashion of whose head was like unto that of a wilde Boare, with two great tuscles shooting above foure spans out of his mouth, he had foure great feete, like to those with which you see Dragons usually painted, and besides the two eyes in his head, hee had two others in his sides, and one neere his navill, and on the ridge of his necke certaine long brisles, as strong and hard as though they had beene of yron or steele. This Sea-monster was carried for a wonder to Antwerp, and there live as yet many which will witness to have seen the same. (*The Spanish Mandeville* 149).

How Reyes came to transpose the place name of *Antuerpia* for the name of Torquemada's composite “pescado” and “puerco,” it is impossible to tell, but not until the 1990 publication of a critical edition of the *Historia* is an alternative explanation offered for Servando's term. According to André Saint-Lu, et al., “*Antverpia* en latín es la ciudad de Amberes, donde se publicaron numerosos textos antiespañoles” (fn. 13) / “*Antuerpia* in Latin is the city of Antwerp, where many anti-Spanish texts were published.”<sup>113</sup> While this etymology is certainly more accurate in general, it warrants a bit more inquiry before it is entirely satisfactory in the present context. Given his own enthusiasm for the Black Legend, it appears unlikely that Servando would equate the Netherlands' denigration of Spain (dating at least to the Sack of Antwerp in 1576)

---

<sup>112</sup> For readability, I have again shifted the typography of “u” to “v” and “f” to “s”.

<sup>113</sup> Thanks to Ray Girvan for this reference: after following Gerbi (and Rotker) to Reyes to Torquemada, it was clear that *Antuerpia* referred to the city, but I had not seen the Saint-Lu edition of the *Historia*.

with Spain's current delight in Pauw's denigration of Nueva España. If Servando's neologism does not allude to a direct comparison, which would seem to paradoxically render the former as baseless as the latter, then it must connote something more, something beyond one-to-one signification. If this is the case, then Servando has pushed the specificity of his coinage into the realm of generalization: the *antuérpias* to which he refers are not just the absurdities of the theory of American degeneracy (and the Black Legend) but also their excesses. From this angle, Reyes's "mistake" seems less off the mark, as it is not the unknown thing in itself at issue, so much as it is the discursive circulation of misinformation through which one interprets and comes to know it. In Reyes's misappropriation of Torquemada, the excess and indeterminacy of the *Antuerpia* or "jabalí marino" thus renders it an appropriate signifier for the surplus of unfounded absurdities disseminated by Pauw, those Servando wishes to exorcise.

As the Reyes and Torquemada example illustrates, with only a certain set of signifiers at hand, knowledge is a messy and sometimes absurd process through which the uncertain becomes certain, through which indeterminate things move from the outside to the inside of discourse. While language is always inadequate to the task of meaning, this becomes most apparent when it must move off the map into unexplored territories (where *hic sunt dracones*): the chain of signification breaks, and the result is often a *cosa maravillosa* or a *monstruosidad*, in this case a "marine boar" or "pigfish." Put another way, because their ambiguousness and perceived otherness generates anxiety, and Shakespeare's Caliban perhaps has come to provide

the paradigmatic example in New World discourse, indeterminate things tend to “tell monstrous lies” when they are forced to signify or made to speak in a language that is not their own. Though one might press the creole Servando into an equation with Caliban, in this case it is his utterance of “antuérpias,” the coinage itself, which warrants the comparison. Because of its perceived strangeness, Servando’s term demands interpretation and creates misinterpretation; it is subversive (like Caliban) in its very presence. Nonetheless, beneath its appearance, the term is *meant* to be subversive, as Servando, in a reversal of European attitudes about Spanish America, is accusing the city of Antwerp of being a publisher of filth. Reyes’s misinterpretation of the antuérpia is therefore oddly apt, because it closes the semantic gap: if the two definitions are conflated, Servando himself couldn’t have come up with a better image than Torquemada’s “jabalí marino” wallowing in the intellectual mire of Europe.

At the same time, the amphibious and indeterminate status of Reyes’s antuérpia, an early modern creature of land and water (not unlike Caliban), resonates with the general uncertainty that still defined, in Servando’s day, the European discourse about the continental Americas and their inhabitants. While the “jabalí marino” belongs to the Old World, it was nevertheless encountered off the map as something previously unknown, and it offers a figure for reading similar encounters in the New World during the age of discovery and into the Enlightenment. Furthermore, the European interpretations generated by encounters with such indeterminate creatures (real and imagined) are, to a degree, emblematic of the

uncertainty provoked by America's wetlands in general. While Caliban might be read as an early example of such thought, the Enlightenment theory of American degeneracy, at its worst, reduced New World natives to little more than amphibians, and it is within this intellectual climate that Servando takes his stand: he takes advantage of American indeterminacy to turn European uncertainty on its head. In the *Relación de lo que sucedió en Europa al doctor Mier (Account of what happened in Europe, from July 1795 to October 1805)*, written around 1818 but posthumously published as part of his *Memorias*, Servando writes of ten years of exile from Mexico, a period that begins in 1795 with his sentence to imprisonment in the monastery at Las Caldas (Santander, Spain), and ends in 1805 with one of his several escapes from the Spanish authorities, in this case into Portugal. My interest in this period begins with his arrival in Paris in 1801, following his flight to France dressed as a French priest. "Hago capítulo aparte de mi estancia en París, para contar en él muchas cosas dignas de saberse" (Martínez 67) / "I am making a separate chapter of my stay in Paris, in order to recount in it many things worthy of note" (Rotker 18), Servando writes, and he indeed covers matters from ecclesiastical administration, to current political events, to fashion and culture in the French capital. He also makes special note of the arrival of Simón Rodríguez, "un caraqueño que, con el nombre de Samuel Robinsón, enseñaba en Bayona, cuando yo estaba, inglés, francés y español. ... [él] se fue a vivir conmigo en París y me indujo a que pusiémos escuela de lengua española, que estaba muy en boga" (Martínez 68) / "a native of Caracas who, under the name of Samuel Robinson, taught English, French and

Spanish in Bayonne when I was there” (Rotker 19). The reason for the popularity of Spanish, according to Servando, was Spain’s recent cession of Santo Domingo and Louisiana to Napoleon, followed by the despot’s subsequent sale of the latter to the United States. As a “proof of our ability,” he explains, they decided to translate *Atala*, which was printed under Rodríguez’s pseudonym. They translated the text “word for word, so that it could be used as a text for our pupils” (Rotker 20), Servando explains, and this simplicity was misinterpreted in a subsequent Castilian translation, published in Valencia, that was basically a deficient plagiarism of his own. He writes: “For instance, I made no annotation for the word *sabánas*, since all through the north of America this Indian word for prairie has been adopted. Not knowing that [the translator] tried to improve on my text and corrected it to read *sábanas*” (Rotker 21). *Sábanas*, accent on the first syllable, is Spanish for bed sheets. I include this anecdote to emphasize two things: first, Servando always draws attention to basic European ignorance of the New World; second, his edition of *Atala* is not particularly remarkable. As a Mexican creole writer, he made Chateaubriand’s representation of New France available to a Spanish audience, but the importance of this task is not revealed in the book itself. Instead, the *place* of *Atala* in Servando’s body of work is more significant, as it reveals the creole’s difficult task as a translator of America’s broader landscape and culture. Because Servando’s account of this historical moment bleeds into the larger dispute of the New World, it deserves further discussion.

While framing the Louisiana transaction in terms of Spain’s shortsightedness, Servando at the same time provides a snapshot of contemporary geopolitics in the

Americas, illustrating how they were shaped by European intrigues. Spain, he suggests, without knowing Louisiana's extent, gave up to Napoleon the entire territory, "tan grande como toda la Nueva España," in exchange for "pequeñita Toscana" (Martínez 68), so that the Prince of Parma could be crowned king of Etruria. While this arrangement was made during the peace of Amiens, Servando explains, war broke out anew, and Napoleon—to prevent the possibility of the territory falling into the hands of the English—sold Louisiana to the United States before Spain had even ceded it to him. Despite these machinations and their effects in Europe, what is certain, he emphasizes, is this:

los angloamericanos se han apoderado hasta de la Florida Oriental, cuya capital es San Agustín, y han puesto su fuerte Clayborne a sesenta leguas de nuestras poblaciones de Texas. No tararán mucho en hacerse dueños de las provincias internas del Oriente y llegar hasta México, por razón natural; pues con el comercio, la industria y la libertad, el acogimiento de todos los extranjeros y las tierras que repartan a todas las familias que emigren de Europa, y que ellos mismos conducen, han adoptado todos los medios de multiplicarse, y en cuarenta años han llegado a nueve millones, de dos y medio que eran cuando la insurrección. (Martínez 68)

the English in America have taken over territory extending as far as Eastern Florida, the capital of which is Saint Augustine, and have located their Fort Clayborne only sixty leagues from our settlements in Texas. It will not be long before they take over the eastern provinces in the interior and extend their territory as far as Mexico, as only stands to reason; for through commerce, industry and freedom, the welcome that they extend to all foreigners and the land that they distribute to all families that emigrate from Europe, whom they themselves bring over, they have adopted every possible means of multiplying their numbers, and in forty years they have increased their population to nine million, from the two and a half million it numbered at the time of the insurrection. (Rotker 19-20).

To contrast the success of the "angloamericanos" in expanding and populating their territories, Servando goes on to enumerate on the same score the many failings of

Spanish America: “Nosotros, al contrario, erámos cien millones cuando la conquista, y hoy apenas llegamos a nueve ... porque hemos adoptado todos los medios de impedir y disminuir la población” (Martínez 68) / “We, on the other hand, numbered a hundred million at the time of the Conquest, and today there are barely nine million ... because we have adopted every possible means of hindering the growth of the population and diminishing it” (Rotker 20). As he describes the drop in population, Servando implicitly includes the native population, and as he lists the contributing factors, from impediments to marriage to general oppression, he includes “la división imaginaria de castas” / “the imaginary division of the population into castes,” as well as the “excomuni3n en que vivimos del g3nero humano” / “excommunication from the human species in which we live.” To conclude his list, he adds the butchery of the revolution, along with “la guerra incesante, p3rfida y cruel que se hace a las naciones n3madas, y con quienes los norteamericanos viven en paz y tratan como hermanos” / “the cruel, perfidious and incessant war waged against the nomad [Indian] nations, with whom the North Americans live in peace and treat like brothers.” Finally, he asserts, “Su misma pol3tica privará a Espa3a de sus Am3ricas si no muda su sistema maquiav3lico” (Martínez 69) / “Spain’s own policy will cause it to lose its American territories if it does not change its Machiavellian system” (Rotker 20).

Without question, this passage is part of Servando’s general attack on Spanish colonial policy in the Americas and the attitudes that foster it. However, it also reveals how Americas discourse, including the broader dispute of the New World, could be manipulated—in this case split along North and South or Anglo and Latin

American lines—to suit a particular purpose. Elsewhere, Servando’s blanket condemnation of New World detractors follows the predictable refrain of “de Paw, Raynal, and Robertson,” but something different happens when he sets Spanish views of the Americas directly against those of the English.<sup>114</sup> Somehow, in Servando’s argument, independence has severed the ideological thread that connects “norteamericanos” to Great Britain. While the general Anglo view of Native Americans is complex, it suffices to say here that it was not monolithic, neither completely that of William Robertson, nor completely one in which “los norteamericanos viven en paz y tratan como hermanos.”<sup>115</sup> Though Servando exaggerates the peaceful state of Anglo/Indian relations in North America, his perpetuation of the Black Legend (despite his own inclusion of the native in an imaginary of Nueva España), as well as his pitting of English against Spanish, North against South, Anglo against Latin America, intimates a larger discursive and political shift in which North America (primarily the U.S.) and its noble savage was enfolded into the European position in the dispute of the New World.<sup>116</sup> Latin

---

<sup>114</sup> Robertson (who exhaustively and meticulously documents his sources) suffers unfairly in this comparison with Pauw. See discussion of Morse below.

<sup>115</sup> At a minimum, the Puritans on one hand and the American sons of the Enlightenment (Jefferson, et al.) on the other. For part of this story, see William Cronon, *Changes in the Land* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983).

<sup>116</sup> While it does not completely resolve the claim I make here, one of Gerbi’s comments on Hegel is of interest. In a section that covers *The United States and South America*, Gerbi writes: “But which nation of the New World will receive this mission and this laurel crown? With the natives excluded, there remain the societies and tribes of European origin. But in regard to them Hegel finds himself embarrassed by his repudiation of the American continent. He experiences some difficulty in combining the contrast between physical immaturity and physical maturity (New and Old World) with the distinction between a merely natural (physical) civilization and a

---

spiritual one. Is the natural civilization to the spiritual as the immature continent is the mature? Hegel never quite says so in so many words, but his verdict on the United States suggests something very similar: that they have not yet reached political maturity, that they do not form a solid state, because they still have enormous spaces to fill with waves of farmers, colonists, and immigrants. This continual draining off and the absence of powerful neighbors prevent the formation of those internal tensions, those class conflicts and urban and industrial agglomerations, which are the necessary basis of an organic state. North America, in fact, is still too natural, and therefore too 'unpolitical' and unspiritual; it has too much space, and therefore too few problems; too much 'geography,' and therefore too little 'history.' If Europe had still the Teutonic forest, there would have been no French Revolution. Its real history is still to begin. When this continent came into contact with Europe it was in part already deceased, and in part, still not complete and 'ready' (*fertig*). Its natives have practically disappeared. And Hegel is quick to appreciate the quite 'European' character of the new North American civilization ('what happens in America derives from Europe'; 'America is a dependency that has taken Europe's overflow') – and the possibilities it offers for the energies that find no outlet in Europe. But North and South America are 'very decisively separated.' To the south of Panama the strip of land between the mountains and the sea, where Peru and Chile are situated, is 'narrower and offers less advantages than that of North America' [...]. Republics have appeared in the whole of South America except Brazil, but if we compare them with North America we find 'a surprising' antithesis.' In the north, order and liberty; in the south, anarchy and militarism. In the north, the Reformation; in the south, Catholicism. The north was 'colonized,' the south, 'conquered.' Here Hegel outlines a new polarization, no longer between mature and immature, natural and spiritual; but between the two Americas, between the mutual confidence (*Zutrauen*) that reigns among the industrious, faithful, and liberal Protestants, and the violence and suspicion prevalent among the quarrelsome, arrogant Catholics. He introduces thus a dynamic, indeed explosive, element into the inert and impotent continent and goes on to say that perhaps the struggle between the two Americas will prove to be the focal point of future history: 'America is the land of the future in which there will be revealed, in the times that stand before us, and maybe even in the conflict between North and South America, the center of gravity of universal history [*die weltgeschichtliche Wichtigkeit*]; it is the land of yearning for all those who have wearied of Old Europe's historic armory.' But after such a hopeful beginning, with its promise of a critical revision of the thesis of America's 'youthfulness' and a more determined and deeper examination of the Goethian epigram [...], Hegel suddenly leaves us standing. As land of the future, America interests neither the historian, who is solely concerned with the past and the present, nor the philosopher, who bothers himself neither with what merely has been, nor with what merely will be, but exclusively with what is eternal, which gives him 'quite enough to do'" (436-7).

America and its *indio* in this arrangement remained backward and behind, even as the concept of American degeneracy itself fell out of common sense.

In another manuscript, or prison notebook, written around 1818, Servando turns his attention to the enduring backwardness of European thought about the Americas, and he mocks Pauw's erudition by compressing his three-volume treatise into a single paragraph. Here, he encapsulates how emerging notions of race were folded into already entrenched attitudes about the wetlands landscape:

Paw ... dijo que la América entera es un continente acabado de salir de las aguas. Por consiguiente, todo lleno de pantanos y lagañas hediondas y mortíferas, incapaz de madurar ninguna fruta y sólo capaz de producir juncos, reptiles y espinos; que de sus corrompidos estanques ha saltado una casta de ranas llamadas indios, especie media entre los hombres y los monos orangutanes. (Reyes, *Memorias* 100-1)

Pauw ... said that the entirety of America is a continent just emerged from the waters. Consequently, it is all full of swamps and stinking and deadly rheums, incapable of bringing any fruit to ripeness and only capable of producing rushes, reptiles and thorns; that from its stagnant ponds has leapt a breed of frogs called *indios*, a species midway between men and orangutans.<sup>117</sup>

Though written privately, Servando's ventriloquy of Pauw nonetheless captures the tone and substance of his anti-authoritarian and resolutely *criollo* public persona, whether railing against European savants or defying his Spanish superiors in the Catholic Church. In this case, Servando suggests that Pauw "must have written his American investigations inside the polar circle," a comment that clarifies his general opinion of European ignorance of the New World, and he concludes that these are "deliriums deserving of a cage": in a prison or asylum, he does not specify. In the context of a native-born partisan's support for Mexican independence from Spain,

---

<sup>117</sup> This is my translation.

and Latin America's autonomy more broadly, Servando's outrage appears misplaced, but he is targeting the broader European attitudes that underscore the particularity of his and his nation's political situation. If Servando's incredulity seems hyperbolic, it takes on explanatory depth when placed against the backdrop of the dispute of the New World.

For all of the outrage that he inspired in Servando, Pauw was a lesser historian, as well as a vulgarizer of Buffon, the Enlightenment authority who engendered the dispute by consolidating a scientific view of the Americas. Always more interested in polemic than in disseminating science, Pauw's distortions of Buffon's ideas were more controversial than the ideas themselves, as comparison of the two confirms. To return again to a key passage from the *Histoire*, Buffon explains, "When the waters on the surface of the earth cannot find vent to flow, they form marshes and fens," and he then enumerates the world's more notable examples. "Nevertheless," he points out, "there are fewer of them in Asia and Africa than in Europe; but America may be said to be but one continued marsh, throughout all its plains, which is a greater proof of the modern date of the country, and of the small number of inhabitants than their want of industry" (*Barr's Buffon* Vol. 2, 211).<sup>118</sup> On this last point, Barr's translation is soft. In the original, the prevalence of marshes confirms *both* a small population *and* a lack of industry, but even when this notion is coupled with Buffon's general theory of degeneration, in which he asserts "that all

---

<sup>118</sup> In the French: "Cette grande quantité de marais est une preuve de la nouveauté du pays et du petit nombre des habitants, encore plus que du peu d'industrie," and a more literal translation: "The great quantity of marshes is evidence of the newness of the country and the small number of inhabitants, and even more the lack of industry."

animals of the New World, were much smaller than those of the Old” (*Barr’s Buffon* Vol. 10, 15), it is difficult to account for the move from this already unflattering picture to the grotesquerie presented by Pauw.

In the *Recherches philosophiques*, Pauw suggests that he has little interest in Buffon’s theory of the Americas as an “after creation,” an assertion he calls “an assumption of a cause to answer a particular purpose” (Webb 12).<sup>119</sup> Instead, he concentrates on repeatedly attacking the Americas as continents hardly capable of supporting the bare life of the native, let alone the imported civilization of Europe. In Pauw’s view, these cold, wet lands mark the line to which the creole will inevitably sink and above which the native will never rise. “All the naturalists assert,” he writes, “that animals imported from Europe into America degenerate; the same deterioration which prevails through the stronger animals, extends to men, who, in different provinces, have fallen into epidemic distempers more or less deadly.” And, while this comment on the creole is not much of a departure from Buffon’s, his opinion of the native in his natural landscape takes a different turn:

The great humidity of the atmosphere, the prodigious quantity of stagnant waters, the noxious vapours, corrupt juices, and vitiated qualities of the plants and aliments, will account for that feebleness of complexion, that aversion from labour, and general unfitness for improvements of every kind, which have prevented the Americans from emerging out of savage life. (Webb 27-8)

Here, one finds the grotesque distortion of Buffon’s theory, the imagery of swamps and croaking frogs that stimulated Servando’s ire and made Pauw his chosen opponent.

---

<sup>119</sup> Citations are from Daniel Webb, *Selections from Les recherches philosophiques sur les Américains of M. Pauw. By Mr. W\*\*\** (1789).

In *Atala*, one finds echoes of the *philosophes*' sweeping generalizations about the Americas, yet when filtered through Chateaubriand's prose, the expanses of watery waste described by Pauw and others take on a sublime cast. To return to Bingham's translation of the novella's prologue:

Four great rivers, having their sources in the same mountains, divide these immense regions; the river St. Lawrence, which loses itself in the East, in the gulf of its own name; the river of the West, which empties itself into unknown seas; the river Bourbon which runs from South to North, and falls into Hudson's bay; the Meschaceba which runs from North to South, and empties into the gulf of Mexico. This last river, through a course of more than a thousand leagues, waters a delightful country, which the inhabitants of the United States call NEW EDEN, and to which the French have left the soft name of Louisiana. (5-6)

If the diction of Servando's mimicry of Pauw pushes wetlands discourse into the mud of "stinking and deadly swamps," along with the *reptiles* and the *ranas*, or *indios*, who inhabit it, Chateaubriand's language pulls in the other direction. Land, in his imagination, provides negative space for the rivers that divide it, with the most vivid examples of life occurring in the places—the wetlands—in between. He creates fecund images in which the tributaries of the Mississippi "enrich it with their slime, and fertilize it with their waters," and "TIME collects, from every source, the trees torn from their roots [...] fastens them together with vines; [...] cements them with rich soil; [...] plants upon them young shrubs, and launches his work upon the waters" (7).<sup>120</sup> Entangled in the movement between these registers, wetlands slime on the one hand and wetlands sublime on the other, the writing of Servando reveals the complex position of the *criollo* in the dispute of the New World: while defending the continent

---

<sup>120</sup> *Atala; or the Love and Constancy of Two Savages in the Desert*, trans. Caleb Bingham (1814). This is the second edition; the first was published in 1802.

from the European imaginary and simultaneously asserting autonomy, he must extract its native inhabitants from *both* landscapes, Pauw's and Chateaubriand's, and bring them into a political sphere that is not simply discursive.

As an insistent refrain in his manuscripts, Servando's counter-attack against Pauw, Raynal and Robertson may seem extreme, but it found plenty of rhetorical company in the work of Latin America's creole clergymen, particularly the Jesuits. Both Molina and Francisco Xavier Clavigero take up the defense in their respective works, the *Storia naturale del Chile* (Bologna, 1789) and the *Storia antica del Messico* (Cesena, 1780). While the publication of these ecclesiastical tomes in Italy suggests a kind of double-insulation from a general readership in Spanish America, Ignacio Beteta's publication of the *Gazeta de Guatemala*, beginning in 1797, indicates that the discourse of the dispute was in fact more widely circulated. By dedicating several volumes to the cause and planning a complete treatise on Guatemala, Beteta made it clear that one of the expressed intents of the periodical was to refute Pauw "and to silence along with him all his anti-American proselytes" (qtd. in Browning 300). A similar context may be established Caleb Bingham's English translation of *Atala*, the first in the United States.

### **A Textbook Defense: Rewriting America in the Early Republic**

Like Servando, Caleb Bingham (1757-1817) linked his career to the cause of the Native American, serving in 1783 as Master of Moor's Indian Charity School,

founded c. 1762 by Eleazar Wheelock.<sup>121</sup> And, while neither as directed nor impassioned as Servando's, Bingham's work as an author, compiler and translator was also embedded to varying degrees in the discourse of the dispute. In *An Astronomical and Geographical Catechism: For the Use of Children* (1800), he touches on the health of the soil and climate in the US and its territories, and in *The Hunters, or The Sufferings of Hugh and Francis, in the Wilderness: a True Story* (1814), he tells of a moose hunting trip in which the life of Hugh, an Anglo boy, is saved by the loyalty and woods-smarts of Francis, his part-Native counterpart. However, in Bingham's two most enduring publications, *The American Preceptor* (1797) and *The Columbian Orator* (1797), one may more accurately measure the currency of the dispute in the U.S. and North America. Indeed, if a nascent patriotism permeates both anthologies, then it is born from the question of whether or not the

---

<sup>121</sup> In terms of biography, there is little to be found on Bingham, and it follows that there is less (if anything) that places him in the creole context. That he was a Jeffersonian republican in the Federalist northeast (specifically Boston), however, is duly noted. He is cited in Ben A. Smith, *American Geographers, 1784-1812: a Bibliographical Guide* (2003). As an educator and compiler, he is discussed in Henry Barnard, *American Journal of Education* (1858); and more recently in Michael Belok, *Forming the American Minds; Early School-books & Their Compilers, 1783-1837* (1973). A good overview is provided by David W. Blight in his Introduction to *The Columbian Orator* (1998). Regarding Bingham's translation of *Atala*, John D. Seelye in *Beautiful Machine: Rivers and the Republican Plan* (1991) writes, "*Les Natchez* was not published until 1829, and Chateaubriand's earliest writings were expressions of his disenchantment with the French Revolution and a reassertion of Christian pieties, writings that made the publication in 1801 of *Atala*—a fragment of the later work—preeminently successful in those parts of America where Federalist sympathies were strongest. It was translated into English in America by Caleb Bingham, a Connecticut-born Congregationalist minister and teacher, whose Dartmouth education and Jeffersonian brand of republicanism made him a uniquely qualified conduit of conservative French ideology. For, when read closely, Chateaubriand's pious little Indian story has a dark dimension, suggesting that savages and the Saviour are not a fruitful but a fated combination" (174).

young country and the New World measure up to Europe and the Old. Whether answered implicitly, by including Jefferson's account of "The Mammoth" along with Buffon's "Of the Elephant," or more explicitly, in poems such as Joel Barlow's "American Sages" or anecdotes such as "The Humane Indian," the question provides one of Bingham's editorial themes, as does the repeated affirmation of America's merits.<sup>122</sup> While these examples allude to the dispute as a background for Bingham's project, *The Columbian Orator* nonetheless brings the issue to the fore in an essay written by Boston journalist David Everett, titled "A Forensic Dispute, On The Question, Are The Anglo-Americans Endowed With Capacity And Genius Equal To Europeans?"

