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Literature and the Production of Geography in Nineteenth-Century America

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English

by

Grant Matthew Rosson

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Literature and the Production of Geography

in Nineteenth-Century America

by

Grant Matthew Rosson

Doctor of Philosophy in English

University of California, Los Angeles, 2020

Professor Christopher J. Looby, Chair

This dissertation examines nineteenth-century American literary writers' critical engagements with and contributions to the production of geographical knowledge prior to the emergence of geography as a distinct modern discipline. Three writers who are now best known for their works of literature, Charles Brockden Brown, Margaret Fuller, and Emily Dickinson, each in their own way sought to redress problems of content and method that they identified in American geographical texts that proliferated in their milieux. In atlases, gazetteers, and geography textbooks, as well as in works of travel writing and nature essays, these writers found not just limited accounts of the country but also, more broadly, what they judged to be insufficient approaches to attaining, organizing, and communicating knowledge of the external world. Their varied writings—Brown's periodical publications, Fuller's travel writing, and Dickinson's letters and poems—attest to and embody a rich repository of critical geographical

discourse in nineteenth-century American letters that has been all but illegible to scholars of geography and literature alike. This dissertation highlights, and attempts to overcome, the structural differences between modern academic disciplines and nineteenth-century knowledge production that have made these writers' engagements with geography—in the etymological sense of "earth-writing"—difficult to see, let alone appreciate and examine. In addition to expanding conceptions of the kind of work conducted by the individual writers discussed, this dissertation aims to model an approach to accessing, and assessing, the rich and varied economy of knowledge and knowledge production that they not only operated in but, through their acts of writing, brought into existence.

The dissertation of Grant Matthew Rosson is approved.

John A. Agnew

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Christopher J. Looby, Committee Chair

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For my parents, with love and gratitude

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INTRODUCTION

> Geography is commonly and vaguely defined to be '*a description of the earth.*'
>
> The points of view in which the earth we inhabit presents itself to our observation are extremely various.
>
> …if we describe the various ranks of organized beings, from man to moss, we describe the earth, and may therefore be considered as geographers.
>
> …the objects and views peculiar to each of the arts and sciences, inasmuch as they are branches of a description of the earth, may be comprehended under the appellation of geography…
>
> It is the ground work of all knowledge that deserves the name of geographical.
>
> – Charles Brockden Brown, Prospectus to *System General of Geography* (1809)

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, significant resources were dedicated to the task of documenting the nature of the American continent. This dissertation tracks the evolution of that task and the resources allocated to it during a period that has been largely neglected by historians of American geography—the period between the late-eighteenth-century founding of the United States and mid-nineteenth-century founding of the first American institutions of modern geographic science. Although countless geographical works were published in America during this time, including atlases, gazetteers, and geography textbooks, such texts have been almost invariably dismissed by scholars of geography as the naïve efforts of amateurs, regarded now only as indexes to the era's cultural values rather than as meaningful contributions to geographical discourse.[1] Rather than arguing for the import of such texts to the history of geography, however, this dissertation proposes an alternative: that the most significant undertakings in geographic thought and knowledge production in America during this period

[1] Bruce A. Harvey, *American Geographics: U.S. National Narratives and the Representation of the Non-European World, 1