Everett structures his essay around the opinions of three respondents: A, B, and C.<sup>123</sup> Though the refutation and concession offered respectively by respondents B and C inject some uncertainty into the dispute, the argument is carried by the affirmation of respondent A, a partisan of the Americas who presumably represents Everett's own point of view. Notably, Everett's argument originates with two presuppositions: one, that the capacity and genius of Anglo-Americans is linked to

---

<sup>122</sup> For further evidence of the dispute's currency in the Early Republic, see Barlow's notes on race and climate (348-50) in the *Columbiad* (1807), a work in which he also mirrors Chateaubriand's sublime vision of the American continent: "Your lawless Mississippi [sic], now who slimes / And drowns and desolates his waste of climes (415-16). In addition, *The Anarchiad* (1786-7), Barlow's collaboration with David Humphreys, John Trumbull and Lemuel Hopkins, directly satirizes the school of Buffon (lines 1117 ff.), with passages that anticipate Servando: "He appears to have exactly foreseen Dr. Robertson's 'History of America,' and his observation that the soil of America is prolific in nothing but reptiles and insects."

<sup>123</sup> Everett, also a lawyer, editor and publisher (*Boston Patriot*, *American Republican*, *Yankee*, *Pilot* and *American Friend*), contributed several other poems and dialogues to the *Orator*. See *Works*, Ed. Benjamin Franklin V.

the nature of their continent, and two, that the inherent nature of the American continent—the quality of its soil, climate and geography—is already under attack.

Everett's "opinion," therefore, proceeds as a negation. He writes:

This continent, extending through all the different climates of the earth, exhibiting on its immense surface the largest rivers and lakes, and the loftiest mountains in the known world, shows us that nature has wrought on her largest scale on this side the Atlantic. The soil is neither so luxuriant as to indulge in sloth, nor so barren, as not to afford sufficient leisure from its own culture, to attend to that of the mind. These are facts, which existed before the migration of our ancestors from Europe.

Far from Pauw's unwholesome morass, the soil and climate of the American continent in Everett's view strikes the perfect balance for not just its own cultivation but also for the cultivation of its inhabitants, both Native and Anglo American. As he goes on to explain:

The soil and climate of every country is in some measure characteristic of the genius of its inhabitants. Nature is uniform in her works. Where she has stunted the productions of the earth, she also cramps her animal productions; and even the mind of man. Where she has clothed the earth with plenty, there is no deficiency in the animate creation; and man arrives to his full vigour.

Because "America abounds with all the productions of nature in as great plenty as any country in Europe," the author continues, "we shall draw the conclusion, that if the Aborigenes [sic] of this country are inferiour to the savages of other parts of the world, nature must have contradicted her own first principles." Further—and he mentions Adams, Franklin, and Washington—if "the mental powers of our forefathers were degenerated by being transplanted to a soil, at least, as congenial and fertile, as that which gave them birth," then it must have been a "paradox of nature."

Like Chateaubriand's description of New France, Everett's description of the Americas begins with the sublime grandeur of the continent, featuring the "largest rivers" and "loftiest mountains in the known world," but it quickly shifts to images of mildness, of "congenial and fertile soil," much like Chateaubriand's move to designate Louisiana a "New Eden." In making the transition from the sublime to the picturesque, Everett is a long way from the slime that characterizes Pauw's view of the Americas, yet in edging towards a pastoral vision of the Americas as a *locus amoenus*, or pleasant place, he steps into an equally problematic landscape. Though not immersed in the degeneracy of soil and climate and therefore beyond reclamation, the Native American is nevertheless tamed by the landscape of the *locus amoenus* and remains subject to cultivation and improvement, something Caleb Bingham benevolently advertises in his edition of *Atala*: "As this Book was evidently written with a view to promote the cause of christianizing and civilizing heathen nations, and has a special regard to our tawny brethren of the western wilds, the Translator flatters himself, that, while he has respect to pecuniary recompense, he shall render some little service to mankind by the publication."

While Bingham's participation in the dispute was oblique, and was not therefore analogous to Servando's, a more direct comparison may be made between the Dominican and Jedidiah Morse (1761-1826), another New England educator and textbook author.<sup>124</sup> By publishing increasingly substantial works in the 1780s and

---

<sup>124</sup> For background and context on Morse, see Leon Jackson, "Jedidiah Morse and the Transformation of Print Culture in New England, 1784-1826" (1999); and Martin Brückner, "Lessons in Geography: Maps, Spellers, and Other Grammars of

90s, including *Geography Made Easy* (1784), *The American Geography* (1789), and *The American Gazetteer* (1797), Morse made a name for himself as a geographer, and in these works and their subsequent editions one may trace the expansion of U.S. territory in North America, as well as the changing face of the globe in general.<sup>125</sup> As Morse consolidated knowledge of the New World, necessarily attending to its soil, climate, and peoples, he inevitably came up against the prevailing European theories and critiques of the Americas. Although Morse briefly corrects Buffon and the theory of degeneration in both the *Geography* and the *Gazetteer*, he more explicitly counters the French naturalist in *The History of America* (1790), where he also takes on Pauw.

---

Nationalism in the Early Republic” (1999). On Morse’s place in the dispute, Gerbi writes, “The geographer Jedidiah Morse (1761-1826), in describing the United States, wet himself the task in his turn of correcting the many errors committed by the Europeans, the only ones who until then had concerned themselves with American geography, and drew largely on Jefferson’s *Notes*. It was from the *Notes* that he took the polemic against Buffon and Raynal, who is said to have ‘extended ... to the inhabitants transplanted in America’ the thesis worked out by Buffon ‘to ennoble the species and individuals of Europe, at the expense of the corresponding species and individuals in the New World’—a task actually carried out by de Pauw—and in several places he defends the healthiness of the climate of the United States, the longevity of its inhabitants, its richness in natural products, and even the virtue of the redskins, whom he absolves from the accusation of sexual frigidity (a characteristic of all nomads and hunters); but he does not hesitate to class as lazy, idle, and despotic, the rich planters of the South, who have been softened by the climate and more especially by their great number of slaves. Thus although his references to Latin America reiterate the superficial judgments of Buffon and de Pauw, he describes the natives of North America quite sympathetically, in an accurate and detailed picture that concludes with an attack on Buffon and de Pauw; and toward the end of his life (ca. 1824) he founded the American Society for Promoting the Civilization and General Improvement of the Indian Tribes in the United States” (404-5).

<sup>125</sup> As Michael Belok points out, another of Bingham’s schoolbooks, *An Astronomical and Geographical Catechism: for the Use of Children* (Boston, 1795), was in fact based on Morse’s *Geography Made Easy*, first published 1784 in New Haven (147).

In the first volume of this two-part work, Morse takes up “A General History of America,” and Chapter I begins with an overview of the major features of the two continents.<sup>126</sup> Rather than outright reject European notions of the Americas and replace them with his own, he instead locates the sources of these generalizations and accounts for discrepancies. Like Servando, Morse also brings Robertson and Raynal into his sights, but he saves his criticism only for the most exaggerated opinions. Robertson’s *History*, in fact, provides both the foundation of his own description of the Americas, as well as his point of departure for their defense. He agrees with the English historian’s assessment of the continent’s “grandeur” (10), citing entire passages, and Morse in his own terms describes their “wild luxuriance of vegetation” (12).<sup>127</sup> At the same time, while he likewise acknowledges the “celebrated Dr.

---

<sup>126</sup> Book II takes up “A Concise History of the Late Revolution.”

<sup>127</sup> A few passages from his *History* illustrate Robertson’s mixed assessment of the Americas. On the one hand: “When we contemplate the New World, the first circumstance that strikes us is its immense extent. [...] America is remarkable not only for its magnitude, but for its position. [...] A country of such extent passes through all the climates capable of becoming the habitation of man, and fit for yielding the various productions peculiar either to the temperate or to the torrid regions of the earth. Next to the extent of the New World, the grandeur of the objects which it presents to view is most apt to strike the eye of an observer. Nature seems here to have carried on her operations with a bolder hand, and to have distinguished the features of this country by a peculiar magnificence. The mountains of America are much superior in height to those in other divisions of the globe. [...] From those lofty mountains descend rivers proportionally large, with which the streams in the ancient continent are not to be compared, either for length or course, or the vast body of water which they roll towards the ocean. The Maragnon, the Orinoco, the Plata in South America, the Mississippi and St. Laurence in North America, flow in such spacious channels, that, long before they feel the influence of the tide, they resemble arms of the sea rather than rivers of fresh water. [...] The lakes of the New World are no less conspicuous for grandeur than its mountains and rivers. There is nothing in other parts of the globe which resembles the prodigious chain of lakes in North America. They may properly be termed inland seas of fresh water; and even those of the second

Robertson's" opinion on the source of the continents' "general predominance of cold" (12), and himself accounts for their "excessive moisture" (17), Morse nevertheless takes exception with some of the conclusions that have been induced from such

---

or third class in magnitude, are of larger circuit (the Caspian sea excepted) than the greatest lake of the ancient continent" (IV: 248-50). And on the other: "But what most distinguishes America from other parts of the earth, is the peculiar temperature of its climate, and the different laws to which it is subject with respect to the distribution of heat and cold. [...] The maxims which are founded upon observation of our hemisphere will not apply to the other. There, cold predominates. [...] If we proceed along the American continent into the torrid zone, we shall find the cold prevalent in the New World extending itself also to this region of the globe, mitigating the excess of its fervour. [...] In all that portion of the globe, the wind blows in an invariable direction from east to west. ... traverses the Atlantic Ocean before it reaches the American shore. It is cooled in its passage over this vast body of water [...]. As this wind advances in its course across America, it meets with immense plains, covered with impenetrable forests, or occupied by large rivers, marshes, and stagnating waters, where it can recover no considerable degree of heat. [...] The effects of human ingenuity and labour are more extensive and considerable, than even our own vanity is apt at first to imagine. When we survey the face of the habitable globe, no small part of that fertility and beauty, which we ascribe to the hand of Nature, is the work of man. His efforts, when continued through a succession of ages, change the appearance and improve the qualities of the earth. [...] But in the New World, the state of mankind was ruder, and the aspect of Nature extremely different. [...] Immense forests covered a great part of the uncultivated earth; and as the hand of industry had not taught the rivers to run in a proper channel, or drained of the stagnating water, many of the most fertile plains were overflowed with inundations, or converted into marshes. ... As we advance towards the northern provinces of America, Nature continues to wear the same uncultivated aspect, and in proportion as the rigour of the climate increases, appears more desolate and horrid. There, the forests, though not encumbered with the same exuberance of vegetation, are of equal extent; prodigious marshes overspread the plains, and few marks appear of human activity in any attempt to cultivate or embellish the earth. No wonder that the colonists sent from Europe were astonished at their first entrance into the New World. It appeared to them a waste, solitary, and uninviting. When the English began to settle in America, they termed the countries of which they took possession, *The Wilderness*. Nothing but their eager expectation of finding mines of gold, could have induced the Spaniards to penetrate through the woods and marshes of America, where, at every step, they observed the ... difference between the uncultivated face of Nature, and that which it acquires under the forming hand of industry and art" (IV: 252-8)

descriptions.<sup>128</sup> Morse's own diction leaves no doubt that he shares, with Robertson at least, an opinion of the Americas as lands of natural excess, but excess in certain natural features does not for Morse equate with disadvantage. "From the coldness and moisture of America, an extreme malignity of climate has been inferred, and asserted by M. de Pauw," he writes; and, "Hence, according to the hypothesis of this author, the smallness and irregularity of the nobler animals, and the size and enormous multiplication of reptiles and insects." On the contrary, Morse argues, "the supposed smallness and less ferocity of the American animals, the Abbe Clavigero observes, instead of the malignity, demonstrates the mildness and bounty of the climate, if we give credit to Buffon, at whose fountain M. de Pauw has drank" (17). At this juncture,

---

<sup>128</sup> Robertson's conclusions corroborated Buffon's theory of degeneracy, though unlike Pauw he did not dwell upon it, choosing instead to emphasize man's role (or lack of role in the Americas) in cultivating or improving nature: "The labour and operations of man not only improve and embellish the earth, but render it more wholesome, and friendly to life. When any region lies neglected and destitute of cultivation, the air stagnates in the woods, putrid exhalations arise from the waters; the surface of the earth, loaded with rank vegetation, feels not the purifying influence of the sun; the malignity of the distempers natural to the climate increases, and new maladies no less noxious are engendered. Accordingly, all the provinces of America, when first discovered, were found to be remarkably unhealthy. [...] The uncultivated state of the New World affected not only the temperature of the air, but the qualities of its productions. The principle of life seems to have been less active and vigorous there, than in the ancient continent. [...] Most of the domestic animals, with which the Europeans stored the provinces wherein they settled, have degenerated with respect either to bulk or quality, in a country whose temperature and soil seem to be less favourable to the strength and perfection of animal creation. [...] The same causes, which checked the growth and he vigour of the more noble animals, were friendly to the propagation and increase of reptiles and insects. Though this is not peculiar to the New World, and those odious tribes, the offspring of heat, moisture, and corruption, infest every part of the torrid zone; they multiply faster, perhaps in America, and grow to a more monstrous bulk. As this country is, on the whole, less cultivated, and less peopled, than the other quarters of the earth, the active principles of life wastes its force in productions of this inferior form" (IV: 258-61).

and in the pages that follow, Morse—in terms that would be familiar to Servando—enters into the dispute of the New World. Following Clavigero, he continues to turn back on itself the logic of the Europeans as well as their reading of natural law.

Like others, Morse points to the inconsistencies in Buffon's own explication of his system of natural history. If Buffon "produces the smallness of the American animals as a certain argument of the malignity of the climate of America" (18), then elsewhere, while writing of animals in general, he contradicts himself. Ultimately, his theories of quadrupeds and American climate do not accommodate one another. Morse goes on to quote at length from Buffon: "As all things, even the most free creatures, are subject to natural laws, and animals as well as men are subjected to the influence of climate and soil, it appears that the same causes which have civilized and polished the human species in our climates, may have likewise, produced similar effects upon other species" (qtd. 18). The problem arises when the generalization is extended to other continents: "In America, where the air and the earth are more mild than those in Africa, the tyger, the lion, and the panther, are not terrible but in name. They have degenerated, if fierceness, joined to cruelty, made their nature; or, to speak more properly, they have only suffered the influence of climate: under a milder sky their nature also has become more mild" (qtd. 18). In this equation, Africa possesses the immoderate climate, while the "temperate earth" (presumably Europe), "produces ... the mildest herbs, the most wholesome pulse, the sweetest fruits, the most quiet animals, and the most humane men" (qtd. 18). In sum, Buffon argues, "This is the greatest proof and demonstration, that in temperate climes every thing becomes

temperate, and that in intemperate climes every thing is excessive; and that size and form, which appear fixed and determinate qualities, depend notwithstanding, like the relative qualities on the influence of climate” (qtd. 19). If, as he argues here, degeneration is analogous to mildness, then it follows that America, too, possesses a “happy clime.” Although Morse points out this fault of logic, because “it is contrary to what M. de Pauw writes against the climate of America,” he does not elaborate. Instead, he turns to Clavigero, who reverses the European gaze.<sup>129</sup>

Morse’s citation of Clavigero begins by pointing out the obvious problem with Buffon’s proposition: “If the large and fierce animals ... are natives of intemperate climes, and small and tranquil animals of temperate climes, as M. Buffon has here established; if mildness of climate influences the disposition and customs of animals, M. de Pauw does not well deduce the malignity of the climate of America from the smaller size and less fierceness of its animals; he ought rather to have deduced the gentleness and sweetness of its climate from this antecedent.” What Clavigero recognizes in Pauw (who himself founders in Buffon’s inconsistencies) is not just a problem of logic and its interpretation but also a problem of knowledge and its production, which brings with it questions of perspective and authority. Clavigero’s answer, simply enough, is to remove Europe from the center or subject-position of the proposition: “If, on the contrary,” he writes, “the smaller size and less fierceness of the American animals, with respect to those of the old continent, are a

---

<sup>129</sup> Morse’s citations are most likely from Francisco Saverio Clavigero and Charles Cullen, *The History of Mexico* (1787).

proof of their degeneracy, arising from the malignity of the climate, as M. de Pauw would have it, we ought in like manner to argue the malignity of the climate of Europe from the smaller size and less fierceness of its animals, compared, with those of Africa” (qtd. 19). He then completely reverses the European gaze, adding that by following this logic, a philosopher of Guinea could certainly write a similar book, *Philosophical Research on the Europeans*.

As for Pauw’s claim that “the enormous size and multiplication of insects and other little noxious animals” derives from an “earth, infected by putrefaction” which in effect feeds the “poison” of such creatures with the “copious juices” of its “uncultivated soil,” Clavigero responds that “this argument, exaggerated as it is, proves nothing against the climate of America.” To paraphrase, if there are some hot and humid lands in America, where large insects are wont to multiply, then it proves only “that in some places the surface of the earth is infected, as he says, with putrefaction; but not that the soil ... of all America, is stinking, uncultivated, vitiated, and abandoned to itself. If such a deduction were just, Pauw might also say, that the soil of the Old-Continent is barren, and fetid; as in many countries of it there are prodigious multitudes of monstrous insects, noxious reptiles, and vile animals” (21). As Morse’s citation of Clavigero demonstrates, New World wetlands may have first figured in European books as racialized landscapes of creole degeneration, but writers across the Americas transformed them into a rich rhetorical ground from which they exposed the ignorance of their European detractors and asserted their political autonomy.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **Uneven Improvements: Swamplands, Slavery, and Writing Subjects in the Louisiana Narratives of Harriet Stowe, Solomon Northup, and Martin Delany**

#### **Preface**

“Late in the afternoon of one of those sultry days which render the atmosphere of the Louisiana swamps pregnant with baneful effluvia,” writes John James Audubon, “I directed my course towards my distant home, laden with a pack consisting of five or six Wood Ibises, and a heavy gun, the weight of which, even in those days when my natural powers were unimpaired, prevented me from moving with much speed” (27). Thus begins “The Runaway,” Audubon’s report of an encounter with a maroon slave family in the bayou country surrounding St. Francisville. While the event took place in the 1820s, the account was published in the second volume of his *Ornithological Biography* (Edinburgh, 1834), the companion narrative to *The Birds of America* (London and Edinburgh, 1827-38). In the years following, the episode was then excerpted and published repeatedly on both sides of the Atlantic, in periodicals including *The Athenaeum* (London, 1835), *The American Quarterly Review* (Philadelphia, 1835), *The Family Magazine* (Cincinnati, 1837), and *The Fly* (London, 1839). It was in the latter context, especially, that Audubon’s figure of the slave in the swamp became familiar to a wide readership, and that this figure was furthermore associated with the nature of Louisiana.

The five-page narrative, sandwiched between descriptions of “The Red-Bellied Nuthatch” and “The Black Vulture of Carrion Crow,” is quickly summarized: after a day of collecting specimens, Audubon is surprised by a runaway slave who, noting the late hour, invites the author back to his camp for the night. There, Audubon meets the slave’s wife and children and hears their story, which—in the context of US slavery—begins with an event that will become increasingly familiar in the years to come. In need of capital, the slaves’ owner chose to sell them at auction, the family was broken apart into lots, and the individuals were distributed to other plantations in the region. What follows is more remarkable. Almost overpowered by grief, the husband and father responded by escaping into the swamps and by then locating and stealing away, one by one, his wife and children. With supplies obtained from servants in his first master’s household, he was able to establish a camp deep in the canebrake, and he hunted game to supplement their living. He was out hunting, in fact, when he encountered Audubon, and took a chance that he might be able to help them. Moved by their story and impressed by their hospitality, the author indeed promises assistance, and the following morning accompanies them to the plantation from which they were sold. The owner, it turns out, is an acquaintance of Audubon’s, and he agrees to repurchase them. Whether his generosity derives primarily from sympathy for the slaves or respect for their sponsor, it is not made clear. Nevertheless, as the narrative concludes, the reader learns that the master “treated them with his former kindness; so that they were rendered as happy as slaves

generally are in that country, and continued to cherish that attachment to each other which had led to their adventures” (32).

In the end, one is left to suppose that the master’s “former kindness” is notwithstanding his decision to break apart and sell the family in the first place, and this is just one of the contradictions that characterizes Audubon’s excursion into the mire of slavery. My choice to begin this chapter with “The Runaway” is in fact rooted in such contradictions, and the narrative forecasts a number of matters related to the management of slaves and land in those places where the economy of the plantation zone overlapped with the ecology of the wetlands.

## **Introduction**

Turning to Louisiana in the nineteenth-century U.S. context, this chapter argues that intersecting discourses of race and landscape were shaped by the interdependence of city and country in the plantation zone, where wetlands encounters take on an increasing social and economic complexity. In this chapter, which features Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), Solomon Northup’s *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853), and Martin Delany’s *Blake; or the Huts of America* (1861-2), I consider the intersections between slavery and race relations, wetlands landscapes, and the rhetoric of improvement in the antebellum plantation economy. Within this economy, which organized portions of the US South, the Caribbean, and the Atlantic World, Louisiana witnessed the conflicts and controversies that attended the institutionalization of slavery. One source of conflict

and controversy running counter to this institution was the fugitive slave in the swamp, a historical and literary figure that fused into a single “other” the agents that the systems of slavery and the plantation were unable to fully incorporate. As systems that violently yoked the African body to the land, extracting labor from one and resources from the other, they rested upon (and perpetuated) discourses of difference to justify their existence. Enduring theories of race were tied to the structure of slavery, and enduring attitudes about landscape were tied the structure of the plantation. Within these structures, if the supposed savagery of the black race legitimized white civilization and power, then the supposed waste of the wilderness landscape—the swamp—legitimized the cultivation and value of the plantation. In both cases, the savage or wild “other” required discipline to be incorporated into the system, and by the same logic it followed that—outside the bounds of the system—the undisciplined slave and swamp would come together into a single composite figure.

Following the Virginia slave rebellion of 1831, if Nat Turner’s escape into the Great Dismal Swamp offers a radical historical example of this figure, then Stowe’s publication of *Dred* in 1856 provides an example of how it was brought into the literary mainstream. By familiarizing readers with this place of African slave refuge, Stowe in effect domesticated the swamp and evacuated its revolutionary potential, yet such ambivalent portrayals continue to draw the attention of scholars—most recently William T. Cowan in *The Slave in the Swamp: Disrupting the Plantation Narrative* (2005)—to the place of the swamp in antebellum plantation culture. As a racialized

landscape, the swamp is both threatening from the perspective of the master and welcoming from that of the slave. In each case, the swamp is nevertheless a space of resistance, one whose history and representation exist as counterpoints to the disciplining narratives of the plantation economy and the nation. This chapter, following the work of Cowan and others, including Louis Rubin, *The Edge of the Swamp: a study in the literature and society of the Old South* (1989); David Miller, *Dark Eden: the Swamp in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (1989); and Anthony Wilson, *Shadow and Shelter: The Swamp in Southern Culture* (2006), builds on this analytic of ambivalence, but also departs from it, by linking the figure of the slave in the swamp to the broader rhetoric of improvement that shaped the emerging wetlands discourse of the nineteenth century.<sup>130</sup>

At the base of the plantation economy, the disciplining of wetlands, of swamps, went hand-in-hand with the disciplining of slaves: the draining or reclamation of these inundated landscapes to increase the volume of agricultural production depended on slave labor. However, one does not speak of wetlands discipline. Instead, one speaks of wetlands improvement, and it is here that a disjuncture opens in the figure of the slave in the swamp, because the improvement of slaves ran counter to the logic of the plantation. Within the rhetoric of the plantation economy, the disciplining of land and labor diverges when spoken in terms of

---

<sup>130</sup> As an intervention, this does not question the slave in the swamp as a figure of resistance to the discipline of the plantation regime. Rather, I am interested in questioning how this historical figure, through representation, has been reified as (reduced to) a symbol of resistance. Further, I am also interested in why the critique of slavery and its literature, then and now, needs and even desires this figure.

improvement—swampland improvement is incompatible with the improvement or education of slaves—and I argue that the unity of identity and place that constitutes this resistant “other” is fractured. Improved—educated, even literate—slaves were just as much of a threat to order as the undisciplined. In this chapter, which reads Stowe against Northup and Delany, I examine the antebellum and specifically Louisiana history beneath this disjuncture. Instead of focusing on the unimproved swamp as a refuge for the undisciplined slave (a composite figure of resistance, yes, but one that belongs to a narrative foreclosed by an outside voice), I consider the uneven relationship between the literate slave and the unimproved wetlands landscape. In Stowe, Northup, and Delany’s narratives, as action shifts between New Orleans and the rural Red River region, African-American protagonists and wetlands landscapes combine to counter the logic of the plantation and the nation that sponsors it; however, the revolutionary potential of the slave in the swamp is to varying degrees undermined by the same narratives that give it expression. To put it another way, I investigate how and under what conditions it has been possible to speak from the slime, as opposed to the privileged position presumed by the sublime.<sup>131</sup>

As I turn toward the U.S. and its history in a global wetlands context, I focus on nineteenth-century literary representations of the slave in the swamp, but I am interested in more than the racialization of a particular landscape. My underlying concern, as much as it can be revealed by textual analysis, has to do with how the process of racialization, in representation, was and is linked to the long-term

---

<sup>131</sup> On this point, I have recently been directed to the work of Stefano Harvey and Fred Moten in *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (2013).

geographical stratification of American populations along racial lines. Put another way, I am interested in how the experience of the environment, broadly conceived, is structured by racial thinking (ideologies of race) or, more bluntly, racism. While the structures that support (and emerge from) racial thinking certainly foreclose on certain aspects of this experience, including access to particular environments for certain populations and the availability of real estate (or private property), these same structures align certain populations and certain landscapes in potentially beneficial ways. In the nineteenth-century, the alignment of African-American slaves and wetlands landscapes was a structural outcome of the plantation economy that carried plusses and minuses for the affected populations, and the literary representations of this outcome were infused with ambivalence. For African-American slaves, the swamp was ultimately a space of silence, unspeakable due to the conditions they lived under, and thus unknowable to the white master and the broader American population. If this silence—and the anxiety it generated in the white population—was a source of potential power in antebellum America, it has had lasting consequences in terms of the literature that the same anxiety helped produce. Because there was not a specifically African-American literature of the slave in the swamp to counter white perceptions (on all sides of the slavery question), those perceptions have had the primary role in shaping the organization of peoples and geography.

As I consider the intersections between race, environment, and representation, a starting point is provided by the work of Mark Feldman and Hsuan Hsu, who in turn frame their own discussion with Lawrence Buell's revision of W.E.B. Du Bois's most

famous prediction. In the twenty-first century, if the problem of the color line “shows no sign of abating,” Buell writes, “a still more pressing question may prove to be whether planetary life will remain viable for most of the earth’s inhabitants without major changes in the way we live now.”<sup>132</sup> In an age of accelerating ecological change and crisis, as Feldman and Hsu observe, Buell’s comment acknowledges the ongoing role of race in determining who will be protected from environmental harms and who will not. The authors, however, step beyond Buell by defining a more complex relationship between environment and race. “The distribution of environmental burdens and risks,” they write:

reflects the legacies of racialization and colonialism, and cannot be analyzed or remedied without attending to problems of racial inequality and geographically uneven development. If environmental criticism endorses an *ecocentric* outlook or *land ethic* that includes the earth itself in our sense of community, it must also come to terms with Du Bois’s observation that ‘whiteness is the ownership of the earth forever and ever, Amen!’ (199-200)

On this view, the construct of race—after the fact—is not simply a factor in predicting or determining the distribution of environmental risk. Rather, the distribution of environmental risk is an intrinsic part of the historical process of racialization. In this context, if we furthermore take Du Bois’s observation seriously, then the “ecocentric outlook” is itself a privileged extension of “whiteness” that emerged (and is still emerging) from the same process. If such an outlook depends on “ownership of the earth” and the environmental security that comes with it, then I also take Feldman and Hsu’s words as a reminder not to slip into the binary (and

---

<sup>132</sup> Mark B. Feldman and Hsuan L. Hsu, “Introduction: Race, Environment, and Representation,” *Discourse* (2007).

totalitarian) thinking that Du Bois is himself mocking. In other words, “blackness” should not be equated with disenfranchisement and environmental risk, but instead understood—like “whiteness—as a racial category in process and differentially produced in respect to ownership and other unevenly distributed forms of power.<sup>133</sup> In this light, the swamp as a space of black resistance (as constructed retrospectively in literary criticism) is not as natural as it may seem and needs to be revisited more carefully.

### **Matters of Improvement**

At the mid-point of the nineteenth century, swamps remained contested landscapes in both the discursive and material realms. As perceptions and representations of these landscapes became increasingly multivalent, attitudes about their value—be they moral or aesthetic—became correspondingly complex. In *Dark Eden* (1989), a study whose depth and nuance is yet to be surpassed, David Miller elaborates the state of the swamp in mid-nineteenth-century representation, both literary and pictorial. For Miller, moral and aesthetic interest in the swamp continued to rest on its status as a ‘desert’ place (originating in the Biblical tradition), but this

---

<sup>133</sup> As Feldman and Hsu also observe, “Du Bois’s later works also push toward an “anti-pastoral” conception of the environment: ‘Have you ever seen a cotton-field white with the harvest—its golden fleece hovering above the black earth like a silvery cloud edged with dark green, its bold white signals waving like the foam of billows from Carolina to Texas across that Black and human Sea? [His] description of a “dark green” landscape shaped by black labor and the political economy of cotton illustrates why terms like *environment* and *nature* cannot be fully understood without accounting for the histories of social and racial stratification” (200).

view of nature shifted from one of emblematic and didactic distancing to one of psychological proximity. With industrialized civilization under increasing critique (as it was in the years around the Civil War), nature became less exteriorized and more internalized: it was figured less as a surface for hierarchical projection of culture's values and more as an expression of its collective psyche in all of its disorder and ambiguity. For Miller, the increasing cultural appeal of the swamp, in keeping with its status as the preeminent wilderness or wasteland, was a matter of "immersion in the unknown."

Miller's choice of the term "immersion" is as much an appeal to the nature of the swamp as it is to the newfound appreciation for the aesthetic experiences and "mental processes" that closer "scientific" scrutiny of the swamp made metaphorically available:

The image, realized more and more as an environment as well, illuminated emergent attitudes and half-repressed emotions and also gave shape to the moods and insights being engendered by a changing economic and social reality. These novel moods and insights in turn imparted mystique to a landscape hitherto shunned. (3)

In describing changing perceptions and representations of nature, Miller's turn from "image" toward "environment" builds on "immersion" as the guiding register of the swamp experience, and his turn in this direction presages others who have taken a more ecological approach to the topic.<sup>134</sup> Although he does not ultimately follow through on the (material) implications of this shift, he makes a critical observation on environment as a bridge between the symbolic and the experiential: "At the deeper

---

<sup>134</sup> See Monique Allewaert.

levels of culture” opened up by the swamp, “the ongoing dialectic between image and meaning became synthesized” (3). As an environment, both metaphor and experience, the swamp suggests that there is no outside to meaning, and (like others) Miller attributes this to the collapse of distance (or prospect) in the swamp encounter itself, “the more the perspective entered the actual landscape” (4). Beyond the purely representational, to attend to the new “engagement with both its material and expressional aspects,” Miller therefore proposes and develops a “phenomenological perspective,” one that accesses the swamp dialectic he has set in motion.<sup>135</sup> While Miller’s work takes a step toward the materiality of swamps, and is therefore of importance to my project, he nevertheless gets mired in representation. Ultimately, his vision of culture is still an enclosure that only touches on the transformation of nature—landscape still trumps land—and not much attention is paid to how these shifting attitudes played out in the actual alteration—the drainage and reclamation—of swamplands in the nineteenth-century US. As far as they were valued, swamps provided an escape into wild nature, rather than a part of a broader ecology in which humans live. It was not (for the most part) until well into the twentieth century that aesthetic or psychological appreciation of wetlands translated into protection or conservation.

On the ground, however, I argue that the (dialectical) translation of these entangled values into economic terms tended to give way to capitalism’s “will to

---

<sup>135</sup> Miller here brushes against a material-discursive concept of nature and culture.

fill.”<sup>136</sup> Broadly speaking, even as swamp landscapes were newly generating an aesthetic appreciation and reflecting a moral ambiguity that spoke to modern, middle-class tastes and sensibilities, traditional values were prevailing in the transformation of swamplands into property and productive real estate. In this rhetorical domain, swamps were still associated with moral decay, the ordered landscape still dominated the aesthetic imagination, and improvement was the discourse that unified these negative modes of thought about the place of swamps in a growing nation. While a nascent understanding of the ecological value of swamps—implicit sometimes in their aesthetic appreciation—was also emerging around this time, it too was subsumed by the dominant capitalist logics of expansion and production.

In respect to property, the rhetoric of improvement encompassed both the slave and the swamp, but the overlap was uneven. If the unlimited improvement of swamps was becoming something of an economic and moral imperative, the improvement of slaves was strictly circumscribed, in fact, was one of the slavery debate’s stickier subjects. In the form of religious instruction, if *some* improvement of slaves was considered a moral duty, it was also deemed good business. A religious slave was a more manageable slave, it was generally believed, and a little bit of spiritual guidance thus made economic sense. Literacy, in the form of reading or writing, was of course absolutely forbidden, and any education of slaves beyond the religious was thought economically unsound as well as morally dangerous: first, it could only lead to discontent and intractability; second, and perhaps more

---

<sup>136</sup> See Rod Giblett.

problematic, education would implicitly acknowledge the human status of slaves, thus undermining the social and political legitimacy of the entire institution.

As this outline suggests, to speak of the improvement of slaves is to find one's language quickly shading into the discipline of slaves, but even without the complication of this added connotation, it is difficult to pin down the valences of this rhetoric. To understand the pervasiveness of improvement as an ideology in the mid-nineteenth-century US, one must back up a couple of hundred years and scale out to include England and the Atlantic World as part of a developing agrarian capitalism.<sup>137</sup> In England, Raymond Williams describes this development as beginning with the consolidation of cultivated land into the hands of an elite few, and with a transition from a feudal peasantry to a "regular structure of tenant farmers and wage labourers."<sup>138</sup> At the same time, "the regulation of production was increasingly in terms of an organised market." While the landowning class was for the most part the same, "an aristocracy, whose ancient or ancient-seeming titles and houses offered the illusion of a society determined by obligations and traditional relations between social orders," Williams stresses that "the main activity of this class was of a radically different kind": "They lived by a calculation of rents and returns on investments of capital, and it was a process of rack-renting, engrossing and enclosure which increased their hold on the land." In sum, the history of the countryside was "centred throughout in the problems of property in land, and in the consequent social and

---

<sup>137</sup> The thought of John Locke is essential here. See *The Second Treatise on Civil Government* (1690).

<sup>138</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (1975).

working relationships.” Within this economic process, as more land came into cultivation, these relationships proliferated according to a strict top-down hierarchy, along with corresponding attitudes. Most significantly, “an estate passed from being regarded as an inheritance, carrying such and such income, to being calculated as an opportunity for investment, carrying greatly increased returns.” As Williams explains, “In this development, an ideology of improvement—of a transformed and regulated land—became significant and directive. Social relations which stood in the way of this kind of modernisation were then steadily and at time ruthlessly broken down” (60-1). The resulting “crisis of values” that accompanied this process was registered in literature, most broadly for Williams in a shift from a “structure of reflection” to one of “retrospect.” Underscoring this shift, the ideology of improvement he first sees in Andrew Marvell—in the context of a new aristocracy—has by the time of Jane Austen been fully articulated to bourgeois sensibilities. Not able to take inheritance for granted, this emerging ideology (or sensibility) was motivated by the need (and desire) to make good, or improving, settlements.

The complexity of this development, furthermore, is rooted in the word itself, as Williams demonstrates in his etymology of *improve*. Coming into English from Old French, the word’s earliest meaning was “profit,” similar to *invest*, and it referred “especially to [profitable] operations on or connected with land, often in the enclosing of common or waste land.” This economic meaning was primary through the eighteenth century, when “it was a key word in the development of a modernizing agrarian capitalism.” At the same time, the more general meaning of “making

something better” also came into use in the seventeenth century, and soon “became established, often in direct overlap with economic operations.” As Williams notes, the problematic overlapping of these meanings did not go unremarked, which he exemplifies with a couplet from Cowper: “Improvement too, the idol of the age, / Is fed with many a victim” (*The Task*, iii, 764-5, 1785). When the object of the word expanded to include humankind, as in “improve oneself,” writers likewise noticed, and “Jane Austen was aware of the sometimes contradictory senses of improvement, where economic operations for profit might not lead to, or might hinder, social and moral refinement.” As he goes on to say, “The separation of the general meaning from the economic meaning is thereafter normal, but the complex underlying connection between ‘making something better’ and ‘making a profit out of something’ is significant when the social and economic history during which the word developed in these ways is remembered” (160-1).<sup>139</sup> Specifically, there has been a tendency for social history to veil economic processes, rendering “improvement” as an almost unassailable common sense. In a more in-depth reading of Austen (*The Country and the City*), Williams writes, “Cultivation has the same ambiguity as improvement: there is increased growth, and this is converted into rents; and then the rents are converted into what is seen as cultivated society. [...] The working improvement, which is not seen at all, is the means to social improvement, which is then so isolated that it is seen very clearly indeed” (116).<sup>140</sup> In economic or

---

<sup>139</sup> Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1983).

<sup>140</sup> To the contrary, Frederick Douglass insists that the institution of slavery is unimproving for its masters; that is, it leads to social and moral degeneration. Likewise,

structural terms, while there is no direct translation of the English historical example to that of the U.S., I argue that both—as parts of a broader system of agrarian capitalism that rested on the labor of slaves—supported the development of a similar ideology that sedimented into a shared language of improvement.<sup>141</sup>

### **The Slave *and* the Swamp in Nineteenth-Century Louisiana**

By the mid-nineteenth century, the figure of the slave in the swamp had been featured in print for some time, circulating in the Atlantic World at least since the publication of John Gabriel Stedman’s *Narrative* (1796). The existence and representation of such figures, whether lone fugitives or members of maroon communities, was dictated by the logic—or illogic—of the plantation system and grounded in its economic and social relations. While the need for escape was predicated on the system’s brutal discipline, the existence of these undisciplined figures reinforced—or reified—the need for the same imperatives. By challenging plantation discipline, they (the very existence of these figures) simultaneously

---

says Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Slavery is no scholar, no improver; it does not love the whistle of the railroad; it does not love the newspaper, the mail-bag, a college, a book or a preacher who has the absurd whim of saying what he thinks; it does not increase the white population; it does not improve the soil; everything goes to decay” (“Emancipation in the British West Indies,” speech, Aug. 1, 1844); and “All men plume themselves on the improvement of society, and no man improves” (*Essays: First Series*, “Self-Reliance”)

<sup>141</sup> I speak in broad terms here, but a suite of books helps me situate this process in the U.S. context: Timothy Sweet, *American Georgics: Economy and Environment in Early American Literature* (2002); Thomas Hallock, *From the Fallen Tree: Frontier Narratives, Environmental Politics, and the Roots of A National Pastoral, 1749-1826* (2003); and Ian Frederick Finseth, *Shades of Green: Visions of Nature in the Literature of American Slavery, 1770-1860* (2009).

invalidated and justified the system that would contain them. While championed as symbols of resistance or freedom in the anti-slavery or abolitionist imaginations, figures of fugitive slaves in swamps were seen by slavery's advocates as threats, both to the plantation system and the social order in general, evidence that African slaves could never be fully disciplined, let alone civilized: their *proper* place was on the plantation. Nevertheless, given their revolutionary potential, these figures were not incorporated easily into the national imaginary, and even for abolitionists, the existence of slaves outside the plantation but not (yet) inside the public sphere produced anxiety. In this case, perhaps, the specter of the free—but unimproved—person of color replaces that of the undisciplined African slave.

As a place of refuge for the slave, the Louisiana swamp is at best unstable, and this instability is illustrated by reading this landscape and its representations across *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Twelve Years a Slave*, and *Blake*. Stowe, to reinforce her characterizations and to shape her narrative, plays on the reader's expectations of what was already a conventional trope, but what about the others? Does Northup, by inhabiting the trope, undermine those expectations? Or, does the writer participate in the same domesticating project? Along similar lines, does Delany's depiction of the swamp as an active space of resistance bring any of its revolutionary potential to fruition?

If a single political flashpoint inspired Stowe to write *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, then it was the Compromise of 1850, which included a revision of 1793's Fugitive Slave Act. While the original act guaranteed the right of slaveholders to recover their

property in the free states (and prohibited their interference), the revised law—with penalties for non-compliance—required states and citizens to take an active role in the recapture and return of escaped slaves. Northern abolitionists were naturally outraged at the prospect of being made party to the perpetuation of slavery, of being implicated in this moral evil, and Stowe’s novel took shape as a response. The necessity of George, Eliza, and Harry’s escape to Canada (rather than one of the northern states) was certainly determined by the law, as was the edifying subplot of slave hunter Tom Loker’s redemption.

Although the Compromise forestalled civil war, it was nevertheless viewed by some as an effort to make disunion inevitable, and for evidence critics pointed to the inclusion of the fugitive slave provision. According to an editorial voice in the November 21, 1850 issue of *The National Era*, “It was originated by men in favor of a dissolution of the Union, who declared, while urging the bill, that they did not believe it would be efficacious, and stubbornly resisted all attempts to make it less odious to the People of the free States. They knew that it would exasperate the North, and cause disaffection to the Union in that section, and that its failure to be carried out would increase the irritation of the South, and dispose it to look more favorably on their disorganizing schemes. Had they aimed alone at providing the best means for the reclamation of slaves, they would have modified the bill so as to make it at least tolerable to the North.”<sup>142</sup> Of the opinion that in the South, “the Fugitive Slave Question is agitated more for political effect, than because the loss of slaves is greatly

---

<sup>142</sup> “Schemes in Regard to Fugitives—Various Views Presented,” *The National Era* (1850)

cared for,” the writer cites an article from the *Charleston Mercury* in which the author calls on slaveholders in the southern states to organize themselves to systematically press their property claims on fugitive slaves in the North. Ultimately, the author’s aim is to set abolitionists against the congressmen who wooed them, and at the same time to pit the federal government against northern property holders who will have to either uphold the right of law or themselves be the agents of disunion. The South benefits either way.

“All this is simply diabolical,” stresses *The National Era*; “South Carolina is no further concerned in this business, than as she may wish to exasperate the two sections of the country against each other.” On the one hand, the writer argues that slaveholders must surely realize that enforcement of the law would destabilize the system: “The fugitives who by their own efforts escape from bondage, would prove agitators of the most dangerous kind, if caught and taken back. Men who have once realized what it is to be free, if reduced again to slavery, will constitute elements of discontent and rebellion in the slave population.” On the other hand, the writer points out that the law follows a logic that is inconsistent with conditions that already prevail within the South: “there are thousands of runaways at this time in the slave States. How many are haunting the Dismal Swamp, and the bayous about New Orleans, and deserted plantations [...]! Why is not agitation got up about them? Why do not the slaveholders complain of the indifference with which the People of the South regard their slave hunts? Southern gentlemen are not accustomed to volunteer or yield their services as slave-catchers. They are almost as passive as the People of the North

when slave hunters are on foot, almost as little disposed to join in the hue and cry.” If the first case suggests that the pursuit and recovery of runaways is contrary to the interests of slaveholders, then the second more simply demonstrates that they are not materially interested in this process. If true, the latter in fact acknowledges that the risk of runaways and the loss of property is an inherent and accepted part of a speculative business in land and labor. A percentage of loss in this system is acceptable. From a property standpoint, an argument in favor of the law does not therefore make sense in the opinion of *The National Era*, and the same logic holds in respect to the South’s stake in the Compromise in its entirety, which was more interested in the expansion of an economic system than it was in the protection of individual property. The writer, in sum, recognizes the fugitive slave controversy as a screen behind which the South would hide these broader interests, as well as the illogic of the system as a whole: “The running away of slaves is then an unavoidable ‘evil’ in a slave country, because a necessary incident of the system of slavery. When men's laws are against Nature, they must not complain if sometimes Nature's laws assert their supremacy.” Ultimately, the revised law was no more enforceable than the old one; it was simply more disagreeable to the North.<sup>143</sup>

What cannot be ignored, however, is that the Compromise essentially addressed the disposition of land in the expanding Union, and whether or not it would

---

<sup>143</sup> As a flashpoint for the slavery debate, the fugitive slave issue may be considered a kind of border spectacle that each side framed for its own purposes. Stowe, then, participates in this border spectacle because it is the human issue in the foreground; land and the economic expansion of the plantation system is more abstract and remains in the background.

be available for plantation slavery. By leaving that decision to popular sovereignty in some of the new territories, the federal government left open the possibility of slavery, which satisfied the South for a time. To put the stakes of the Compromise into perspective, and to balance the ultimate importance of territorial expansion against contradictory views of slavery (and its perpetuation or proscription), it is useful to consider the Swamp Land Act, which Congress was debating at the same time. If the terms of Compromise suggest that the U.S. Congress was not wholly invested in proscribing the external expansion of slave territory, then a case may be made they were likewise not entirely interested in discouraging its internal expansion, as evidenced by the passing of a series of Swamp Land Acts, beginning in 1849. These Acts, first drafted in response to severe flooding in Louisiana and Missouri, transferred title of federally owned swamplands to states in the lower Mississippi River Valley. With the aim of curtailing floods, drainage and levee projects were to be funded by the sale of swamplands, and states would also benefit from the increased farmlands (and tax revenues) that would result from these reclamation projects.

In 1858, under Joint Resolution No. 105, the Senate and House of Representatives of the State of Louisiana appointed the Louisiana Board of Swamp Land Commissioners and the State Engineer “to inquire into the propriety of dispensing with the Internal Improvement Department, and [if so], also to inquire what disposition should be made of the slaves and other property of the State now under the charge of the State Engineer.” At the time, the State owned “ninety slaves

and five snag and dredge boats, besides the equipment of the boats, and other property at the State Capitol,” as well as “five runaway slaves, received in accordance with law from the depot for runaway slaves at Baton Rouge.” In effect, the purpose of the inquiry was to determine the cost effectiveness of the Internal Improvement Department, whose duties included “the improvement of navigation in all the streams of the State that are navigable or susceptible of being made so,” and whether or not such duties would be more cheaply performed by outside contractors. In making their determination, the cost of owning and maintaining equipment was open to question, but the same question did not apply to the State’s slaves: “We set it down as not requiring demonstration, that slave labor is the surest and cheapest. It is the surest, because we have it entirely under our control; it is the cheapest, as is proven by the fact that every planter buys his own laborers” (3-4). Having fulfilled their duty, the Commissioners and State Engineer determined that it ultimately would not be feasible to dispense with the department, and they published their report the following year.

As a lens for examining the intersection of slave labor and wetlands improvement in mid-nineteenth-century Louisiana, this report offers a particularly narrow focus, and at first glance its local specificity may seem to have little or nothing to do with the literary representations of this time and place that were circulating nationally (and beyond) in narratives such as *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, *Twelve Years a Slave*, and *Blake, or the Huts of America*. Put another way, at a moment when sectional tensions were dominating the national discussion, as well as providing the context for reading and interpreting such narratives, the disposition of the slaves and

dredging equipment owned by the state of Louisiana appears to be an entirely internal matter, of little consequence to the larger movements of U.S. history. However, not only was there federal legislation behind the formation of the Louisiana Board of Swamp Land Commissioners, their reason for being was tied to a national agrarian ideology of improvement and its practices—including wetlands drainage and reclamation—that transcended sectional concerns. In Louisiana (and the Lower Mississippi River Valley), the maintenance of waterways and the construction of levees were very much in the national interests of agrarian capitalism, and moral and aesthetic attitudes about swamps only underscored the economic necessity. These projects depended on slave labor, and one of their byproducts was an expansion of plantation real estate. Beneath the literary figure of the fugitive slave in the swamp, and in addition to the historical actors who generated such representations, African Americans through their labor were materially invested in the transformation of wetlands landscapes at a moment when “swamplands” were being codified in newly specific economic and social terms. Without question, swamps became racialized, or essentially associated with African Americans during the antebellum period in the US, and the representational aspects of this process have been thoroughly examined by literary historians. Missing from these studies, however, is a deeper appreciation of the material links between slaves and swamps that structured their literary representations. Because it bridges—perhaps confuses—distinctions between nature and culture, the discourse of improvement provides unique access to these relations,

especially when it is considered within the social and environmental historical context of the wetlands.

Background for the Swamp Land Acts is provided by Ann Vileisis. In the antebellum United States, as she explains, Americans “viewed wetlands from an agrarian perspective—seeing in natural wetlands the potential for farmland. Because most ... farmed or believed that farming formed the nation’s economic and moral backbone, this agrarian outlook predominated” (66). The discourse of improvement, including what Vileisis terms the “drainage imperative,” was essential to this broader agrarian perspective. Both found direct expression (and wide circulation) in a vibrant agricultural press and at the same time underscored much of the literature of the day.

For settlers in the Mississippi River valley, the drainage imperative created a hydrological chain reaction, and Louisiana by mid-century was experiencing increased and sometimes “devastating” seasonal flooding. Even though it was generally understood that upriver development made downriver flooding worse, “people confused cause with effect” (71), and the downriver lowlands and floodplains were nevertheless viewed as the problem that needed to be eliminated:

By building levees along the river’s banks, settlers believed they could prevent the Mississippi from deluging and overflowing into riparian wetlands. Then after drainage and “reclamation,” new settlers could inhabit and cultivate the fertile fields. If wild swamps could be converted into well-ordered farms, people believed that the rampages of nature would no longer afflict them. (71-2)<sup>144</sup>

The problem was how to initiate the conversion of these swamps. Because they were undesirable in their present state and because the cost of reclaiming them was

---

<sup>144</sup> Here, emerging scientific knowledge was trumped by ideology of improvement.

prohibitive, many of these downriver wetlands remained under federal ownership and thus outside of state sovereignty. A solution, however, was presented by the very nature of the Mississippi River watershed: as legislators in the lower states such as Senator Downs recognized, if upriver development exacerbated local flooding, then it was an interstate or federal issue, and an appeal for Congressional assistance could be made. It was out of this recognition that the first Swamp Land Act was born:

Democratic lawmakers from Missouri and Louisiana proposed it in the winter of 1849 and by March it was signed into law.<sup>145</sup>

In the following years, a number of states followed suit, but Louisiana was the first to receive federal grants of public swampland, and a state board of commissioners was formed to oversee and administer these transactions.<sup>146</sup> Within a wetlands context, Louisiana was again central to a developing discourse. According to Vileisis, “As the question of what to do with swamplands progressed from a circumscribed local matter to the broader issue of dispersing federal lands throughout the public domain, legislators found themselves not only defining various types of swamplands but also reassessing the controversial balance of authority between state and national government” (73). Here, as wetlands sovereignty and knowledge shifted

---

<sup>145</sup> The Swamp Land Act (1850), on condition of reclamation by private parties, transferred title of federally owned swampland to states (though its provisions were reversed in part by Wetland Protection Act of 1872).

<sup>146</sup> From 1858 report: “The Swamp Land Board has for its duties, the reclamation and drainage of lands, and carries on its works by using the funds arising from the sales of lands donated to the State by the United States, under Acts of Congress of 1849 and 1850. These laws make it imperative on the State to use the moneys accruing from these lands for the special purpose for which they were denoted, and the present State Constitution has solemnly recognized this condition.”

in scale, from the local or state to the national, the need for new wetlands language was a legal and political matter. Put another way, the physical transformation of these landscapes was again tied to translation, although in this case a translation of meaning within rather than across language.

The first-time development of a national, legal definition for swamplands, however, was not an easy task. Not only did legislators from different states and regions differently perceive these landscapes, they also brought different language to the table. Adding to the difficulty was the topography of swamps, which did not lend itself to definition by the existing legal frameworks: “the very process of swampland selection with its square concept of land reveals a fundamental misunderstanding of wetlands and their irregular, water-determined boundaries” (77). As Vileisis explains, the lawmakers’ task nevertheless was guided by a shared “agrarian ideology” through which “natural landscapes—wetlands included—were evaluated primarily in terms of the cultivability” (75), both present and future, and this outlook was reflected in the language of bill, which granted “all swamp and overflow lands made *unfit thereby for cultivation*” (qtd. in Vileisis, 73).

The agrarian thinking behind such language, of course, was that swamps existed in a negative sense as lands to be positively converted to farmland, and the essentially economic aspect of this logic was bundled with appeals to moral as well as aesthetic reasoning. Vileisis cites Louisiana Senator Solomon Downs as the spokesman for the rhetoric in favor of transforming the state’s swamplands. In economic terms, he said, “The first and fundamental interest of the Republic is

cultivation of its soil.” It is the “sole foundation of the capital or wealth which supplies every channel of industry.” In traditional moral terms, swamps were “evils” awaiting “redemption,” and in a more political vein, their drainage would result in the “increase of population, the augmentation of wealth, the cultivation of virtue, and the diffusion of happiness.” Finally, in aesthetic terms, he argued, “The whole of both shores of that magnificent river, to which the world has nothing equal ... will be one continuous succession of plantations, lawns, villas, gardens.” Such a vista would draw “equally the admiration of the lover of nature and the man of taste and ... the philosopher and the political economist” (74-5). Though a pro-agrarian Southern Democrat, Downs’s views and rhetoric were not fundamentally different from the national view of wetlands, which combined in differing proportions a Lockean understanding of property, a stubborn Christian morality, and an Enlightenment appreciation of an ordered landscape.

That this assertion of state autonomy coincided with the passing of the Missouri Compromise should not be overlooked, and “the Swamp Land Acts took on decidedly larger meaning in the context of sectional conflict. The legislation, however, appealed to both groups for different reasons. Southern politicians considered the swamp grants an opportunity for states to gain control over more lands held in the public domain. Northern delegates saw the legislation as a means for federal involvement in land distribution and public health policy; some even hoped to engineer the law as a means for limiting the spread of slavery” (77).

To read *Uncle Tom's Cabin* primarily in the light of the Fugitive Slave Act places the Compromise's fundamental concern with territorial expansion in the shadows, and it obscures the ethic of land improvement that motivated the agrarian capitalism of the time. Without question, Stowe draws attention to the fugitive question, but antislavery contemporaries (and later readers) who focused only on this aspect of the novel participated in a border spectacle not unlike that proposed by the editorial writer from South Carolina. Although to different ends, parties on both sides conscripted the figure of the fugitive slave to further sectional interests. To follow Stowe's narrative into the swamps of Louisiana, however, is to see her antislavery interests come into conflict with the prevailing ideology of agrarian capitalism.

### **Before *Dred*: of Slaves and Swamps in *Uncle Tom's Cabin***

With an interior garden protected from the business of the plantation economy, Augustine St. Clare's New Orleans mansion sits at the narrative turning point in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852): the household's urban, domestic scenes balance the pastoral of the Shelby's Kentucky farm against the swampy hellscape of Simon Legree's Red River plantation, and Harriet Beecher Stowe makes use of this space and time to explore the moral, political, and aesthetic questions of slavery. The home is the philosophical center of the novel, the stage upon which the author explores the debate. The characters, including St. Clare's wife Marie and cousin Ophelia, are designed mostly as vessels for particular viewpoints, but Augustine possesses a depth that sets him apart. More than just a type, he embodies the novel's dilemma, the

tension between art (and life)'s commitment to itself and its responsibility to society. Though outwardly he exhibited "the rough bark of manhood," at his "core," still "living and fresh," he nevertheless possessed "an extreme and marked sensitiveness of character, more akin to the softness of woman than the ordinary hardness of his own sex." Cheated out of true love, as Stowe explains, at "the hour that comes only once," he instead "became the husband of a fine figure, a pair of bright, dark eyes, and a hundred thousand dollars," and resigned himself to his fate. "And thus ended the whole romance and ideal of life for Augustine St. Clare," the author writes:

But the *real* remained,—the *real*, like the flat, bare, oozy tide-mud, when the blue, sparkling wave, with all its company of gliding boats and white-winged ships, its music of oars and chiming waters, has gone down, and there it lies, flat, slimy, bare,—exceedingly real. (202)

Embedded as it is in the surrounding sentimentality, this [existential] passage is easily overlooked. It is, however, the most modern moment in the book, and for the character St. Clare represents the void of the ideal never to be renewed. Though the sentence's essential tautology—"But the *real* remained ... exceedingly real"—would suggest containment of what comes between, Stowe's choice of metaphor does exactly the opposite. Like tide mud slipping through one's fingers, these lines acknowledge that "oozy" matter is not just what remains of form but is in fact what precedes it; that sublimation in life as well as art proceeds from and returns to the slime.

Stowe has a narrative to write, however, and though such aesthetic musings underscore her project, she does not pursue them because they do not directly serve her ends. Instead, by denying the fiction of St. Clare's story, she paradoxically draws

attention to her own art and to the limits of the novel as a form of representation. Of St. Clare's situation, she writes:

Of course, in a novel, people's hearts break, and they die, and that is the end of it; and in a story this is very convenient. But in real life we do not die when all that makes life bright to us dies to us. There is a most busy and important round of eating, drinking, dressing, walking, visiting, buying, selling, talking, reading and all that makes up what is commonly called *living*, yet to be gone through; and this yet remained to Augustine. (202)

While this passage speaks to the contrast between the life Augustine could have had and the business of life at hand, it is also the lament of the novel—and the novelist herself—that art (even as critique) must in this case (and at this historical moment) be yoked to the terrible business of slavery. Through a life denied its aesthetic fulfillment, Stowe points to the matter—to “the *real*”—beneath the book: land speculation and coerced labor as the base of a national culture and economy. By casting the slaveholder St. Clare's attitude towards “the *real*” as perverse, Stowe offers perhaps her most subversive critique of the peculiar institution, and—though the author will develop this figure much more fully in *Dred*—I consider the fugitive slave in the swamp as the figure that most explicitly (and problematically) encapsulates the matter of St. Clare's and Stowe's aesthetic dilemma.

If Tom's sale to Haley is the complication that initiates the rising action of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, then Stowe mirrors that moment in the subsequent shift in the narrative landscape: the pastoral of Kentucky and the family farm gives way to sublime of the lower Mississippi River valley and the plantation complex. Her introduction to this new landscape indicates that the industry of the latter has likewise wrought an irrevocable change in the fortune and in the perception of the river. She

writes, “The Mississippi! How, as by an enchanted wand, have its scenes changed, since Chateaubriand wrote his prose-poetic description of it, as a river of mighty, unbroken solitudes, rolling amid undreamed wonders of vegetable and animal existence.” It comes as no surprise that Chateaubriand’s representation provides the touchstone for the raw experience of Nature that has been lost, but Stowe insists that it has been transformed into something just as powerful:

But, as in an hour, this river of dreams and wild romance has emerged to a reality scarcely less visionary and splendid. What other river of the world bears on its bosom to the ocean the wealth and enterprise of such another country? —a country whose products embrace all between the tropics and the poles! Those turbid waters, hurrying, foaming, tearing along, an apt resemblance of that headlong tide of business which is poured along its wave by a race more vehement and energetic than any the world ever saw.<sup>147</sup>

In this instance, while it follows the geographical expanse of Chateaubriand’s, Stowe’s sublime is not generated by the unfathomable scale of the Mississippi but rather by the unfathomability of (the white) Western man’s capacity to tame it. Similarly, the picturesque, yet overwhelming fecundity of Chateaubriand’s river, figured in its floating islands, is translated by Stowe into the myriad products that the Mississippi rushes along. The pressure of the sublime, however, cannot be sustained in either case, and if Chateaubriand often finds outlet in the melancholy, then Stowe’s prose in this case deflates into the sentimental:

Ah! would that they did not also bear along a more fearful freight, —the tears of the oppressed, the sighs of the helpless, the bitter prayers of poor, ignorant hearts to an unknown God, —unknown, unseen, and silent, but who will yet “come out of his place to save all the poor of the earth!”

---

<sup>147</sup> This statement recalls Emerson.

The “reality” of the river, as Stowe represents it, is therefore two-fold. The sublime experience of the river is now generated by the industry of man, but that industry is nevertheless supported by the material base of human slavery. The experience of this reality in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* thus has an underside and a corresponding mode of expression, which—not unlike Chateaubriand’s use of Chactas’s exile to govern the aesthetic of *Atala*—is organized by Tom’s dispossession. If the Mississippi and Louisiana’s wetlands offer Chateaubriand figures for appealing to melancholy, then they present themselves in a similar light—or shade—for Stowe’s appeal to sentimentality. As the passage I am following returns to earth and water, from the sublime power of industry to the “fearful freight” that forms its collective collateral, Stowe relies on the unmistakably imagery of the swamp:

The slanting light of the setting sun quivers on the sea-like expanse of the river; the shivery canes, and the tall, dark cypress, hung with wreaths of dark, funereal moss, glow in the golden ray, as the heavily laden steamboat marches onward. (187-8)

Within this conventional swamp scenery, aboard this steamboat-turned-hearse, Stowe locates Tom and his fate. As she moves back toward his point of view, the shifting landscape continues to assert itself as the organizing principle of the narrative.

For Tom and other slaves displaced from the interior or Mid-Atlantic States, the Mississippi signifies a journey into a murky unknown that for Stowe requires expression in Shakespearean terms: the river leads to “That undiscovered country, from whose bourn / No traveler returns.” In her estimation, one is not able “to appreciate the sufferings of the negroes sold south,” without understanding that “the instinctive affections of that race are peculiarly strong,” that “[t]heir local attachments

are very abiding,” that “[t]hey are not naturally daring and enterprising, but home-loving and affectionate.” When these traits are coupled with “all the terrors with which ignorance invests the unknown,” it is no wonder that “the threat of being sent down river” represents for slaves “the last severity of punishment.” Upon the good evidence of a “missionary among the fugitives in Canada,” she writes that slaves “were induced to brave the perils of escape, in almost every case, by the desperate horror with which they regarded being sold south.” It is a “doom,” Stowe concludes, that “nerves the African, naturally patient, timid, and unenterprising, with heroic courage, and leads him to suffer hunger, cold, pain, the perils of the wilderness, and the more dread penalties of recapture” (124).

Because Stowe equips Tom (as a slave) with only a disordered imagination of this “undiscovered country,” it is and contradictory that she chooses to describe his first encounter with the lower Mississippi in orderly, cartographic terms. “For a hundred or more miles above New Orleans,” she writes,

the river is higher than the surrounding country, and rolls its tremendous volume between massive levees twenty feet in height. The traveler from the deck of the steamer, as from some floating castle top, overlooks the whole country for miles and miles around. Tom, therefore, had spread out full before him, in plantation after plantation, a map of the life to which he was approaching.

As property himself, Tom’s status as a subject and beholder of this prospect seems tenuous at best, and it is therefore apt that Stowe represents his perception in terms of the stark organization of labor that he sees spread out before him: “He saw the distant slaves at their toil; he saw afar their villages of huts gleaming out in long rows on many a plantation, distant from the stately mansions and pleasuregrounds of the

master.” The repetition of “distant” in this passage of course resonates in respect to Tom’s distance from home, but it more significantly underscores the extreme alienation of labor that characterizes the plantation complex. If Stowe is an avowed enemy of slavery and its spread in its most dehumanizing form, then she is more ambiguous when it comes to rejecting the institution as a whole, and this is illustrated by her treatment of Tom’s identification with the scenes of slavery before him.<sup>148</sup>

“[A]s the moving picture passed on,” she continues,

his poor, foolish heart would be turning backward to the Kentucky farm, with its old shadowy beeches, —to the master's house, with its wide, cool halls, and near by, the little cabin, overgrown with the multiflora and bignonia. There he seemed to see familiar faces of comrades, who had grown up with him from infancy; he saw his busy wife, bustling in her preparations for his evening meal; he heard the merry laugh of his boys at their play, and the chirrup of the baby at his knee.

The decidedly picturesque mode through which Tom remembers the Kentucky farm belongs to the pastoral, but if he is hopeful of somehow recovering what has been lost, it is not clear to what delusion Stowe attributes the foolishness of his heart. Is it the expectation that he will find something similar on the plantation, the hope that he will someday return to the farm, or is Stowe making a larger comment here on the delusion that there is anything about slavery that can be thought of in pastoral terms? If the latter is a possibility at all, Stowe submerges her opinion in Tom’s point of view (belief system?), which is framed entirely by the experience of a benevolent form of unfreedom. Put another way, it is possible that Tom’s indoctrination, his

---

<sup>148</sup> In considering this passage, I would stress that at this particular moment, large-scale plantation was the future of agriculture—land and slavery—not the idyllic family farm.

pastoral belief in a life of slavery, is itself part of Stowe's overall indictment of the system. Ultimately, the only clear answer is that there is no pastoral to be found down the Mississippi, and Tom's reverie is arrested by the sights and sounds of industrial agriculture in Louisiana swamplands: "and then, with a start, all faded, and he saw again the cane-brakes and cypresses and gliding plantations, and heard again the creaking and groaning of the machinery, all telling him too plainly that all that phase of life had gone by forever" (188).

Tom's separation from the pastoral, however, is not only a matter of a change in the landscape to which he properly belongs/that forms his proper place of belonging. Being sold down river means he is likewise cut off from the improving influence and cultivation of the gently patriarchal Shelby family. As the reader learns early in the novel, Mrs. Shelby not only possessed a "natural magnanimity and generosity of mind," but she was also a woman of "high moral and religious sensibility and principle, carried out with great energy and ability into practical results" (13). Mr. Shelby, more complacent on such matters and content that his wife's zeal more than made up for his own deficiencies, "gave her unlimited scope in all her benevolent efforts for the comfort, instruction, and improvement of her servants, though he never took any decided part in them himself." One must conclude, then, that Tom was a beneficiary of such improvement, and "[h]aving, naturally, an organization in which the *morale* was strongly predominant, together with a greater breadth and cultivation of mind than obtained among his companions" (38), he was among the slaves an exceptional figure, both patriarch and minister. To

put it in pastoral terms, if Mr. Shelby shepherds the entire plantation by proxy, via his wife, then Tom is in turn Mrs. Shelby's agent, shepherding his flock of slaves. While she and Tom are divided by the uneven power relations of master and slave, the separation between the two is smoothed over by Stowe's invocation of what comes naturally to them. Mrs. Shelby is of course religious, but she is also predisposed to be charitable, and while Tom's instinct for moral principle provides the ground for his improvement, it depends on her charity for its cultivation.<sup>149</sup> Stowe's naturalization of the connection between Mrs. Shelby and Tom is part of her strategy to define the Kentucky farm in respect to what it is not, the brutal disciplinary regime of plantation slavery, and her diction reflects the (Puritan) pastoral ideals that govern the spheres

---

<sup>149</sup> Within the ideology of Stowe's novel, however, the universal "improvement" and "cultivation" of slaves is not a possibility, and it is in this resistance to putting blacks on equal terms with whites, that her middle-class/pastoral sensibility dovetails with and is complicated by the broader Enlightenment ideals of human education and improvement. That Tom is exceptional in his capacity for cultivation (within limits) is perhaps best illustrated by the contrasting example of Sam and Andy, who appear during Shelby's transaction with Haley. While their narrative function is to create a distraction to ensure that Eliza might escape with little Harry (who has also been sold), Stowe chooses to characterize the slaves as stereotypical figures of local color or minstrelsy. The episode then unravels in slapstick fashion as they succeed in unseating Haley from his horse, followed by a mock chase in which they attempt to rein in the beast: "Well, yer see," said Sam, proceeding gravely to wash down Haley's pony, "I'se 'quired what ye may call a habit o' *bobservation*, Andy. It's a very 'portant habit, Andy, and I 'commend yer to be cultivatin' it, now yer young. Hist up that hind foot, Andy. Yer see, Andy, it's *bobservation* makes all de difference in niggers. Did n't I see which way the wind blew dis yer mornin'? Did n't I see what Missis wanted, though she never let on? Dat ar's *bobservation*, Andy. I spects it's what you may call a faculty. Faculties is different in different peoples, but cultivation of 'em goes a great way." (63)

that form the matter of the novel: the religious and the moral, as well as the agricultural.<sup>150</sup>

With Tom thus cut off from the moral and religious cultivation offered by Mrs. Shelby, Stowe furthermore chooses to measure Tom's distance from the Kentucky farm in terms of something that this peculiar pastoral arrangement effectively guarantees: the slave's illiteracy. "In such a case," Stowe explains, "you write to your wife, and send messages to your children; but Tom could not write, — the mail for him had no existence, and the gulf of separation was unbridged by even a friendly word or signal." For Tom, the domestic or private sphere does not intersect with the public sphere, and the author again puts her finger on one of the paradoxes of the culture of slavery. If the pastoral care and instruction of the slave was within bounds, then a general education—including literacy—was not, and Stowe carefully draws attention to this illogic by focusing on the limits placed on Tom's education and understanding. These limits, not surprisingly, are materialized in a book, but not just any book. She asks, "Is it strange, then, that some tears fall on the pages of his Bible, as he lays it on the cotton-bale, and, with patient finger, threading his slow way from word to word, traces out its promises?" Stowe emphasizes that Tom

---

<sup>150</sup> Perhaps the problem with the improvement of slaves arises when it spills over into the universalizing Enlightenment ideal of education. The moral and religious is contained by the pastoral, but access to the rational mind (and on the flip side the sublime) and emerging from the landscape into subjecthood is forbidden because it would acknowledge slaves as human. This is why wetlands are the right landscape for this discussion. In their insistence on matter, they threaten subjectivity (a slip into the landscape) and thus the category of the human. Hence the problem with slaves and literacy. That entry into the republic of letters is its own form of discipline is a contingent issue.

accomplishes this “laboriously,” but like all of his work in this world, it is done in good faith with his heart set on the promises to come. “Let—not—your—heart—be—troubled. In—my—Father’s—house—are—many—mansions. I—go—to—prepare—a—place—for—you,” he reads, and it follows from his faith and limited understanding that he takes these words as flesh, as entirely literal [Cicero and the surface of the page, the material aspect, the human]. To illustrate that Tom reads with his heart and not with his head, Stowe invokes the paragon of Western rhetoric:

Cicero, when he buried his darling and only daughter, had a heart as full of honest grief as poor Tom’s;—perhaps no fuller, for both were only men;—but Cicero could pause over no such sublime words of hope, and look to no future reunion; and if he *had* seen them, ten to one he would not have believed—he must fill his head first with a thousand questions of authenticity of manuscript, and correctness of translation. But, to poor Tom, there it lay, just what he needed, so evidently true and divine that the possibility of a question never entered his simple head. It must be true; for, if not true, how could he live?

If slavery is the cause of Tom’s pain, then the pastoral care that comes with it is also the source of his comfort. At the same time, Stowe offers Tom access to the sublime, not as it relates to the rational mind and aesthetic experience, but rather in a religious and figural sense [to be compared with his final martyrdom?] As eternal, the words of the Bible connect Tom to his two reasons for living: they envelop him in the world to come, but their present existence on the page also links him to his life back on the Shelby farm.

As for Tom’s Bible, though it had no annotations and helps in margin from learned commentators, still it had been embellished with certain way-marks and guide-boards of Tom’s own invention, and which helped him more than the most learned expositions could have done. It had been his custom to get the Bible read to him by his master’s children, in particular by young Master George; and, as they read, he would designate, by bold, strong marks and dashes, with pen and ink, the passages which more particularly gratified his

ear or affected his heart. His Bible was thus marked through, from one end to the other, with a variety of styles and designations; so he could in a moment seize upon his favorite passages, without the labor of spelling out what lay between them—and while it lay there before him, every passage breathing of some old home scene, and recalling some past enjoyment, his Bible seemed to him all of this life that remained, as well as the promise of a future one. (188)

While the marks in Tom's Bible offer material evidence of his religious and moral improvement, their illegibility also designates a limit of the slave's pastoral care.

These marks, however, also represent the hinge between Tom's domestic improvement and the public sphere of literacy. If the discipline of the former is allowed, then that of the latter is not. Literacy is a discipline for the most part denied the slave, as it falls outside the improvements necessary for optimal plantation management. It is therefore appropriate that the formation of Tom's nascent literacy falls not to the master himself but to young Master George.

Stowe's description of the two reading and annotating the Bible in effect recalls the reader's first introduction to Tom, as he and Master George perform a scene of writing that is itself a stock trope of slave narrative. In contrast to its standard depiction, Stowe does not represent this act as forbidden or taking place in secret, but there is nevertheless a clear indication that it is an exceptional occurrence. Despite the absence of violence, there is also no question that it is a scene of discipline, with Master George wielding a piece of chalk instead of a lash. Amidst the domestic bustle of Aunt Chloe's supper preparations, the tableau is set in Uncle Tom's cabin. As it is Stowe's first introduction of "the hero of our story," she "must daguerreotype" him for the reader. Described as "Mr. Shelby's best hand,"

He was a large, broad-chested, powerfully made man, of a full glossy black, and a face whose truly African features were characterized by an expression of grave and steady good sense, united with much kindness and benevolence. There was something about his whole air self-respecting and dignified, yet united with a confiding and humble simplicity.

The contrast between Tom's physical power and his benevolent demeanor is remarkable on several levels. While Stowe emphasizes that the two are compatible, it is hard to escape the underlying sense that the latter is possible despite the former. The passage unfolds in terms of misdirection and an upsetting of expectations. It begins as a description of the typical African lion, but it does not proceed in kind. Tom is noble, not because of his physical prowess (or potential defiance), but rather because of his capacity for domestication. In Mr. Shelby's words to Haley, the reader has already learned that "Tom is an uncommon fellow;" he "is a good, steady, sensible, pious fellow," who "got religion at a camp-meeting, four years ago," and as Shelby stresses, "I believe he really *did* get it" (2). What unfolds, then, is a scene of a lion tamed, and it is difficult to disentangle the transmission of literacy from the overriding relationship between master and slave.

To return to Tom and the tableau in the cabin, "He was very busily intent at this moment on a slate lying before him, on which he was carefully and slowly endeavoring to accomplish a copy of some letters, in which operation was overlooked by young Mas'r George, a smart, bright boy of thirteen, who appeared to fully realize the dignity of his position as instructor." At first glance, the unfolding play is of course analogous to the schoolhouse, but the shading of Stowe's diction and imagery

becomes uncomfortably ambiguous, and the operation of copying letters takes on the appearance of work in the field:

“Not that way, Uncle Tom,—not that way,” said [George], briskly, as Uncle Tom laboriously brought up the tail of his *g* the wrong side out; “that makes a *q* you see.”

“La sakes, now, does it?” said Uncle Tom, looking with a respectful, admiring air, as his young teacher, flourishingly scrawled *q*'s and *g*'s innumerable for his edification; and then, taking the pencil in his big, heavy fingers, he patiently recommenced.

More than anything else, the briskness with which George corrects Tom's labor brings to mind an overseer disciplining a slave, and this image is reinforced by Stowe's choice of lesson. The mixing up of *q*'s and *g*'s is a commonplace mistake, but the emphasis on the letters' tails is suggestive of something less benign than a handwriting correction. As George flourishingly scrawl[s] *q*'s and *g*'s innumerable for [Tom's] edification,” it is difficult not to imagine the lash. While these two kinds of discipline are not the same, and I do not want to equate them, it is nonetheless interesting that such a correspondence can be made or that the possibility of such a correspondence exists. Even when Stowe presents a scene that runs counter to the slave regime, her ideology and language is nevertheless constrained by it. There is no outside the plantation economy in the book: every character, device, and possible plot exists in respect to it.

Stowe first gives conventional expression to the figure, the locus, the trope of the slave in the swamp as the St. Clare family and Miss Ophelia discuss the question

of slavery, in what amounts to a set-piece of the prevailing opinions.<sup>151</sup> Following the incident of Prue (who died of alcoholism), out of concern that Ophelia might think them “barbarians,” Marie justifies her attitudes and defends the social order. “I know it's impossible to get along with some of these creatures,” she remarks. “They are so bad they ought not to live. I don't feel a particle of sympathy for such cases. If they 'd only behave themselves, it would not happen.” After Eva interposes—“But mamma ... the poor creature was unhappy; that's what made her drink”—Marie doubles down:

Oh, fiddlestick! as if that were any excuse! I'm unhappy, very often. I presume ... that I 've had greater trials than ever she had. It's just because they are so bad. There's some of them that you cannot break in by any kind of severity. I remember father had a man that was so lazy he would run away just to get rid of work, and lie round in the swamps, stealing and doing all sorts of horrid things. That man was caught and whipped, time and again, and it never did him any good; and the last time he crawled off, though he couldn't but just go, and died in the swamp. (306-7)

In Marie's words, Stowe depicts two of the trope's valences: first, that some slaves cannot be disciplined by “any kind of severity,” that not even repeated whippings can do “any good”; and second, that the slave's laziness (his refusal of the discipline of work) finds its accommodation in the swamp, which is correspondingly—albeit implicitly in this case—decadent or degenerate. According to the logic of the plantation, the intractable slave thus finds an appropriate end completely outside the

---

<sup>151</sup> Marie is the justifier of slavery on the grounds of the slave's inhumanity (it is the natural order of things); St. Clare opposes the violence slavery but is not an abolitionist, but maybe a reformer—he doesn't question the social order but believes it could be a benevolent institution; Miss Ophelia of course is the abolitionist but she does not believe slaves can be equals.

regime of discipline, yet Marie reads this as illogical: “There was no sort of reason for it, for father's hands were always treated kindly.”

If Marie’s words depict the (inherently) lazy slave, the avoider of discipline who hides from work in the swamp, then St. Clare’s rejoinder introduces the opposite side of the coin, the recalcitrant slave, the violent resister of discipline who escapes into the swamp. “I broke a fellow in once,” he says, “that all the overseers and masters had tried their hands on in vain.” While St. Clare at first speaks explicitly in terms of discipline—he “broke a fellow in once”—the severity of this statement (and the regime that structures it) is soon softened (or obscured) by the rhetoric of improvement. Ultimately, because kindness will prove more effective than the lash, St. Clare must begin by establishing the difficulty of the task at hand:

Well, he was a powerful, gigantic fellow, —a native-born African; and he appeared to have the rude instinct of freedom in him to an uncommon degree. He was a regular African lion. They called him Scipio. Nobody could do anything with him; and he was sold round from overseer to overseer, till at last Alfred bought him, because he thought he could manage him. Well, one day he knocked down the overseer, and was fairly off into the swamps. (306)

From Scipio’s size and strength, to his African-ness, to his royal bearing transmuted in the figure of a lion, Stowe’s characterization of the noble yet dangerous slave is entirely conventional, and it comes from the same stock as Cable’s *Bras Coupé*. If she contributes anything notable to the characterization, perhaps it is that the slave “appeared to have the rude instinct of freedom in him to an uncommon degree.”

Nevertheless, it is a *rude* rather than *human* instinct, because here, as always, Stowe is reluctant to grant the African slave a full share of his personhood. And, it follows

that such a rude or uncultivated instinct would find expression or enactment in a flight into the swamps.

As St. Clare goes on to explain, “Alfred was greatly exasperated; but I told him that it was his own fault, and laid him any wager that I could break the man; and finally it was agreed that, if I caught him, I should have him to experiment on.” If the end is still to “break the man,” then the dehumanizing agreement to “experiment on” Scipio only reinforces the fact that the rhetorics of corporal punishment and improvement, and their respective practices, belong to the same disciplinary regime. After admitting that he, too, got excited about the prospect of the hunt, even if he was only to play “mediator” if the slave was caught, St. Clare recounts the chase:

the dogs bayed and howled, and we rode and scampered, and finally we started him. He ran and bounded like a buck, and kept us well in the rear for some time; but at last he got caught in an impenetrable thicket of cane; then he turned to bay, and I tell you he fought the dogs right gallantly. He dashed them to right and left, and actually killed three of them with only his naked fists, when a shot from a gun brought him down, and he fell, wounded and bleeding, almost at my feet. (307-8)

While Stowe, again emphasizing the slave’s physicality, presents Scipio as a wild animal and foregrounds his actions, I will for a moment look past the character to the swamp landscape that ultimately “caught” him. Here, “the impenetrable thicket of cane” mirrors the intractability of the slave, and plantation discipline reaches its limit. In order to push through, he would have to become a part of the swamp’s ecology, and Stowe would soon find expression of this figure in Dred. The point of Scipio, however, is that the wild slave does not escape into the impenetrable swamp, and is rather surrendered to St. Clare: “The poor fellow looked up at me with manhood and

despair both in his eye. I kept back the dogs and the party ... and claimed him as my prisoner. It was all I could do to keep them from shooting him [...]; but I persisted in my bargain, and Alfred sold him to me” (308). St. Clare’s “claim” in this instance may be compared to a claim made on an unimproved plot of swampland: by law, the claim is not valid until the land can bear cultivation, and these are precisely the terms in which St. Clare describes Scipio’s transformation:

Well, it was quite a simple process. I took him to my own room, had a good bed made for him, dressed his wounds, and tended him myself, until he got fairly on his feet again. And, in process of time, I had free papers made out for him, and told him he might go where he liked. (308)

While it could be argued that St. Clare’s action was a simple matter of human kindness, it cannot be forgotten that it occurred within the framework of his wager with Alfred. His amelioration of Scipio, however free of the lash, is nonetheless a form of discipline, and this is born out by the slave’s rejection of his owner’s offer of freedom: as St. Clare explains to Ophelia, “The foolish fellow tore the paper in two, and absolutely refused to leave me” (308).<sup>152</sup> That St. Clare’s “kindness” improved the slave, or prepared him for the mark of cultivation, is then born out by the result of the experiment: “I never had a braver, better fellow, — trusty and true as steel, St. Clare explains. “He embraced Christianity afterwards, and became as gentle as a child. He used to oversee my place on the lake, and did it capitally, too.” The

---

<sup>152</sup> Scipio’s refusal of “his free papers,” the legal mark of freedom, and his choice to remain inscribed within slavery raises some questions: as inscription, legal freedom in this case retains the mark of enslavement and perhaps this corresponds with the inscription of the land? Or, is Scipio’s improvement inscription enough?

rhetorical transformation of Scipio from African lion to gentle child complete, Stowe nevertheless sentimentalizes the anecdote:

I lost him the first cholera season. In fact, he laid down his life for me. For I was sick, almost to death; and when, through the panic, everybody else fled, Scipio worked for me like a giant, and actually brought me back into life again. But, poor fellow! he was taken, right after, and there was no saving him. I never felt anybody's loss more. (308)

The poetic closure of their seemingly reciprocal relationship, however, is undercut by the logic of the plantation economy and its language. Prior to the pandemic, Scipio performed “capitally” for St. Clare, and throughout the latter’s illness, he “worked ... like a giant.”

While writing *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, the figure of the slave in the swamp was familiar enough in the popular imagination that Stowe could play on the trope to enact the sub-plot of Cassy and Emmeline’s escape from Legree’s plantation.<sup>153</sup>

While the two “succeeded in plunging ... into a part of the labyrinth of swamp, so deep and dark that it was perfectly hopeless for Legree to think of following them without assistance” (195), it was only a ruse, and the overall success of their “Strategem” leads Legree to believe that the landscape has for the first time defeated him in the chase. Rendered impotent by the swamp, he consummates his anger in

---

<sup>153</sup> An entire synopsis of the sub-plot is not necessary, but the ruse of the escape was part of a larger plan. Over time, by preying on Legree’s drunkenness and superstition, Cassy had convinced him that the garret room of the house was haunted by a slave who died at his hands. With fear preventing Legree and the rest of the household from ever entering the room again, Cassy had established there a hiding place, one from which she and Emmeline could oversee the progress of the pursuit and bide their time. One evening, after ensuring that they were seen entering the swamp, the two were then able to retreat to the garret during the ensuing commotion. Some nights later, after scaring Legree into hiding, the two women made their real escape, walking out the front door: Cassy dressed as a Creole lady and Emmeline as her servant.

violence against Tom: “The escape of Cassy and Emmeline irritated the before surly temper of Legree to the last degree; and his fury, as was to be expected, fell upon the defenseless head of Tom” (199). While Tom’s martyrdom is structured by the entire plot, the beating that directly results in his death is precipitated by Stowe’s revision of a familiar trope: Legree’s action, predicated on his vow to kill Tom if Cassy and Emmeline are not recovered, hinges on the common knowledge that slaves can and do disappear into the impenetrable swamps of Louisiana.

Going a step further, Legree’s motivation derives from the belief, consistent with his characterization, that the management of his plantation—both slaves and swamp—is an exception to this rule. As Cassy tells Emmeline, explaining her plan, “He’ll muster some of those old overseers on the other plantations, and have a great hunt; and they’ll go over every inch of ground in that swamp. He makes it his boast that nobody ever got away from him” (194). At this point, readers have already heard similar boasts from Legree himself. “I never see the nigger, yet, I couldn’t bring down with one crack” (108), he told his newly acquired slaves, brandishing his fist, and likewise, as he welcomed them to the plantation: “Ye see what ye’d get, if ye try to run off. These yer dogs has been raised to track niggers; and they’d jest as soon chaw one on ye up as to eat their supper” (116-7). If total control of his property motivates Legree, then to lose slaves in the swamp—to lose control of labor and land simultaneously—is a proper cause for his undoing. It is therefore appropriate that Cassy, one of two slaves that Legree cannot control, gives expression to the

fundamental irony of this reversal. Once safe in the garret with Emmeline, she with satisfaction remarks:

Look out of this knot-hole. Don't you see 'em all down there? Simon has to give it up, for this night. Look, how muddy his horse is, flouncing about in the swamp; the dogs, too, look rather crestfallen. Ah, my good sir, you 'll have to try the race again and again—the game isn't there. (197-8)

Via Cassy, there is dramatic irony in the reader's knowledge that the slaves haven't in fact run away, but there is a darker irony in her remark: it may be true that the game he is after is not there, but by the logic of the system, he will find other game to enact the spectacle of control. Cassy and Emmeline, by not actually running into the swamp, betray the trope (the game, the logic), but in Tom, Legree finds another body or supplement upon which he seeks to fulfill it. However, just as Cassy eludes his control, along with the landscape, so—ultimately—does Tom. Though Legree transfers his frustration to Tom, it brings no satisfaction. Though available to the improvement of religion, he is not susceptible to the discipline of the lash.

### **Solomon Northup's Louisiana Landscapes**

Born a freeman in 1808 and raised in New York, Solomon Northup was kidnapped in Washington, D. C. in the spring of 1841 and sold into Louisiana slavery. In 1853, he was able to get a letter to a friend in New York who then legally sponsored his release. In effect, Northup wrote himself out of slavery, but not in the manner made famous by Frederick Douglas, whose narrative treated literacy as the figure through which the author wrote himself towards freedom. Rather, in *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853), the unfolding of Northup's peculiar circumstances means that

his narrative is structured by freedom ultimately regained (and is perhaps more like a narrative of captivity than spiritual conversion). His origin story—and the rising action of the plot—is therefore complicated by the violent negation of his freedom, and not by an epiphany about his debased status as a slave.

Once he enters the space of Louisiana, Solomon Northup's movements through the landscapes of this ecology run parallel to those of Tom in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and Northup—by drawing on the iconographic conventions of his time—allows these landscapes to shape his narrative. Not unlike Stowe, who moves Tom from the seeming paradise of Kentucky, to a New Orleans garden oasis, to the depths of the hellish Red River swamps, Northup (while never as didactic as Stowe) mediates his movement from New Orleans into Louisiana's wilderness in typological terms. Northup, embodying a trope of slave literature in general, was sold from a good master to a bad: he came into the possession of John M. Tibbeats because his first master, William Ford, "became embarrassed in his pecuniary affairs" (103).<sup>154</sup> As he explains:

Tibbeats was the opposite of Ford in all respects. He was a small, crabbed, quick-tempered, spiteful man. He had no fixed residence that I ever heard of, but passed from one plantation to another, wherever he could find employment. He was without standing in the community, not esteemed by white men, nor even respected by slaves. He was ignorant, withal, and of a

---

<sup>154</sup> As Northup details, "A heavy judgement was rendered against him in consequence of his having become security for his brother, Franklin Ford, residing on Red River, above Alexandria, and who had failed to meet his liabilities. He was also indebted to John M. Tibbeats to a considerable amount in consideration of his services in building the mills on Indian Creek, and also a weaving-house corn-mill and other erections on the plantation at Bayou Boeuf, not yet completed. It was therefore necessary, in order to meet these demands, to dispose of eighteen slaves, myself among the number" (105).

revengeful disposition. He left the parish long before I did, and I know not whether he is at present alive or dead. Certain it is, it was a most unlucky day for me that brought us together. During my residence with Master Ford I had seen only the bright side of slavery. His was no heavy hand crushing us to the earth. *He* pointed upwards, and with benign and cheering words addressed us as his fellow-mortals, accountable, like himself, to the Maker of us all. I think of him with affection, and had my family been with me, could have borne his gentle servitude, without murmuring, all my days. (103-4)

As a writer, Northup plays his change in ownership as the turning point in a narrative that will carry him through suffering: “clouds were gathering in the horizon— forerunners of a pitiless storm that was soon to break over me. I was doomed to endure such bitter trials as the poor slave only knows, and to lead no more the comparatively happy life which I had led in the ‘Great Pine Woods’” (104). Yet, he marks the change in his fortunes with a keen awareness of his place and the place of his masters in the local plantation economy.<sup>155</sup> His skill, one of many that stand in for his undisclosed literacy, determines his purchaser and saves him from the more abject forms of labor into which he would most likely disappear, yet it brings him into inevitable and violent conflict with Tibeats.<sup>156</sup>

Northup’s knowledge of geography (and not just in retrospect) is another literacy that sets him apart from most of the slaves in his company, and the

---

<sup>155</sup> He writes, “I was sold to Tibeats, in consequence, undoubtedly, of my slight skill as a carpenter. This was in the winter of 1842. The deed of myself from Freeman to Ford, as I ascertained from the public records in New-Orleans on my return, was dated June 23d, 1841. At the time of my sale to Tibeats, the price agreed to be given for me being more than the debt, Ford took a chattel mortgage of four hundred dollars. I am indebted for my life, as will hereafter be seen, to that mortgage” (106). In other words, Tibeats did not own Northup outright, and this saved his life.

<sup>156</sup> His other skills include river raft navigation.

typological aspects of his narrative are likewise grounded in topography.<sup>157</sup> Ford, he writes, “resided then in the ‘Great Pine Woods,’ in the parish of Avoyelles, situated on the right bank of Red River, in the heart of Louisiana” (89-90), and the author renders the journey to Ford’s in particular detail: after disembarking the steamboat *Randolph* in Alexandria, the entourage caught the morning train to Bayou Lamourie, “distant eighteen miles,” and then set out on foot for the plantation, “situated on the Texas road, twelve miles from Lamourie.” On the way, they “cross[ed] two plantations, one belonging to Mr. Carnell, the other to a Mr. Flint, [and] reached the Pine Woods, a wilderness that stretches to the Sabine River.” As Northup explains, “The whole country about Red River is low and marshy,” but the “Pine Woods ... is comparatively upland, with frequent small intervals, however, running through them” (92). At sunset, after walking for miles “through continuous woods without observing a single habitation,” the group reached an “opening, containing some twelve or fifteen acres.” Here stood Ford’s house:

It was two stories high, with a piazza in front. In the rear of it was also a log kitchen, poultry house, corncribs, and several negro cabins. Near the house was a peach orchard, and gardens of orange and pomegranate trees. The space was entirely surrounded by woods, and covered with a carpet of rich, rank verdure. It was a quiet, lonely, pleasant place—literally a green spot in the wilderness. (94)<sup>158</sup>

---

<sup>157</sup> As the work of Sue Eakin has exhaustively documented, Northup’s description of the region provides a rich and accurate record of the Red River region around Alexandria, LA.

<sup>158</sup> Northup notes, “Rich planters, having large establishments on Bayou Boeuf, are accustomed to spend the warmer season in these woods. Here they find clear water and delightful shades. In fact, these retreats are to the planters of that section of the country what Newport and Saratoga are to the wealthier inhabitants of northern cities” (93).

If the physical location of Ford's residence was determined by local, topographical conditions—the “comparatively upland” situation of the Pine Woods—then Northup adapts these conditions to serve his narrative: he emplaces the farm, as a garden, against the swamp wilderness that surrounds it, and he emplots his relatively idyllic time in this garden in respect to the inevitable expulsion to come. Although located in the deep, plantation South and not in the middle ground of Stowe's Kentucky, Ford's “green spot” is recognizable as a particular (and historical) version of the Shelby farm and would have resonated with readers of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Northup's description of Ford as a man of God deepens this resonance. As he explains, “We usually spent our Sabbaths at the opening, on which days our master would gather all his slaves about him, and read and expound the Scriptures.” Ford's efforts to “inculcate” the minds of his slaves with “feelings of kindness towards each other, of dependence upon God” (96) were rewarded by devotion, none exceeding that of Sam, a slave whose piety recalls that of Uncle Tom. Given a Bible by his mistress, Sam had it about him enough to draw the scorn of other white men who visited the mill: “the remark it most generally provoked,” writes Northup, “was, that a man like Ford ... was ‘not fit to own a nigger.’” Ford, “however, lost nothing by his kindness,” and Northup notes that his master's benevolence gave rise to one of the paradoxes of slavery:

It is a fact I have more than once observed, that those who treated their slaves most leniently, were rewarded by the greatest amount of labor. I know it from my own experience. It was a source of pleasure to surprise Master Ford with a greater day's work than was required, while, under subsequent masters, there was no prompter to extra effort but the overseer's lash. (97)

To translate this passage into the terms of improvement is to reveal that limited religious and moral cultivation of slaves, under the veil of kindness, reaps a return of increased and seemingly un-coerced labor. Religion, as discipline, is concealed. Like Stowe, Northup thus participates in the representation of a benign form of slavery, though his is validated by first-hand experience. While there is no way of knowing how much conviction is behind Northup's sentiments, there is no question that the content of his story is shaped and constrained by the existing generic and rhetorical conventions of slave narrative and antislavery fiction. Once Northup the narrator is inside slavery, the relative paradise of Ford's farm and the man's relative benevolence as a master serve a narrative purpose, providing a recognizable way for the author to stage his descent into the darkest depths of the plantation system. [That Northup seems to uncritically participate in the ideology of improvement raises questions: points to its pervasiveness, and the bigger paradox of African American writing about slavery; it is the only regime of intelligibility available to him; he paradoxically derives self-possession through it.]: "I think of him with affection, and had my family been with me, could have borne his gentle servitude, without murmuring, all my days."

The Pine Woods residence, however, was only one of Ford's holdings, and Northup's focus on this idyllic scene very quickly gives way to a broader and more troubling view of agrarian capitalism and its contingencies. The gentleman farmer also owned a nearby lumber mill on Indian Creek and, through his wife's inheritance, an "extensive plantation and many slaves" (96) some twenty-seven miles away on

Bayou Boeuf. It is to the latter that Tibeats took Northup in order to complete some previously contracted construction on the property. His description of the region indicates a shift in the topography of his enslavement and intimates the corresponding shift in his fortunes:

Bayou Boeuf is a sluggish, winding stream—one of those stagnant bodies of water common in that region, setting back from Red River. It stretches from a point not far from Alexandra, in a south-easterly direction, and following its tortuous course, is more than fifty miles in length. Large cotton and sugar plantations line each shore, extending back to the borders of interminable swamps. It is alive with aligators [sic], rendering it unsafe for swine, or unthinking slave children to stroll along its banks. (106)

The descriptive excess of the region's landscapes, as they oscillate between the hellish and the paradisiacal, is best exemplified by Northup's flight from Tibeats, after their second fight, which takes him through "the great Pacoudrie Swamp" and back to Ford's plantation.<sup>159</sup> His master's "accursed throat" in his grip, antagonized by Tibeats to the point of killing him, Northup relates that "[a] voice within whispered me to fly. To be a wanderer among the swamps, a fugitive and a vagabond on the face of the earth, was preferable to the life that I was leading" (135).<sup>160</sup>

---

<sup>159</sup> Northup narrates these encounters in considerable detail, but they boil down to the author's refusal to submit and be beaten by Tibeats for arbitrary offenses: in the first case, he used the wrong nails, and after struggling with his master and knocking him down, Tibeats rounded up some men, bound Northup with ropes, and attempted to hang him. He was saved only by the intervention of the overseer. In the second, he planed some boards incorrectly, and Tibeats came after him with a hatchet.

<sup>160</sup> He writes, "I was desolate, but thankful. Thankful that my life was spared,—desolate and discouraged with the prospect before me. What would become of me? Who would befriend me? Whither should I fly? Oh, God! Thou who gavest me life, and implanted in my bosom the love of life who filled it with emotions such as other men, thy creatures, have, do not forsake me. Have pity on the poor slave—let me not perish. If thou cost not protect me, I am lost—lost! Such supplications, silently and unuttered, ascended from my inmost heart to Heaven. But there was no answering

Although thoughts of ultimate freedom sustain him, Northup's flight into the swamp is particular to this encounter and conditional on Tibbats's extraordinarily poor treatment of him. He presents it as spontaneous, in other words, and while Northup articulates the episode to the existing (discourse) of fugitive slaves in swamps, he figures himself as an individual acting alone and not as part of any sort of collective (resistance). At the same time, his handling of the narrative is more idiosyncratic than typological. He plays it as a trial, a passage through the wilderness in the biblical sense, but he does not allow this to constrain his narrative voice. On the contrary, what stands out (and makes the passage affecting) is Northup's treatment of the swamp as a particular landscape and not as a generic wilderness. Further, he writes with an awareness that the swamp may lay outside of the plantation, beyond its boundaries, but that it nonetheless lies—along with the plantation and the Pine Woods—within the encompassing region of the Red River and the Bayou Boeuf country.<sup>161</sup> “I never knew a slave escaping with his life from Bayou Boeuf,” he remarks in respect to that specific body of water, but his ability to negotiate the entirety of this region, this wetlands ecology, is what excepts him from that rule as well as the fate of those he arrived with. Northup's command of this ecology is evident in his control of the narrative, in respect to both his first-hand knowledge and the information he folded in at the time of composition.

---

voice—no sweet, low tone, coming down from on high, whispering to my soul, ‘It is I, be not afraid.’ I was the forsaken of God, it seemed—the despised and hated of men” (136).

<sup>161</sup> Sue Eakin's map of the Bayou Boeuf region is indispensable for understanding this geography.

While it is not feasible to discuss the entire passage, which runs to six pages, I would draw attention to several elements. Northup tracks his movements with a detailed knowledge of geography and topography. The overall trajectory of the narrative is into the swamp, southbound and into ever-deepening waters, and back out again, following a north-west route that will return him to the Pine Woods near Ford's residence. In the paragraph that sets up the episode, he provides a brief (overview) of the dogs used for hunting slaves on Bayou Boeuf—a pack of which are presently pursuing him—and notes that he knows how to swim, a skill prohibited slaves in the region. As he explains, “In their flight they can go in no direction but a little way without coming to a bayou, when the inevitable alternative is presented, of being drowned or overtaken by the dogs” (137). When he therefore invokes the Almighty, praying for “the strength to reach some wide, deep bayou where I could throw them off the track, or sink into its waters” (138), it is an appeal rooted in his own aptitude for self-preservation. As he reaches a bayou that answers his prayer, and as he plunges deeper into the Great Pacoudrie Swamp, this wilderness thus operates as a trial of his faith and evidence of his desolation, but Northup also renders it as a form of providence that is at the same time a landscape specific to the Red River ecology he is traversing.<sup>162</sup> It is a landscape of darkness, populated by monsters of all kinds, but it is also shelter for those who seek it. At the center of the episode, a

---

<sup>162</sup> Northup's knowledge of the region is keen: “I was now in what I afterwards learned was the ‘Great Pacoudrie Swamp.’ It was filled with immense trees—the sycamore, the gum, the cotton wood and cypress, and extends, I am informed, to the shore of the Calcasieu river. For thirty or forty miles it is without inhabitants, save wild beasts—the bear, the wild-cat, the tiger, and great slimy reptiles, that are crawling through it everywhere” (139).

passage captures Northup's awareness of his place within this ecology, as well as his control of these narrative elements. He writes:

At length the sun went down, and gradually night's trailing mantle shrouded the great swamp in darkness. Still I staggered on, fearing every instant I should feel the dreadful sting of the moccasin, or be crushed within the jaws of some disturbed alligator. The dread of them now almost equaled the fear of the pursuing hounds. The moon arose after a time, its mild light creeping through the overspreading branches, loaded with long, pendent moss. I kept traveling forwards until after midnight, hoping all the while that I would soon emerge into some less desolate and dangerous region. But the water grew deeper and the walking more difficult than ever. I perceived it would be impossible to proceed much farther, and knew not, moreover, what hands I might fall into, should I succeed in reaching a human habitation. Not provided with a pass, any white man would be at liberty to arrest me, and place me in prison until such time as my master should "prove property, pay charges, and take me away." I was an estray, and if so unfortunate as to meet a law-abiding citizen of Louisiana, he would deem it his duty to his neighbor, perhaps, to put me forthwith in the pound. Really, it was difficult to determine which I had most reason to fear—dogs, alligators or men!

After midnight, however, I came to a halt. Imagination cannot picture the dreariness of the scene. The swamp was resonant with the quacking of innumerable ducks! Since the foundation of the earth, in all probability, a human footstep had never before so far penetrated the recesses of the swamp. It was not silent now—silent to a degree that rendered it oppressive,—as it was when the sun was shining in the heavens. My midnight intrusion had awakened the feathered tribes, which seemed to throng the morass in hundreds of thousands, and their garrulous throats poured forth such multitudinous sounds—there was such a fluttering of wings—such sullen plunges in the water all around me—that I was affrighted and appalled. All the fowls of the air, and all the creeping things of the earth appeared to have assembled together in that particular place, for the purpose of filling it with clamor and confusion. Not by human dwellings—not in crowded cities alone, are the sights and sounds of life. The wildest places of the earth are full of them. Even in the heart of that dismal swamp, God had provided a refuge and a dwelling place for millions of living things. (140-2)

In typical terms, the first paragraph appeals to the desolation of the swamp as symbolic of the slave condition, and ultimately paints it as no more dangerous than the plantation landscape as a whole. The second paragraph, however, capitalizes on

this desolation of this scene to produce a moment of terrible beauty. As Northup narrates the “midnight intrusion” that “awakened the feathered tribes” of the swamp, the explosion of sound he describes is sublime in its affect; however, his narrative voice is not subsumed by the “clamor and confusion.” Rather, on the edge of the sublime, through a material experience of immersion, Northup finds discursive self-possession rather than annihilation. Although he resolves the scene with the language of providence, the final sentence suggests a unique awareness of the human place *in* nature rather than in respect to it: “Even in the heart of that dismal swamp, God had provided a refuge and a dwelling place for millions of living things.” Though Northup is no doubt speaking figuratively of God’s shelter, even in slavery, it is difficult here to separate that from the literal refuge of the swamp as a liminal space within the plantation region of the Red River.

Put another way, the swamp in Northup’s experience is an outlet or “safety valve” for the plantation (not fully a part of it, but not entirely separate either), and the narrative resolution of the episode provides evidence of this function.<sup>163</sup> First, upon exiting the bayou, he runs almost immediately into a master and slave out hunting hogs. Without a pass and therefore subject to being taken into possession, he resolves upon a “ruse” to discover where in the Pine Woods he has emerged:

Assuming a fierce expression, I walked directly towards him, looking him steadily in the face. As I approached, he moved backwards with an air of alarm. It was plain he was much affrighted—that he looked upon me as some infernal goblin, just arisen from the bowels of the swamp. (143)

---

<sup>163</sup> The idea of the “safety valve” comes from Cowan.

He demands only directions to Ford's place, which he receives without challenge, and the success of his "ruse" derives from his choice to fully assume the role of fugitive slave in the swamp, which goes unquestioned by his interlocutor. In this guise, Northup anticipates and embodies as a writing subject both Stowe's Dred and Strother's Osman. Second, once Northup is under the protection of Ford, the two promptly run into Tibeats on the road back to the Bayou Boeuf plantation.<sup>164</sup> Rather than anger at his escape, Tibeats instead expresses a perverse pleasure at Northup's skill in the chase: "I never saw such running before," he says. "I'll bet him against a hundred dollars, he'll beat any nigger in Louisiana." Although he "allow[s] I wanted a shot at him mightily," Tibeats's anger seems to have expended itself in the thrill of the pursuit, and Ford's response, in which he blames the other man's inhumane treatment of Northup for the whole affair, does not alter the impression that the swamps offer a natural outlet to prevent the overflow of violence on the plantation. Of Tibeats's violent behavior—specifically, the use of "hatchets and broad-axes upon slaves"—Ford says:

"This is no way of dealing with them, when first brought into the country. It will have a pernicious influence, and set them all running away. The swamps will be full of them. A little kindness would be far more effectual in restraining them, and rendering them obedient, than the use of such deadly weapons. Every planter on the bayou should frown upon such inhumanity. It is for the interest of all to do so." (150-1)

Ford's appeal for soft discipline, the improving influence of the master, is in keeping with his patriarchal view of benevolent slavery. In addition, by suggesting that the inhumane treatment of slaves is what drives them into the swamps, he erases the

---

<sup>164</sup> His deliverance is narrated in biblical terms, including a return to Ford's garden.

possibility that they would on their own initiative escape into these spaces because the entire system is inhumane. In effect, there are no bad slaves, only bad masters, and the swamp in this view is an expedient for the slave that could be avoided by the master. Northup, according to Ford, “was always a willing and faithful boy with him” (150), and the fault was Tibbeats’s own.

During this entire exchange, Northup writes, “I opened not my mouth” (151). While his silence could be interpreted as submission, it is rather part of his strategy of self-preservation as a slave and self-possession as a writer. As in the case of his emergence from the swamp, he plays the role of slave in the aspects necessary to his survival. If he was the bad slave there, potentially violent, then he is the good slave here, true to Ford’s image of him. As a writer, his negotiation of these roles is trickier. In this context, he is first and foremost not a slave, but a captive, and appeals to the reader as a fellow human being. Tibbeats’s violence against him was thus an assault on his humanity, and his flight into the swamp a risk worth taking. That he could assume the aspect of a dangerous slave when confronted by a stranger is then evidence of his ingenuity. He aligns himself with the swamp in order to distance himself from it in the eyes of his readers. His alignment with Ford, however necessary as an appeal to his readership, is more problematic because it forces him as a writer to subscribe to the improving ideology of agrarian capitalism (leaving it unexamined). Within this view, the slave remains embedded in the landscape, and separation from that landscape comes at a cost for the African American writer. Northup, for the most part, is able only to speak for himself as an individual and not for slaves in common.

As a narrator, by participating in the pastoral literary tradition—and, in effect, endorsing a pastoral understanding of land and social relations—Northup in retrospect clouds his vision of slavery: “I think of [Ford] with affection, and had my family been with me, could have borne his gentle servitude, without murmuring, all my days” (103-4).

In respect to the book as a whole, Northup’s flight into the swamp is just an early episode of his life as a slave, and the account will go on to treat the majority of his twelve years of bondage as property of Edwin Epps, who bears a noticeable resemblance to Stowe’s Simon Legree. As a cycle—from Ford’s garden, into the wilderness, and back again—this short and self-contained episode nevertheless lays out the compromises Northup must make with the narrative conventions of the time, and how these choices shape his treatment of the Louisiana landscape. If, in the big picture, this treatment appears overwhelmingly conventional (and thus in accord with a hegemonic vision of agrarian life), then there are smaller glimpses that afford Northup a subjectivity that is at odds with the prevailing view. At times, such glimpses simply reverse the master’s gaze, as Northup does when he narrates a moment of counter-surveillance before he takes the plunge into the bayou: “Climbing on to a high fence, I could see the cotton press, the great house, and the space between. It was a conspicuous position, from whence the whole plantation was in view” (134-5). In other cases, however, Northup assumes a much more complex relationship with the landscape, as he does at the center of the Great Pacoudrie Swamp, alone, afraid, and exhausted from his escape. Both moments are underscored

by Northup's knowledge of the total environment of Bayou Boeuf country, but it is only in the second case that he appeals to a kind of ecological thinking, and this suggests that the swamp allows the writer to constitute himself as a subject within nature that is not subject to the naturalized relationship between master and slave, white and black. To understand the significance of this alternative for Northup, which he regretfully does not pursue, it is necessary to step outside of the literature of slavery and turn to an unexpected (and perhaps uneven) figure for comparison.

### **Thoreau's *Sanctum Sanctorum***

In the annals of U.S. swamp criticism, much is made of Henry David Thoreau's thought and writing as figuring a turning point in nineteenth-century perceptions of wild nature and its landscapes, the wetlands in particular. The most often cited of his passages comes from the essay "Walking" (1862), in which Thoreau writes, "When I would recreate myself, I seek the darkest wood, the thickest and most interminable and, to the citizen, most dismal, swamp. I enter a swamp as a sacred place, a *sanctum sanctorum*. There is the strength, the marrow, of Nature."<sup>165</sup> While at first glance, the author's use of "recreate" would suggest the swamp excursion as a pleasant—if unusual—pastime, he clears up any ambiguity as the passage unfolds:

The wildwood covers the virgin mould, and the same soil is good for men and for trees. A man's health requires as many acres of meadow to his prospect as his farm does loads of muck. There are the strong meats on which he feeds. A

---

<sup>165</sup> From The Thoreau Reader online (A Project in Cooperation with the Thoreau Society): "'Walking' began as a lecture, delivered at the Concord Lyceum on April 23, 1851 and many other times. It evolved into the essay published in the *Atlantic Monthly*, after his death in 1862."

town is saved, not more by the righteous men in it than by the woods and swamps that surround it. A township where one primitive forest waves above while another primitive forest rots below—such a town is fitted to raise not only corn and potatoes, but poets and philosophers for the coming ages. In such a soil grew Homer and Confucius and the rest, and out of such a wilderness comes the Reformer eating locusts and wild honey.

The swamp is not a place for recreation in the benign sense; it is a site of cultural transformation for Thoreau, and his relationship to the landscape is more than a contrarian or anti-civilizationist stance. According to Vileisis, although Thoreau at first “wrote about swamps in a conventionally derisive manner, using them as metaphors to criticize society’s ills, he soon realized that the landscape worked better as metaphor for the vitality and exuberance of life. The very fact that swamps were so strongly disliked by society prompted him to reinvestigate and develop his own understanding of them. What began for Thoreau as an exercise in social critique blossomed into an intimate and fertile relationship with natural swamps” (96). Going beyond the Romantic and transcendental thought of his contemporaries, including Ralph Waldo Emerson, as she points out, “Thoreau took those ideas further by literally immersing himself in the natural world to an intense and original degree” (95). More broadly, for David Miller, it was an experiential desire for “immersion in the unknown,” potentialized by swamps and other desert landscapes, that defined the shifting aesthetics of U.S. representational culture in the mid-nineteenth century.

While the passage from “Walking” is indicative of Thoreau’s mature thought on swamps, it is generally agreed that the author mined his journals, begun in 1837, for material throughout his writing career. In respect to immersion, an entry from June 16, 1840 stands out. In it, Thoreau recounts the beginnings of what he calls “our

White Mountain expedition,” undertaken with his brother at the end of August 1839, and later treated in *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849).<sup>166</sup> He writes:

The river down which we glided for that long afternoon was like a clear drop of dew with the heavens and the landscape reflected in it. And as evening drew on, faint purple clouds began to be reflected in its water, and the cow-bells tinkled louder and more incessantly on the banks, and like shy water-rats we stole along near the shore, looking out for a place to pitch our camp.

It seems insensibly to grow lighter as night shuts in; the furthest hamlet begins to be revealed, which before lurked in the shade of the noon. It twinkles now through the trees like some fair evening star darting its ray across valley and wood.<sup>167</sup>

In the pages of the journal, the relative solitude of this moment, the description of moving into nature and away from village life, appears to put Thoreau in more of a reflective state of mind. After a break, he enthusiastically turns to the imagination of a more profound experience:

Would it not be a luxury to stand up to one’s chin in some retired swamp for a whole summer’s day, scenting the sweet-fern and bilberry blows, and lulled by the minstrelsy of gnats and mosquitoes? A day passed in the society of those Greek sages, such as described in the “Banquet” of Xenophon, would not be comparable with the dry wit of decayed cranberry vines, and the fresh Attic salt of the moss beds. Say twelve hours of genial and familiar converse

---

<sup>166</sup> The book, first published at Thoreau’s own expense in 1849, was drafted in the years at Walden Pond, 1845-47.

<sup>167</sup> In *Week*, the lead up to the immersion passage unfolds—in the entry for Thursday—as follows: “Nothing that naturally happens to man can hurt him, earthquakes and thunder-storms not excepted,” said a man of genius, who at this time lived a few miles farther on our road. When compelled by a shower to take shelter under tree, we may improve that opportunity for a more minute inspection of some of Nature’s works. I have stood under a tree in the woods half a day at a time, during a heavy rain in the summer, and yet employed myself happily and profitably there prying with microscopic eye into the crevices of the bark or the leaves of the fungi at my fees. “Riches are the attendants of the miser; and the heavens rain plenteously upon the mountains” (318-19). *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, Rev. ed. (1873).

with the leopard frog. The sun to rise behind the alder and dogwood, and climb buoyantly to his meridian of three hands' breadth, and finally sink to rest behind some bold western hummock. To hear the evening chant of the mosquito from a thousand green chapels, and the bittern begin to boom from his concealed fort like a sunset gun! Surely, one may as profitably be soaked in the juices of a marsh for one day, as pick his way dry-shod over sand. Cold and damp,—are they not as rich experience as warmth and dryness? (141-2)

Although his description is marked by the youthful exuberance of a twenty-three-year-old, the imaginative practice of plunging into the “cold and damp” of the swamp—amidst its olfactory, auditory, and tactile sensations—anticipates Thoreau’s more serious-minded approach to the swamp as “a *sanctum sanctorum*,” and the twenty years that separates these appeals (1840 to 1862) is exactly the era in which Miller traces a growing interest in an aesthetics of immersion. It also stands in stark contrast to the almost exactly contemporary experience of Northup, and his description of a day spent in the swamp: “My clothes were in tatters, my hands, face, and body covered with scratches, received from the sharp knots of fallen trees, and in climbing over piles of brush and floodwood. My bare foot was full of thorns. I was besmeared with muck and mud, and the green slime that had collected on the surface of the dead water, in which I had been immersed to the neck many times during the day and night” (142). As I have previously discussed, these years also witnessed the increasing legal codification of swamplands, as well as the reification of the slave in the swamp as a figure through which U.S. writers (on both sides of the issue) negotiated the broader question of slavery, including the Fugitive Slave Act. In other words, there may have been an aesthetic (and moral) drift toward the swamp as a represented landscape, but the legal, economic, and political status of swamplands

was another matter: through the image of the swamp, the individual may have been more willing to embrace his “other,” but for the civilization that supported this cultural gesture, swamplands remained out of bounds, their value determined by their elimination and potential for cultivation.

What made Thoreau a radical, then, was not just his willingness to make an imaginative plunge, nor his outright rejection of what Vileises calls the “drainage imperative” and the other mechanisms of progress.<sup>168</sup> Unlike those who placed themselves self-consciously at the cultural vanguard, he was not seeking thrills through the swamp landscape, “the simultaneous fear of and desire for annihilation,” as Miller puts it, nor was he measuring his own value through an ability to order and cultivate—make property of—the swamplands available to him. Rather, he derived a sense of self through communion with the un-improved “Wildness” of the swamp. More to the point, his expressed individualism was permeated by the swamp and vice versa. “Walking,” in fact, is a catalogue of such sentiments:

Nowadays almost all man's improvements, so called, as the building of houses and the cutting down of the forest and of all large trees, simply deform the landscape, and make it more and more tame and cheap. A people who would begin by burning the fences and let the forest stand!

[...]

Hope and the future for me are not in lawns and cultivated fields, nor in towns and cities, but in the impervious and quaking swamps.

[...]

Yes, though you may think me perverse, if it were proposed to me to dwell in the neighborhood of the most beautiful garden that ever human art contrived,

---

<sup>168</sup> In respect to the former, he was already part of a tradition going back to Bartram.

or else of a Dismal Swamp, I should certainly decide for the swamp. How vain, then, have been all your labors, citizens, for me!

[...]

In society, in the best institutions of men, it is easy to detect a certain precocity. When we should still be growing children, we are already little men. Give me a culture which imports much muck from the meadows, and deepens the soil—not that which trusts to heating manures, and improved implements and modes of culture only!

[...]

I would not have every man nor every part of a man cultivated, any more than I would have every acre of earth cultivated: part will be tillage, but the greater part will be meadow and forest, not only serving an immediate use, but preparing a mould against a distant future, by the annual decay of the vegetation which it supports.

What such passages add up to, and many more could be excerpted from the essay, is a polemic against the civilizing process of enclosure, in respect to both wilderness and mankind.<sup>169</sup> Speaking from a very different place in respect to the swamp, Northup would no doubt be in agreement.

### **Martin Delany's Geographies of Resistance**

In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, if there is a single passage in which Stowe appears to reveal her full hand regarding her beliefs on race, it is the following:

If ever Africa shall show an elevated and cultivated race,—and come it must, some time, her turn to figure in the great drama of human improvement,—life will awake there with a gorgeousness and splendor of which our cold western tribes faintly have conceived. In that far-off mystic land of gold, and gems,

---

<sup>169</sup> None of this is new, of course, as far as an understanding of Thoreau is concerned, but I do think that reading him in comparison to Northup (rather than placing Thoreau at the center of an emerging ecological awareness) is a necessary exercise.

and spices, and waving palms, and wondrous flowers, and miraculous fertility, will awake new forms of art, new styles of splendor; and the negro race, no longer despised and trodden down, will, perhaps, show forth some of the latest and most magnificent revelations of human life. Certainly they will in their gentleness, their lowly docility of heart, their aptitude to repose on a superior mind and rest on a higher power, their childlike simplicity of affection, and facility of forgiveness. In all these they will exhibit the highest form of the peculiarly *Christian life*, and, perhaps, as God chasteneth whom he loveth, he hath chosen poor Africa in the furnace of affliction, to make her the highest and noblest in that kingdom which he will set up, when every other kingdom has been tried, and failed; for the first shall be last, and the last first. (236)

She backs away from the statement, however, by framing it as the potential thought of Marie St. Clare, one of the novel's most unsympathetic characters. Putting aside its uncertain attribution, the significance of the statement comes across clearly, and it hangs over the rest of the narrative. Figured as "the great drama of human improvement," Stowe—obliquely or not—subscribes to a theory of human civilization and progress that places Africa and "the negro race" at an earlier stage of development. For Stowe, this paternalistic view of land and people ultimately offers a way out of slavery but it does not resolve the dilemma of African American underdevelopment.<sup>170</sup>

Stowe's lack of imagination raises the question of an alternate vision for the present and future of Africa and the African race in the 1850s, and if there is a single corresponding passage that provides that view, it belongs to Martin Delany's *Blake; or the Huts of America: A Tale of the Mississippi Valley, the Southern United States, and Cuba*. In the voice of Plácido, his fictionalized characterization of the Cuban

---

<sup>170</sup> Here, I take inspiration from Carla L. Peterson's discussion in "Capitalism, Black (Under)Development, and the Production of the African-American Novel in the 1850s," *American Literary History* (1992).

poet, Delany offers what could be a direct response to Stowe's version of African development:

“Heretofore [Africa] has been regarded as desolate—unadapted to useful cultivation or domestic animals, and consequently, the inhabitants savage, lazy, idle, and incapable of the higher civilization and only fit for bondmen, contributing nothing to the civilized world but that which is extorted from them as slaves. Instead of this, let us prove, not only that the African race is now the principal producer of the greater part of the luxuries of enlightened countries, [...]; but that in Africa their native land, they are among the most industrious people in the world, highly cultivating the lands, and that ere long they and their country must hold the balance of commercial power by supplying as they do now as foreign bondmen in strange lands, the greatest staple commodities in demand, as rice, coffee, sugar, and especially cotton, from their own native shores, the most extensive native territory, climate, soil, and greatest number of ... inhabitants in the universe; and that race and country will at once rise to the first magnitude of importance in the estimation of the greatest nations on earth, from their dependence upon them for the great staples from which is derived their natural wealth.” (261-2)

Delany's reversal of the dependence scheme, placing Africa ahead of other nations, highlights a revolutionary shift in the center of the capitalist world market, and this is the ultimate goal of the slave conspiracy and rebellion that the character of Henry Blake is fomenting in the novel. As I discuss in this section, this reorientation of center renders existing territorial boundaries moot for the conspirators, and U.S. swamps become part of a hemispheric network of liminal spaces in which to plot revolution. This is not to say that Delany equates swamps with black resistance, but he is perhaps the only African American writer of his time to explore the potential of the swamp as a communal space of autonomy.<sup>171</sup>

---

<sup>171</sup> My discussion builds on Stephanie LeMenager's "Marginal Landscapes: Revolutionary Abolitionists and Environmental Imagination," *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies* (2005).

In his chapter on Martin Delany in *To Wake the Nations*, Eric J. Sundquist makes it clear that *Blake* is radical in conception, “calling for the exercise of black revolutionary force” (183), a novel that “advocates slave revolution,” and offers a “compelling portrait of a revolutionary ethos.” The portion of the narrative that survives, as Sundquist notes, “brings rebellion to the point of outbreak without actualizing it” (184), and the fact that Cuba is the setting for this interrupted, unfinished rebellion has become interesting to me as it relates to Delany’s contrasting portrayal of the United States as a possible location for such an uprising. Specifically, in terms of the way that the author presents each city to the reader, I am interested in New Orleans and Havana as comparative sites of possible slave insurrection in Delany’s novel. While New Orleans is imbued with a latent, perhaps dormant, potential for subversion, Havana is charged with an active and present potential for revolt.

Delany’s depiction of the King’s Day celebration in Havana, primarily the African dancing, serves as a focal point for his imagining of the potential setting for such an uprising. That he distances himself from the scene by framing it as a description borrowed from a periodical—he is “indebted for the following description of the grand Negro festival to a popular American literary periodical, given by an eyewitness to the exhibition”—is worth noting, because he is able to surround the dance with an aura of danger as well as attribute the resulting description of fear inspired by the celebration to an American source. According to the “borrowed,” perhaps fabricated, account,

On this day [the slaves] are allowed to use their own language and their own songs, a privilege denied them on other days, lest they might lay plans for a general rising.

As it is the sights, the sounds, the savage shrieks, the uncouth yells suggest very uncomfortable thoughts of Negro insurrection. One cannot help thinking of the menace of the Spanish Government that Cuba shall be either Spanish or African, and when we see these savages in their play more like wild animals than human beings, the idea what their rage would probably be, makes the boldest shudder. It would be easy on King's Day for the Negroes to free themselves, or at least to make the streets of Havana run with blood, if they only knew their power; Heaven be praised that they do not, for who can count the lives that would be lost in such a fearful struggle? (301)

Ultimately, Delany's device presents an outsider, an American journalist, sensing the danger inherent in this relatively unregulated gathering of slaves and fearing for the safety of the white citizens of the city. By standing aside from the narrative in this instance and deferring to another source, Delany establishes a different kind of authority for the sentiment expressed in the passage. The danger must be real, in other words, if a description of it could develop so organically in someone else's journalistic account. In addition, the device helps the author establish a link not only to an American perspective but also to a similar American slave tradition. The King's Day dance, as Delaney points out, is directly analogous, "being identical, but more systematic, grand and imposing, with the 'Congo Dance,' formerly observed every Sabbath among the slaves in New Orleans" (299). By linking the slave dances in Havana and New Orleans, Delany establishes the question of "Negro insurrection" in both contexts, but while he pursues the question to the point of outright rebellion (even revolution) in the Cuban city, he allows it to implode (even self-destruct) in the American one.

Sundquist explores in detail why “not just [the idea] of “an independent black nation but the revolution necessary to secure it was far easier [for Delany] to contemplate in Cuba than in the United States” (206), and though I won’t explore all the intricacies of this difference here, I will point out in Sundquist’s terms that “the significant free black and mixed-race population ... made racial and class boundaries quite fluid and created a social situation that had no equivalent in the United States, except to a degree in New Orleans” (202). In the context of my present discussion, the shared fluid social boundaries between the races in Havana and New Orleans suggests that the fear inspired by such racial fluidity, exemplified by the carnival atmosphere of a King’s Day or a Mardi Gras, takes on a transnational quality that Delany clearly exploits in his novel. While the immediate fear of violent, localized slave insurrection in the white population of the United States does not compare directly to the white population’s fear of the same in Cuba, due to the latter’s revolutionary potential, I would argue that, by linking New Orleans and Havana, part of Delany’s project in *Blake* is to suggest that white Americans should fear slave revolt in Cuba as if it were happening on their own soil. Sundquist speaks of the “Africanization” of Cuba that could have resulted from such an uprising, as well as the American fear of such an event, and as Floyd J. Miller states in his introduction to the novel, “Delany turned these fears on their heads and argued that Cuban blacks should take charge of their own revolution—that is, free themselves—and implicitly suggests that a black Cuba will lead to the downfall of slavery in the United States” (xxii). In light of Miller’s statement, Delany’s differing presentations of Havana and

New Orleans as sites for slave insurrection begin to make sense on a deeper level, which I hope to begin to reveal through a brief discussion of the treatment of the latter city in the novel.

As noted before, for Delany, the presentation of slave insurrection in New Orleans is one of potential rather than realization. Neither the city nor the slave is ready, and an examination of certain passages centered on Blake's time in the city will illustrate the presence, yet the pre-maturity of such a proposition. Blake arrives in New Orleans on the evening of Mardi Gras under a moon "whose soft and mellow light," in Delany's words, "seems ever like the enchanting effect of some invisible being, to impart inspiration." He describes, "the passing to and fro with seeming indifference" of "Negroes, both free and slaves, as well as the whites and Creole quadroons, fearlessly along the public highways, in seeming defiance of the established usage of Negro limitation" (98). In the stores, for example, "might be seen the fashionable young white lady of French or American extraction, and there the handsome, and frequently beautiful maiden of African origin, mulatto, quadroon, or sterling black, all fondly exchanging civilities. ... Freedom seemed as though for once enshielded by her sacred robes and crowned with cap and wand in hand, to go forth untrammelled through the highways of the town." Delaney observes that due to the celebration, "the Negroes had been allowed such "unlimited privileges. ... Nor were they remiss to the utmost extent of its advantages" (99). Thus, Delany creates a setting for Blake in New Orleans that is pregnant with latent possibility—there is an undercurrent of subversion in all of these inter-race interactions as "freedom"

personified, there is perhaps the presence of the moon's "inspiration" in the night, but the conditions are not right, are not yet present, to bring full realization to the advantages provided, even sponsored by the (religious, state, and cultural) tradition of Mardi Gras.

More significant than the setting itself, however, is how Delany presents the dormant potential for revolt and revolution that he sees in the slaves of New Orleans. As he imagines it, "Light, of necessity, had to be imparted to the darkened region of the obscure intellects of the slaves, to arouse them from their benighted condition to one of moral responsibility, to make them sensible that liberty was legitimately and essentially theirs, without which there was no distinction between them and the brute" (101). Clearly, Blake is the figure that could bring about such a realization, yet we see him foiled in his attempt by the slaves themselves. In fact, through Blake's admonishment of Tib, Delany exposes his own assessment of the possible success of slave revolt in the American South:

'My friend,' said Henry, 'listen a moment to me. You are not yet ready for a strike; you are not ready to do anything effective. You have barely taken the first step in the matter, and ... You must have all the necessary means, my brother ... for the accomplishment of your ends. ... Have all the instrumentalities necessary for an effective effort, before making the attempt. Without this, you will fail, utterly fail!' (105)

That Tib, then, betrays the plot is significant, because though he acts as an individual, his actions confirm Blake's (Delany's) reservations and gesture to the collective unreadiness for rebellion exhibited by the New Orleans slaves. On a side note, the contrast in this scene between the forceful eloquence of Blake and the inarticulate

dialect of Tib and some of the other slaves lends also to the rendering of the American slave as unprepared, even unsuited, to the task of rebellion.

In spite of Delany's portrayal of the plot in New Orleans as a failure, it nevertheless fulfills the function in the narrative of inspiring fear in the city's white residents and leaders, and he describes this fear, and the social apparatus that responds to it, as exaggerated and paranoid, out-of-proportion to the actual events that he has just shown the reader. In this regard, I see the fear that he creates around the failed plot as more central to his project than his depiction of the plot itself as a threat to the white citizens of New Orleans. Fear is what unites New Orleans and Havana as sites of possible slave revolt, and it is a fear rooted in the racial intermingling made possible by the twinned traditions of Mardi Gras and King's Day. I am building here on Sundquist's larger analysis of the Cuban situation as a kind of "shadow play" (185) of the American South, and it is the development of this relationship that allows Delany to present the episode of slave subversion in New Orleans as not just a temporal precursor to the episode in Havana that ends the novel, but as a kind of ever-present figuration for slave subversion in both the United States and Cuba. In other words, through the (historical) presence of fear, the depiction of the plot in New Orleans (even though it fails) is bound inextricably to Delany's narrative presentation of the potential success of the slave rebellion in Cuba and the deeper fear of revolution (and Africanization) that it inspires. As I suggested earlier, for Southern American whites (slaveholders in particular) this fear takes on a transnational quality that is not alleviated by the fact that slave rebellion in the American South presents a

local and, for the most part, containable threat. Slave revolt on a national, revolutionary scale may not be possible in the United States, but because it is possible in Cuba, the fear inspired by local events in the American South is distributed as if it were. As Sundquist suggests, Delany “offered an anatomy of slaveholding that compressed the triangular relations of Africa, the West Indies, and the United States over a broader historical period into a single moment” (199), and for my analysis here, one example of this moment can be found in Delany’s pairing of Mardi Gras in New Orleans and King’s Day in Havana.

Sundquist develops in some detail the potency of such celebrations in “building a revolutionary ethos” (211), and that is definitely something also worth exploring in regard to the depiction of Mardi Gras in the novel. In addition, as it relates to Delany’s treatment of time in the novel, Sundquist’s discussion of the “messianic” and “millenarian” implications of Blake’s revolutionary message, I think, could be further and fruitfully developed in the context of Benjamin’s “Theses on the Philosophy of History.” I will also note here that in New Orleans, the celebration of Carnival begins officially on Twelfth Night (King’s Day) and culminates in the daylong festivities of Mardi Gras. What significance that has to a reading of Delany’s novel I’m not sure, but I think it is interesting nonetheless.

Finally, and though this is not directly related to the discussion above, I want to take just a moment to compare Delany’s fabricated journalistic depiction of King’s Day to the actual journalistic remembrance of the Congo Dance I located in the *New York Times Online*. The 1879 article is a reprint of one that appeared in the *New-*

*Orleans Picayune* in the same year, and is set up by its author as a reminiscence of Sunday afternoons in Congo Square sixty-years past. In addition to the temporal disjunction that this device creates in terms of a memory of slavery, I also discovered that the text of the article, aside from the introduction and conclusion, itself appears in exactly the same form in a chapter in *My Southern Home: or, The South and Its People*, a book by former slave William Wells Brown published in 1880. Because this brings the authorship of the passage into question, it adds another layer of disjunction to the point of view presented in the article, and this is something worth looking into. Nevertheless, the content of the passage is strikingly similar to the King's Day passage in *Blake*, both in terms of its description of the tribes and the dance itself, yet it is the difference between the two passages that I want to point to here. Specifically, there is no digression into the potential danger represented by such a gathering and the fear that it inspires, but the concluding portion of the layered Brown/*Picayune* passage is telling in its own right:

All this was going on with a dense crowd looking on, and with a hot sun pouring its torrid rays on the infatuated actors of this curious ballet. After one set had become fatigued, they would drop out to be replaced by others, and then stroll off to the groups of some other tribe in a different portion of the square. Then it was that trouble would commence, and a regular set-to with short sticks followed, between the men, and broken heads ended the day's entertainment. ... When the sun went down, a stream of people poured out of the turn-stiles, and the gendarmes, walking through the square, would order the dispersion of the negroes, and by gun-fire, at nine o'clock, the place was well-nigh deserted. These dances were kept up until within the memory of men still living, and many who believe in them, and who would gladly revive them, may be found in every State in the Union.

If we consider this reminiscence in relation to the unraveling of the New Orleans slave plot in *Blake*, it is suggestive that the “gala occasion” described by this narrator

disintegrates into fisticuffs between the slaves themselves, rather than imbuing the spectators with fear, and finally ends with gendarmes firing their guns to disperse the crowds. Perhaps time had, in part, erased the potency of any danger in relation to these slave gatherings, yet it is interesting to consider how the conclusion of this passage seems to support Delany's limited imagination concerning the possibility of slave rebellion in the American South. In the end, the novel's unfinished revolution, as well as the deeper uncertainty of the Louisiana swamp as a hemispheric space of resistance, is compounded by the unfinished status of the narrative. The final chapters of the novel—full title, *Blake; or the Huts of America: A Tale of the Mississippi Valley, the Southern United States, and Cuba*—have been lost.<sup>172</sup>

---

<sup>172</sup> See Jeffory A. Clymor, "Martin Delany's Blake and the Transnational Politics of Property." *American Literary History* (2003) and Robert S. Levine, *Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass, and the Politics of Representative Identity* (1997).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adams, Stephen. *The Best and Worst Country in the World: Perspectives on the Early Virginia Landscape*. Charlottesville: UVA P, 2001.
- Alonso, Martín. *Enciclopedia del Idioma* [Tomo I: A-CH]. Madrid: Aguilar, 1958.
- Annales philosophiques, politiques et littéraires. Ouvrage utile aux amateurs de la vérité*, Par un habitant de la Louisiane. Philadelphia: 1807.
- Aravamudan, Srinivas. *Tropicopolitans: Colonialism and Agency, 1688-1804*. Durham: Duke UP, 1999.
- Allen, John L. "Geographical Knowledge & American Images of the Louisiana Territory." *The Western Historical Quarterly* 2.2 (1971): 151–170. *JSTOR*. Web. 7 Aug. 2013.
- Allewaert, M. *Ariel's Ecology: Plantations, Personhood, and Colonization in the American Tropics*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2013.
- -. "Swamp Sublime: Ecologies of Resistance in the American Plantation Zone." *PMLA* 123.2 (2008): 340-57.
- Auerbach, Erich. *Mimesis: the Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. Trans. Willard R. Trask. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003.
- Bachelard, Gaston. *Earth and Reveries of Will: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*. 1943, 1947. Trans. Kenneth Haltman. Dallas: Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, 2002.
- Barad, Karen. *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Durham: Duke UP, 2007.
- Barlow, Joel. *The Columbiad: a poem*. Philadelphia: Fry and Kammerer, 1807.
- Barlow, Joel, John Trumbull, and Lemuel Hopkins. *The Anarchiad*. 1786-7.
- Barnard, Henry. *American Journal of Education*. Vol. 5. London: Trübner & Co., 1858.
- Barr's Buffon*. *Buffon's Natural history. Containing a theory of the earth, a general*

*history of man, of the brute creation, and of vegetables, minerals, &c. &c. &c. From the French. With notes by the translator. In ten volumes.* London: H. D. Symonds, 1797.

Bartram, William. *Travels and other writings: travels through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida.* The Library of America 84. New York: Library of America, 1996.

---. *Travels through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida, the Cherokee Country, the Extensive Territories of the Muscogulges or Creek Confederacy, and the Country of the Chactaws. Containing an Account of the Soil and Natural Productions of Those Regions; Together with Observations on the Manners of the Indians.* Philadelphia: James and Johnson, 1791.

Bauer, Ralph. "Colonial Discourse and Early American Literary History: Ercilla, the Inca Garcilaso, and Joel Barlow's Conception of a New World Epic." *Early American Literature* 30.3 (1995): 203–232. *JSTOR*. Web. 7 Aug. 2013.

---. "Early American Literature and American Literary History at the 'Hemispheric Turn'." *American Literary History* 22.2 (2010): 250–265. *JSTOR*. Web. 7 Aug. 2013.

Bauer, Ralph, and José Antonio Mazzotti, eds. *Creole Subjects in the Colonial Americas: Empires, Texts, identities.* Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2009.

Bédier, Joseph. *Études critiques.* Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1903.

Belok, Michael. *Forming the American Minds; Early School-books & Their Compilers, 1783-1837.* Agra: Satish Book Enterprise, 1973.

Bermingham, Ann. *Landscape and Ideology. The English Rustic Tradition 1740-1860.* Berkeley: U of California P, 1986.

Bingham, Caleb. *Atala; or the Love and Constancy of Two Savages in the Desert. Translated from the French of F. A. Chateaubriand.* Boston: Samuel T. Armstrong, 1814.

---. *The Columbian Orator: Containing a Variety of Original and Selected Pieces Together with Rules, Which Are Calculated to Improve Youth and Others, in the Ornamental and Useful Art of Eloquence.* Bicentennial ed. Ed. David W. Blight. New York: New York University Press, 1998.

- Bisland, Elizabeth. *The Life and Letters of Lafcadio Hearn*. Vol. 1. Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1906. *Questia Media America*. Web. 15 Mar. 2008.
- Blight, David W. Introduction. Bingham. *The Columbian Orator* x-xxvii.
- Brackenridge, H. M. *Views of Louisiana* [...]. Pittsburgh: Cramer, Spear and Eichbaum, 1814.
- Brading, D. A. *The Origins of Mexican Nationalism*. Cambridge, U.K: Centre of Latin American Studies, University of Cambridge, 1985.
- Bronner, Simon J., ed. and introd. *Lafcadio Hearn's America: Ethnographic Sketches and Editorials*. Lexington: U of Kentucky P, 2002.
- Brown, Ralph H. "A Letter to the Reverend Jedidiah Morse: Author of the American Universal Geography." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 41.3 (1951): 188–198. *JSTOR*. Web. 7 Aug. 2013.
- - -. "The American Geographies of Jedidiah Morse." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 31.3 (1941): 145–217. *JSTOR*. Web. 7 Aug. 2013.
- Brown, William Wells. *My Southern Home: or, The South and Its People*. Boston: A. G. Brown & Co., 1880. *Documenting the American South*. 2000. University of North Carolina. Web. 6 Dec. 2007.
- Browning, John D. "Cornelius de Pauw and Exiled Jesuits: The Development of Nationalism in Spanish America. *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 11.3 (1978): 289-307.
- Brückner, Martin. "Lessons in Geography: Maps, Spellers, and Other Grammars of Nationalism in the Early Republic." *American Quarterly* 51.2 (1999): 311–343. *JSTOR*. Web. 7 Aug. 2013.
- - -. *The Geographic Revolution in Early America: Maps, Literacy, and National Identity*. Chapel Hill: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture. U of North Carolina P, 2006.
- Brückner, Martin, and Hsuan L. Hsu, eds. *American Literary Geographies: Spatial Practice and Cultural Production, 1500-1900*. Newark: U of Delaware P, 2007.
- Bryan, Violet Harrington. *The Myth of New Orleans in Literature: Dialogues of Race and Gender*. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1993.

- Buckingham, James Silk. *The Slave States of America*. London: Fisher, Son & Co., 1842.
- Buffon, Georges Louis Leclerc, comte de. *Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière* [...]. Paris: De l'Imprimerie royale, 1749-1804.
- - -. *Natural history: general and particular, by the Count de Buffon. Translated into English, illustrated with above three hundred copper-plates, and occasional notes and observations, by William Smellie*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 9 vols. London: A. Strahan, and T. Cadell, 1791. Web. 24 May 2015.
- - -. *The natural history of birds From the French of the Count de Buffon. Illustrated with engravings; and a preface, notes, and additions, by the translator [William Smellie]*, vol. 9 London: A. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1793.
- Burke, Edmund. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. 1757. Ed. Adam Phillips. New York: Oxford UP, 1990.
- Butler, Judith. "Foucault and the Paradox of Bodily Inscriptions." *The Journal of Philosophy* 86:11 (1989): 601-7.
- Cable, George Washington. *The Creoles of Louisiana*. New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1884.
- - -. *The Granddissimes: A Story of Creole Life*. New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1880.
- - -. *Old Creole Days*. New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1879.
- Calè, Luisa, and Adriana Craciun. "The Disorder of Things." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 45.1 (2011): 1-13. *Project MUSE*. Web. 7 Aug. 2013.
- Campanella, Richard. *Bienville's Dilemma: A Historical Geography of New Orleans*. Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, 2008.
- Cañizares-Esguerra, Jorge. *How to Write the History of the New World: Histories, Epistemologies, and Identities in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2001.
- - -. *Nature, Empire, and Nation: Explorations of the History and Science in the Iberian World*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2006.
- Cartwright, Keith. "'To Walk With the Storm': Oya as the Transformative 'I' of Zora Neale Hurston's Afro-Atlantic Callings." *American Literature* 78.4 (2006): 741-62.

- Carver, Jonathan. *Travels through the interior parts of North-America, in the years 1766, 1767, and 1768*. London: Printed for the author; and sold by J. Walter, and S. Crowder, 1778.
- Catesby, Mark. *The natural history of Carolina, Florida and the Bahama Islands: containing the figures of birds, beasts, fishes, serpents, insects, and plants: particularly, the forest-trees, shrubs, and other plants, not hitherto described, or very incorrectly figured by authors. Together with their descriptions in English and French. To which, are added observations on the air, soil, and waters: with remarks upon agriculture, grain, pulse, roots, &c. To the whole, is prefixed a new and correct map of the countries treated of*. 2 vols. London: Printed at the expence of the author; sold by W. Innys and R. Manby, by Mr. Hauksbee, and by the author, 1731-43.
- Certeau, Michel de. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Trans. Stephen Rendall. Berkeley: U of California P, 1984.
- - -. *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*. Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1985.
- Chang-Rodríguez, Raquel, ed. *Beyond Books and Borders: Garcilaso de La Vega and La Florida Del Inca*. Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 2006.
- Charlevoix, Pierre-François-Xavier de. *Histoire et description generale de la Nouvelle France: avec le Journal historique d'un voyage fait par ordre du roi dans l'Amérique septentrionale*. Paris: Chez Rolin fils, 1744.
- - -. Charlevoix, Pierre-François-Xavier de and John Gilmary Shea. *History and general description of New France*. [Shea's Charlevoix.] New York: F.P. Harper, 1900.
- - -. *Histoire du Paraguay*. Paris: Chez Didot, 1756.
- - -. *The history of Paraguay. Containing amongst many other new, curious, and interesting particulars of that country, a full and authentic account of the establishments formed there by the Jesuits, ... Written originally in French, by the celebrated Father Charlevoix*. 2 vols. London: Lockyer Davis, 1769.
- Chateaubriand, François-Auguste. *Atala, ou les amours de deux sauvages dans le desert*. 4th ed. Paris: Chez Migneret, 1801.
- - -. *Atala ó los amores de dos salvages en el desierto. Escrita en Frances por Francisco-Augusto Chateaubriand, y traducida de la tercera edicion nuevamente corregida por S. Robinson*. Paris: Calle St. Honoré, 1801.

- . *Atala ó los amores de dos salvages en el desierto. Por Francisco-Augusto Chateaubriand*. Traducción Castellana. Valencia: Joseph de Orga, 1803.
- . *Atala ó los amores de dos salvages en el desierto. Novela escrita en Frances por Francisco Augusto Chateaubriand*. Tercera Impresion. Valencia: José Ferrer de Orga, 1813.
- . *Atala. From the French of Mr. De Chateaubriant*. London: G. & J. Robinson, 1802.
- . *Atala; or, the Amours of Two Savages in the Desert. Translated from the French of F. A. Chateaubriand, author of Travels in Greece, &c.* London: Gale, Curtis, and Fenner, 1813.
- . *Atala; or, The love and constancy of two savages in the desert*. Ed. William Leonard Schwartz. Trans. Caleb Bingham. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1930.
- . *The Beauties of Christianity*, trans. Frederic Shoberl, ed. Henry Kett, 3 vols. London: Henry Colburn, 1813.
- . *Génie du christianisme, ou beautés de la religion chrétienne*. Paris: Chez Migneret, 1802.
- . *Les Natchez. Oeuvres complètes*. Tome XXII. Paris: Pourrat, 1837.
- Cheyfitz, Eric. *The Poetics of Imperialism: Translation and Colonization from The Tempest to Tarzan*. New York: Oxford UP, 1991.
- Childs, John Brown, ed. *Hurricane Katrina: Response and Responsibilities*. Santa Cruz: New Pacific Press, 2005.
- Chinard, Gilbert. "The American Philosophical Society and the Early History of Forestry in America." *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 89.2 (1945): 444–488. *JSTOR*. Web. 7 Aug. 2013.
- . "Eighteenth Century Theories on America as a Human Habitat." *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 91.1 (1947): 27-57.
- . *L'exotisme américain dans l'oeuvre de Chateaubriand*. Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1918.

- - -. *L'homme contre la nature: essais d'histoire de l'Amerique*. Paris: Hermann et C<sup>ie</sup>, 1949.
- - -. *L'Amérique et le rêve exotique dans la littérature française au XVIIe et au XVIIIe siècles*. Paris: Hachette, 1913.
- Church, Henry Ward. "Corneille De Pauw, and the Controversy Over His Recherches Philosophiques Sur Les Américains." *PMLA* 51.1 (1936): 178-206.
- Clavigero, Francisco Xavier. *Storia antica del Messico*. Cesena, 1780.
- Clavigero, Francisco Saverio and Charles Cullen, *The History of Mexico: Collected from Spanish and Mexican Historians, from Manuscripts, and Ancient Paintings of the Indians. Illustrated by Charts, and Other Copper Plates. To Which Are Added, Critical Dissertations on the Land, the Animals, and Inhabitants of Mexico*. Vol. 2. London: G.G.J. and J. Robinson, 1787.
- Clifford, James. "Taking Identity Politics Seriously: 'The Contradictory, Stony Ground ...'" *Without Guarantees: In Honour of Stuart Hall*. Eds. Paul Gilroy, Lawrence Grossberg, and Angela McRobbie. London: Verso, 2000.
- - -. *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997.
- Clymor, Jeffory A. "Martin Delany's Blake and the Transnational Politics of Property." *American Literary History* 15.4 (2003): 709-31. *Project MUSE*. Web. 3 Apr. 2015.
- Cochran, Terry. *Twilight of the Literary: Figures of Thought in the Age of Print*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2001.
- Connery, Christopher. "The Oceanic Feeling and the Regional Imaginary." *Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary*. Eds. Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake. Durham: Duke UP, 1996: 284-311.
- Cott, Jonathan. *Wandering Ghost: The Odyssey of Lafcadio Hearn*. New York: Knopf, 1991.
- Cowan, William Tynes. *The Slave in the Swamp: Disrupting the Plantation Narrative*. New York: Routledge, 2005.
- Cronon, William, ed. "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to Wrong Nature." *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*. New York: Norton, 1995. 69-90.

- - -. *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1983.
- - -. *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*. New York: Norton, 1991.
- Curtius, Robert Ernst. *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*. 1948. Trans. Willard R. Trask. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1973.
- Darby, William. *A geographical description of the state of Louisiana ... with an account of the character and manners of the inhabitants; together with a map, from actual survey and observation projected on a scale of ten miles to an inch, of the state of Louisiana, and adjacent countries*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: James Olmstead, 1817.
- Dash, J. Michael. *The Other America: Caribbean Literature in a New World Context*. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1998.
- Daston, Lorraine. "Objectivity and the Escape from Perspective." *Social Studies of Science* 22.4 (1992): 597-618.
- Daston, Lorraine and Peter Galison. *Objectivity*. Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2010.
- Dawdy, Shannon Lee. *Building the devil's empire: French colonial New Orleans*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.
- - -. "Enlightenment from the Ground: Le Page du Pratz's *Histoire de la Louisiane*." *French Colonial History* 3 (2003): 17-34.
- Delany, Martin R. *Blake or the Huts of America*. Intro. and ed. Floyd J. Miller. Boston: Beacon Street, 1970.
- Dimock, Wai Chee. "World History According to Katrina." *States of Emergency: The Object of American Studies*. Eds. Russ Castronovo and Susan Gillman. Chapel Hill: U North Carolina P, 2009. 143-160.
- Donaldson, Gary A. "A Window on Slave Culture: Dances at Congo Square in New Orleans, 1800-1862." *The Journal of Negro History* 69.2 (Spring, 1984): 63-72. *JSTOR*. Web. 5 Dec. 2007.
- Douay-Rheims Catholic Bible. *Douay-Rheims Bible Online*. 2001-2014. Web. 4 Sept. 2012.

- Douglass, Frederick. *A Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*. Boston: Published at the Anti-Slavery Office, 1845.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. 1903. Eds. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Terri Hulme Oliver. New York: Norton, 1999. 9-164.
- - -. "The Conservation of Races." 1897. Du Bois 176-83.
- Duchemin, Marcel. *La bibliothèque de Chateaubriand*. Paris: L. Giraud-Badin, 1932.
- Dumont de Montigny. *The Memoir of Lieutenant Dumont, 1715-1747: a Sojourner in the French Atlantic*. Ed. Gordon Sayre. Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2012.
- Dumont de Montigny, and Newberry Library. *Regards sur le monde atlantique, 1715-1747*. Sillery, QC: Septentrion, 2008.
- - -. *Mémoires historiques sur la Louisiane* [...]. Paris: Chez Bauche, 1753.
- Eakin, Sue. *Solomon Northup's Twelve Years a Slave and Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*. Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, 2007.
- - -. Eakin, Sue L. *The Bayou Boeuf country. Prepared in connection with Ezra Bennett and the world he lived in, 1830-1875, and Twelve years a slave, ed. by Sue Eakin and Joseph Logsdon*. Map. 1970.
- Echeverria, Durand. *Mirage in the West: A History of the French Image of American Society to 1815*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957.
- - -. "Roubaud and the Theory of American Degeneration." *The French American Review* 3 (1950): 24-33.
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *Letters and Social Aims*. 1875. The Complete Works. Vol. 8. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1917.
- Erickson, Martin E. "Some Little-Known Guatemalan Publications." *Hispania* 28.4 (1945): 499-504. *JSTOR*. Web. 7 Aug. 2013.
- Everett, David. "A Forensic Dispute, On The Question, Are The Anglo-Americans Endowed With Capacity And Genius Equal To Europeans?" *The Columbian Orator*. Ed. Caleb Bingham. Boston: Manning & Loring, 1797. 295-99.
- Fairall, Herbert S. *The World's Industrial and Cotton Exposition, New Orleans 1884-5*. Iowa City, Iowa: Republican Publishing Co., 1885.

- Feldman, Mark B. and Hsuan L. Hsu, "Introduction: Race, Environment, and Representation," *Discourse* 29, no. 2/3 (April 1, 2007): 199–214.
- Finseth, Ian Frederick. *Shades of Green: Visions of Nature in the Literature of American Slavery, 1770-1860*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 2009.
- Fischer, Sibylle. *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*. Durham: Duke UP, 2004.
- Fumagalli, Maria Cristina, ed. *Surveying the American tropics: a literary geography from New York to Rio*. Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2013.
- Gayarré, Charles. *History of Louisiana: The French Domination*. New York: Redfield, 1854.
- Gazeta De Guatemala*. Guatemala: Por don Ignacio Beteta, 1797.
- Genovese, Eugene D. *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1979.
- Gerbi, Antonello. *The Dispute of the New World: The History of a Polemic, 1750-1900*. 1955. Trans. Jeremy Moyle. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1973.
- . *Nature in the New World: From Christopher Columbus to Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo*. 1975. Trans. Jeremy Moyle. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1985.
- Giblett, Rod. "Is the Public Sphere to the Ecosphere as Culture Is to Nature? (As Male Is to Female?)." *Continuum* 11.3 (1997): 74-84.
- . "Philosophy (and Sociology) in the Wetlands: The S(ub)lime and the Uncanny." *New Formations* 18 (Winter 1992): 142-59.
- . *Postmodern Wetlands: Culture, History, Ecology*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1996.
- Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993.
- . *Postcolonial Melancholia*. New York: Columbia UP, 2005.
- Girvan, Ray. "In search of the antuerpia." *JSBlog - Journal of a Southern Bookreader*. 30 May 2010. Web. 31 Oct. 2011.
- Grases, Pedro. *La primera version castellana de Atala*. Caracas: [s. n.], 1955.

- Greeson, Jennifer Rae. "Expropriating The Great South and Exporting 'Local Color': Imaginaries of the First Reconstruction." *American Literary History* 18.3 (2006): 496-520.
- . *Our South: Geographic Fantasy and the Rise of National Literature*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2010.
- Grimsted, David. *American Mobbing, 1828-1861: Toward Civil War*. New York: Oxford UP, 1998.
- Gruesz, Kirsten Silva. "Delta *Desterrados*: Antebellum New Orleans and New World Print Culture." *Smith and Cohn* 52-79.
- . "The Gulf of Mexico System and the 'Latinness' of New Orleans." *American Literary History* 18.3 (2006). 468-95.
- Guterl, Matthew Pratt. "An American Mediterranean: Haiti, Cuba, and the American South." *Levander and Levine* 96-115.
- Hall, Gwendolyn Midlo. *Africans in Colonial Louisiana the Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1992.
- Hall, Stuart. "When Was 'The Post-colonial'? Thinking at the Limit." *The Post-Colonial Question*. Ed. Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti. New York: Routledge, 1996. 242-60.
- . "The Local and the Global." *Culture, Globalization and the World System*. Ed. Anthony King. Binghamton, NY: SUNY UP, 1991.
- Hallock, Thomas. *From the Fallen Tree: Frontier Narratives, Environmental Politics, and the Roots of A National Pastoral, 1749-1826*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2003.
- Haraway, Donna. "Modest\_Witness@Second\_Millennium." *The Haraway Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2004. 223-50.
- . "The Virtual Speculum in the New World Order." *Feminist Review* 55 (Spring, 1997): 22-72. *JSTOR*. Web. 21 Nov. 2013.
- . *When Species Meet*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2008.
- Harrison, Stephen, Steve Pile, and Nigel Thrift, eds. *Patterned Ground: Entanglements of Nature and Culture*. London: Reaktion, 2004.

- Harvey, David. *Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996.
- Harvey, Stefano and Fred Moten. *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*. New York: Minor Compositions, 2013.
- Hearn, Lafcadio. *An American Miscellany*. Ed. Albert Mordell. New York: Dodd, 1924.
- . "At the Gate of the Tropics." *Cincinnati Commercial*. Nov. 26, 1877.
- . *Chita: A Memory of Last Island*. 1889. Ed. Delia LaBarre. Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 2003.
- . *Fantastics and Other Fancies*. Ed. and Introd. Charles Woodward Hutson. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1919.
- . "From Memphis to New Orleans." *Cincinnati Commercial*. Nov. 23, 1877.
- . *Two Years in the French West Indies*. 1890. Foreword. Raphael Confiant. Brooklyn: Interlink, 2001.
- Forstall, E. J. "Antiquities of Louisiana." *The Commercial Review of the South and West*. Vol. I. New Orleans: J.B.D. DeBow, 1846.
- Holmes, Oliver Wendell. "The Stereoscope and the Stereograph," *The Atlantic Monthly* (June 1859). Web. 11/20/09
- Howarth, William. "Imagined Territory: the Writing of the Wetlands." *New Literary History* 30.3 (1999): 509-39.
- Hsu, Hsuan L. "Literature and Regional Production." *American Literary History* 17.1 (2005): 36-69.
- Hugo, Victor. "Preface to Cromwell." 1827.
- Hulme, Peter. "Expanding the Caribbean." *Home, Identity, and Mobility in Contemporary Diasporic Fiction*. Eds. Michael Niblett and Kerstin Oloff. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009.
- Hulme, Peter and William Sherman, eds., *The Tempest and its Travels*. London: Reaktion, 2000.

- Humphries, Jefferson. Introduction. *Chita*. By Lafcadio Hearn. Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 2003. xvii-xxvii.
- Huret, Romain and Randy J. Sparks, eds. *Hurricane Katrina in Transatlantic Perspective*. Baton Rouge: LSU P, 2014.
- Hutchins, Thomas. *An Historical Narrative and Topographical Description of Louisiana, and West-Florida ... with directions for sailing into all the bays, lakes, harbours and rivers on the north side of the Gulf of Mexico, and for navigating between the islands situated along that coast, and ascending the Mississippi River*. Philadelphia: Printed for the author, and sold by Robert Aitken, 1784.
- Iannini, Christopher P., *Fatal Revolutions: Natural history, West Indian Slavery, and the Routes of American Literature*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2012.
- Jackson, Leon. "Jedidiah Morse and the Transformation of Print Culture in New England, 1784-1826," *Early American Literature* 34.1 (1999): 2-31
- James, C. L. R. *Mariners, Renegades, & Castaways: The Story of Herman Melville and the World We Live In*. Hanover, NH: UP of New England, 2001.
- Jara, René. "The Inscription of Creole Consciousness: Fray Servando de Mier. 1492-1992: *Re/Discovering Colonial Writing*. Minneapolis: Prisma Institute, 1989. 349-82.
- Jefferson, Thomas. *Notes on the State of Virginia*. London: John Stockdale, 1787.
- Journal oeconomique, ou, Mémoires, notes et avis sur l'agriculture, les arts, le commerce, & tout ce qui peut y avoir rapport, ainsi qu' a la conservation & a l'augmentation des biens des familles, &c.* Paris: Chez Antoine Boudet, 1751.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*. 1764. Trans. John T. Goldthwait. Berkeley: U of California P, 1960.
- Kaplan, Amy. "Nation, Region, and Empire." *The Columbia History of the American Novel*. New York: Columbia UP, 1991.
- Kaplan, Amy and Donald E. Pease, eds. *Cultures of United States Imperialism*. Durham: Duke UP, 1993.
- Kazan, Elia. Dir. *Panic in the Streets*. 1950.
- Kelman, Ari. *A River and Its City: The Nature of Landscape in New Orleans*.

- Berkeley: U of California P, 2003.
- Kennedy, Richard S. *Literary New Orleans: Essays and Meditations*. Baton Rouge: LSU P, 1992.
- King, Edward, and James Wells Champney. *The great South; a record of journeys in Louisiana, Texas, the Indian Territory, Missouri, Arkansas, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, South Carolina, North Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, and Maryland*. Hartford, Conn: American Publishing Co., 1875.
- King, Grace. *New Orleans: The Place and Its People*. New York: Macmillan, 1895.
- Kmen, Henry A. "The Roots of Jazz and the Dance in Place Congo: A Re-Appraisal." *Anuario Interamericano de Investigacion Musical* 8 (1972): 5-16. *JSTOR*. UCSC Lib. 5 Dec. 2007
- Kupperman, Karen Ordahl, ed. "The Changing Definitions of America." *America in European Consciousness, 1493-1750*. Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Va. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1995.
- LaBarre, Delia. Preface. *Chita*. By Lafcadio Hearn. Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 2003. vii-xvi.
- LaBarre, Delia, ed. and introd. *The New Orleans of Lafcadio Hearn: Illustrated Sketches from the Daily City Item*. Baton Rouge: LSU P, 2007.
- Latour, Bruno. *What is the Style of Matters of Concern?* Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 2008.
- Law, John. *A full and impartial account of the Company of Mississipi, otherwise call'd the French East-India-Company, projected and settled by Mr. Law. ... To which are added, A Description of the Country of Mississipi, and a Relation of the first Discovery of it: In Two Letters from a Gentleman to his Friend. In French and English*. London: R. Francklin, 1720.
- Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. 1974. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1991.
- Leonard, Irving A. "A Frontier Library, 1799," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 23. 1 (1943): 21-51.

- LeMenager, Stephanie. "Marginal Landscapes: Revolutionary Abolitionists and Environmental Imagination," *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies* 7.1 (Fall 2005): 49-56.
- Le Page du Pratz, Antoine. *Histoire de la Louisiane* [...]. Paris: Chez de Bure, Veuve Delaguette, et Lambert, 1758.
- - -. "Mémoire concernant le desséchement des marais, & le moyen de faire des levées solides," par M. Le Page du Pratz, Ingénieur Machiniste & Hydraulique. *Journal Oeconomique ou Mémoires, notes et avis sur l'Agriculture, les Arts, le Commerce, & tout 'ce qui peut y avoir rapport, ainsi qu'à la conservation & à l'augmentation des Biens des Familles, &c.* Paris: Chez Antoine Boudet, [Novembre] 1751. 68-83.
- Lescallier. *The Method for draining lands overflowed by the tides, such as is practised at Surinam, and Demerray. Extracted from a work of Mr. Lescallier, and translated into English by himself.* Roseau: Dominica, 1802.
- Levander, Caroline and Robert Levine, eds. *Hemispheric American Studies*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2007.
- Levander, Caroline F. and Robert S. Levine. "Introduction: Essays Beyond the Nation." Levander and Levine 1-17.
- Levander, Caroline F. and Robert S. Levine. "Introduction: Hemispheric American Literary History." *American Literary History* 18.3 (2006): 397-405.
- Levine, Robert S. *Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass, and the Politics of Representative Identity*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1997.
- Lewis, Peirce F. *New Orleans: The Making of an Urban Landscape*. Santa Fe: Center for American Places, 2002.
- Locke, John. *The Second Treatise on Civil Government*. 1690. Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1986.
- Lowe, John, ed. *Louisiana Culture from the Colonial era to Katrina*. Baton Rouge: LSU P, 2008.
- Marmontel, Jean François. *Les Incas*. 1777.
- Martin, Geoffrey J. "The Emergence and Development of Geographic Thought in New England." *Economic Geography* 74 (1998): 1-13. *JSTOR*. Web. 7 Aug. 2013.

- Marx, Leo. *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*. New York: Oxford UP, 1964.
- McKee, Kathryn and Annette Trefzer. "Preface: Global Contexts, Local Literatures: The New Southern Studies." *American Literature* 78.4 (2006): 677-90.
- Meinig, D.W. *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1988.
- Mier Noriega y Guerra, José Servando Teresa de. *Fray Servando Teresa de Mier: selección, notas y prólogo*. Ed. Edmundo O'Gorman. Antología del pensamiento político americano. México: Impr. Universitaria, 1945.
- - -. *Historia de la revolución de Nueva España, Antiguamente Anáhuac, ó verdadero origen y causas de ella con la relación de sus progresos hasta el presente año de 1813*. Londres: G. Glindon, 1813.
- - -. *Historia de la revolución de Nueva España*. Edición Crítica. Eds. André Saint-Lu, Marie-Cécile Bénassy-Berling, et al. Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1990.
- - -. *The Memoirs of Fray Servando Teresa de Mier*. Ed. Susana Rotker. Trans. Helen Lane. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- - -. *Memorias de Fray Servando Teresa de Mier Del convento de Santo Domingo, de México. Diputado al primer Congreso Constituyente de la República Mexicana*. Prologue by Alfonso Reyes. Madrid: Editorial América, Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1917. Web. 10 May 2014.
- - -. *Memorias*. Ed. Angel José Fernández. Xalapa: Universidad Veracruzana, 2009.
- - -. *Memorias: un fraile mexicano desterrado en Europa*. Ed. Manuel Ortuño Martínez. Madrid: Trama editorial, 2006.
- Mignolo, Walter. *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2000.
- Miller, David C. *Dark Eden: The Swamp in Nineteenth-Century American Culture*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1989.
- Mitchell, W.J.T., ed. *Landscape and Power*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2002.
- - -. "Imperial Landscape." Mitchell 5-34.

- Molina, Juan Ignacio. *Compendio de la historia geografica, natural y civil del reyno de Chile*. Madrid: Don Antonio de Sancha, [1788].
- Molina, Giovanni Ignazio. *The geographical, natural and civil history of Chili*. Middletown, Conn.: Printed for I. Riley, 1808.
- Montesquieu, Charles de Secondat. *The spirit of laws. In two volumes. Translated from the French of M. De Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu*. 10<sup>th</sup> ed. London: printed for S. Crowder, C. Ware, and T. Payne, 1773. Online. Web. 24 May 2015.
- Morris, Christopher. *The Big Muddy: An Environmental History of the Mississippi and Its Peoples from Hernando de Soto to Hurricane Katrina*. New York: Oxford UP, 2012.
- Morrison, Toni. "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature." *Michigan Quarterly Review* 28.1 (1989): 1-34.
- Morse, Jedidiah. *The history of America, in two books. Containing, I. A general history of America. II. A concise history of the late Revolution. Extracted from the American edition of the Encyclopaedia*. Philadelphia: Thomas Dobson, 1790.
- Murray, Paul. *A Fantastic Journey: The Life and Literature of Lafcadio Hearn*. Sandgate, Folkestone, Kent: Japan Library, 1993.
- Nash, Roderick. *Wilderness and the American Mind*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1967.
- Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2011.
- Northup, Solomon, and David Wilson. *Twelve Years a Slave: Narrative of Solomon Northup, a Citizen of New-York, Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841, and Rescued in 1853, from a Cotton Plantation Near the Red River, in Louisiana*. New York: Miller, Orton & Mulligan, 1855.
- Northup, Solomon, Sue L. Eakin, and Joseph Logsdon. *Twelve Years a Slave*. Baton Rouge: LSU P, 1968.
- O’Gorman, Edmundo. *The Invention of America; an Inquiry into the Historical Nature of the New World and the Meaning of its History*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1961.

- Parrish, Susan Scott. *American Curiosity: Cultures of Natural History in the Colonial British Atlantic World*. Chapel Hill: UNC P, 2006.
- Pattulo, Henry. *Essai sur l'amélioration des terres*. Paris: Chez Durand, 1858.
- Pauw, Corneille de. *Recherches philosophiques sur les Américains, ou mémoires intéressants pour servir à l'histoire de l'espece humaine. Par M. de P\*\*\*. Avec une dissertation sur l'Amérique & les Américains, par Dom Pernety*. 3 vols. [London]: 1771.
- - -. *Recherches philosophiques sur les Américains, ou Mémoires intéressants pour servir à l'histoire de l'espece humaine*. Berlin: [s.n.], 1770.
- Paz, Octavio. *Los hijos del limo: del romanticismo a la vanguardia*. Barcelona: Editorial Seix Barral, S.A., 1974.
- Peterson, Carla L. "Capitalism, Black (Under)Development, and the Production of the African-American Novel in the 1850s," *American Literary History* 4.4 (Winter, 1992): 559-583.
- Pimental, Luz. "The Representation of Nature in Nineteenth-Century Narrative and Iconography." *Literary Cultures of Latin America: A Comparative History*. Eds. Mario J. Valdés and Djelal Kadir. New York: Oxford UP, 2004. 156-172
- Pratt, Mary Louise. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Prévost, Abbé. *Manon Lescaut*. 1731.
- Puig de la Bellacasa, Maria. "Matters of care in technoscience: Assembling neglected things." *Social Studies of Science* 41.1 (2011): 85-106.
- Raynal, *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissemens & ducommerce des Européens dans les deux Indes*. A La Haye: chez Gosse, Fils, 1774.
- Reardon, Jenny. *Race to the Finish: Identity and Governance in the Age of Genomics*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2005.
- Report of the Board of Swamp Land Commissioners, and State Engineer, Under Joint Resolution No. 105, Approved March 16<sup>th</sup>, 1858*. Baton Rouge: J. M. Taylor State Printer, [January] 1859.
- Reyes, Alfonso. "De un autor censurado en el *Quijote* (Antonio de Torquemada)."

1947. *Obras completas*. Vol. 6. Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1957. 347-383.
- - -. Introduction. *Memorias de Fray Servando de Mier, del convento de Santo Domingo de México*. Biblioteca Ayacucho 17. Madrid: Editorial América, [1917].
- Roach, Joseph. *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*. New York: Columbia UP, 1996.
- Robertson, William. *The history of America*. Basil: J. J. Tourneisen and J. L. Legrand, 1790.
- Robertson, William. *The History of America*. London: Printed for W. Strahan; T. Cadell, in the Strand; and J. Balfour, at Edinburgh, 1778.
- Rosenbaum, Sidonia C. "The Utopia of Lafcadio Hearn—Spanish America." *American Quarterly* 6.1 (1954): 76-8. Online. *JSTOR*. Web. 14 Mar. 2008.
- Roskelly, Hephzibah. "Cultural Translator: Lafcadio Hearn." Kennedy 16-29.
- Ross, Kathleen. "A Natural History of the Old World: the Memorias of Fray Servando Teresa de Mier." *Revista de estudios hispánicos* 23.3 (1989): 87-99.
- Rotker, Susana, ed. Introduction. *The Memoirs of Fray Servando Teresa de Mier*. Trans. Helen Lane. New York: Oxford UP, 1998. xxiii-lxiv.
- Rubin, Louis D. *The Edge of the Swamp: A Study in the Literature and Society of the Old South*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1989.
- Rydell, Robert W. *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1984.
- Saint-Pierre, Bernardin de. *Paul et Virginie*. 1788.
- Sarrailh, Jean. "La fortune d'Atala en Espagne (1801-1833)." *Homenaje ofrecido a Menéndez Pidal: miscelánea de estudios lingüísticos, literarios e históricos*. Tomo Primero. Librería y Casa Editorial Hernando (S.A.): Madrid, 1925. 255-68.
- Sayre, Gordon. *Les Sauvages Américains: Representations of Native Americans in French and English Colonial Literature*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1997.

- - -. "Plotting the Natchez Massacre: Le Page du Pratz, Dumont de Montigny, Chateaubriand." *Early American Literature* 37.3 (2002) 381-413.
- Schama, Simon. *Landscape and Memory*. New York: Knopf, 1995.
- "Schemes in Regard to Fugitives – Various Views Presented." *The National Era* (21 November 1850).
- Schwartz, William Leonard. "Caleb Bingham's Translation of Atala." *Modern Language Notes* 45.1 (1930): 7–12. *JSTOR*. Web. 7 Aug. 2013.
- - -. Introduction. *Atala; or, The love and constancy of two savages in the desert*. Trans. Caleb Bingham. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1930.
- Scott, David. *Conscripts of Modernity the Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment*. Durham: Duke UP, 2004.
- Scott, Rebecca. *Degrees of Freedom: Louisiana and Cuba After Slavery*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2005.
- Seed, Patricia. *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World, 1492-1640*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1995.
- Seelye, John D. *Beautiful Machine: Rivers and the Republican Plan, 1755-1825*. New York: Oxford UP, 1991.
- - -. *Prophetic Waters: The River in Early American Life and Literature*. New York: Oxford UP, 1977.
- Shakespeare, William. *The Tempest*. 1611.
- Sharpe, Jenny. "Is the United States Postcolonial? Transnationalism, Immigration, and Race." *Postcolonial America*. Ed. Richard King. Urbana: U of Illinois P. 103-21.
- Shohat, Ella. "Notes on the 'Post-Colonial.'" *Social Text* 31/32 (1992): 99-113. *JSTOR*. Web. 18 Jun. 2014.
- Shuman, R. Baird. "Hearn's Gift from the Sea." *The English Journal* 56.6 (1967): 822-7. Online. *JSTOR*. 15 Mar. 2008.
- Simpson, Lewis P. "New Orleans as a Literary Center: Some Problems." Kennedy. 76-88.

- Smith, Ben A., and James W. Vining. *American Geographers, 1784-1812: A Bio-bibliographical Guide*. Greenwood Publishing Group, 2003.
- Smith, Jon and Deborah Cohn. "Introduction: Uncanny Hybridities." *Look Away! The U.S. South in New World Studies*. Eds. Smith and Cohn. Durham: Duke UP, 2004.
- Smith, Neal. *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990.
- Sofoulis, Zoe. "Through the lumen: Frankenstein and the optics of re-origination." Diss. U of California, Santa Cruz, 1988.
- Sommer, Doris. *Foundational Fictions*. Berkeley: U California P, 1991.
- Sparks, Jared. *Lives of Robert Cavalier de Salle and Patrick Henry*. Vol. 1. Boston: Little Brown, 1848.
- Spivak, Gayatri. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1988.
- Starr, S. Frederick, ed. and introd. *Inventing New Orleans: Writings of Lafcadio Hearn*. Jackson, UP of Mississippi, 2001.
- Stedman, John Gabriel. *Narrative of a five years' expedition, against the revolted negroes of Surinam, in Guiana, on the wild coast of South America; from the year 1772, to 1777: elucidating the history of that country, and describing its productions ... with an account of the Indians of Guiana, & negroes of Guinea*. 2d ed. London: J. Johnson, & T. Payne, 1806.
- Stowe, Harriet Beecher. *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp together with Anti-Slavery Tales and Papers, and Life in Florida After the War*. 1856. 2 vols. Riverside Edition of the Writings of Harriet Beecher Stowe. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Co., 1896.
- - -. *Uncle Tom's Cabin or, Life Among the Lowly with an Introduction Setting Forth the History of the Novel and A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*. 1851. 1853. 2 vols. Riverside Edition of the Writings of Harriet Beecher Stowe. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Co., 1896.
- Suazo, Matthew. "Figures of Cosmopolitanism in the Postcolonial Present." *boundary 2* 37.2 (Summer 2010): 187-198.

- Sublette, Ned. *The World that Made New Orleans*. Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2008.
- Sundquist, Eric. J. *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993.
- Sweet, Timothy. *American Georgics: Economy and Environment in Early American Literature*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002.
- “The Congo Dance.; How New-Orleans Negroes Amused Themselves Sixty Years Ago.” *New Orleans Picayune* 13 Oct. 1879. Rpt. in *New York Times* 3 Nov. 1879. *New York Times Online* 6 Dec. 2007.
- Thoreau. “Walking.” *The Atlantic Monthly* May 1862. *The Atlantic Online*. Web. 10 July 2014.
- - -. *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, Rev. ed. Boston: James R. Osgood and Co., 1873.
- Turner, Mark, and Andrés Guerrero, eds. *After Spanish Rule: Postcolonial Predicaments of the Americas*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.
- Tinker, Edward Larocque. *Lafcadio Hearn’s American Days*. New York: Dodd, 1924.
- Torquemada, Antonio de. *Jardín de Flores curiosas, en que se tratan algunas materias de humanidad, philosophia, theologia y geographia, con otras curiosas y apacibles*. Salamanca: 1570.
- Torquemada, Antonio de, Lewis Lewkenor, and Ferdinand Walker. *The Spanish Mandeuile of miracles. Or The garden of curious flowers*: London: Printed by J[ames] R[oberts] for Edmund Matts, 1600.
- Twain, Mark. *Life on the Mississippi*. Boston, J. R. Osgood, 1883.
- Ulloa, Antonio de. *Noticias americanas: Entretenimientos phisicos-historicos, sobre la América Meridional, y la Septentrional [sic] oriental. Comparacion general de los territorios, climas, y producciones en las tres especies, vegetales, animales, y minerales: Con relacion particular de las petrificaciones de cuerpos marinos de los Indios naturales de aquellos paises, sus costumbres, y usos: De las antiguedades: Discurso sobre la lengua, y sobre el modo en que pasaron los primeros pobladores*. Madrid: En la imprenta de don Francisco Manuel de Mena, Calle de las Carretas, 1772.

United States, President (1801-1809: Jefferson), *An Account of Louisiana, Laid Before Congress by Direction of the President of the United States, Nov. 14, 1803: Comprising an Account of Its Boundaries, History, Cities, Towns, Settlements; of the Origin, Number and Strength of the Inhabitants; of Its Rivers, Canals, Mountains, Minerals, and Productions of Soil; of the Different Tribes of Indians, and the Number of Their Warriors; and of Its Navigation and Laws Under the Spanish government, &c. &c.* Providence: Heaton & Williams, 1803.

Vega, Garcilaso de. *La Florida del' Inca: historia del adelantado, Hernando de Soto* [...]. Lisbon: Impresso por Pedro Crasbeeck, 1605.

- - -. *The Florida of the Inca; a history of the adelantado, Hernando de Soto, Governor and Captain General of the Kingdom of Florida, and of other heroic Spanish and Indian cavaliers.* Trans. and Ed. John Grier Varner and Jeannette Johnson Varner. Austin: U of Texas P, 1951.

Vileisis, Ann. *Discovering the Unknown Landscape: a History of America's Wetlands.* Washington, D.C: Island Press, 1997.

Volney, C. F. *Tableau du climat et du sol des États-Unis d'Amérique: Suivi d'éclaircissements sur la Floride, sur la colonie française au Scioto, sur quelques colonies canadiennes et sur les sauvages.* Paris: Chez Courcier, 1803.

Volney, C. F., Charles Brockden Brown, and George Henry Apthorp. *A view of the soil and climate of the United States of America: with supplementary remarks upon Florida; on the French colonies on the Mississippi and Ohio, and in Canada; and on the aboriginal tribes of America.* Philadelphia: J. Conrad & Co., 1804.

Xariffa (Mary Ashley Townsend). *The World's Cotton Centennial Exposition Poem ... Read at the Inaugural Ceremonies. New Orleans, December 16, 1884.* New Orleans: L. Graham & Son, 1885.

Waggoner, Mary Rush Gwin, ed. *Le plus beau país du monde: completing the picture of proprietary Louisiana, 1699-1722.* Lafayette, LA: Center for Louisiana Studies, 2005.

Webb, Daniel. *Selections from M. Pauw. By Mr. W\*\*\*.* London: R. Cruttwell, 1795.

Wertheimer, Eric. *Imagined Empires: Incas, Aztecs, and the New World of American Literature, 1771-1876.* New York: Cambridge UP, 1999.

- Wey-Gómez, Nicolás. *The Tropics of Empire*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008.
- White, Hayden. "Auerbach's Literary History: Figural Causation and Modernist Historicism," *Literary History and the Challenge of Philology: The Legacy of Erich Auerbach*. Ed. Seth Lerer. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1996: 124-39.
- - -. *Figural Realism: Studies in the Mimesis Effect*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1999.
- - -. *Tropics of Discourse*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1978.
- Whitman, Walt. *Leaves of Grass*. 1855.
- Williams, Michael, ed. *Wetlands: A Threatened Landscape*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990.
- Williams, Raymond. *The Country and the City*. New York, Oxford UP, 1975.
- - -. *Keywords: a vocabulary of culture and society*. Rev. ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Wilson, Anthony. *Shadow and Shelter: The Swamp in Southern Culture*. Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 2006.
- Wilson, Rob, and Christopher Leigh Connery, eds. *The Worlding Project: Doing Cultural Studies in the Era of Globalization*. Santa Cruz: New Pacific Press, 2007.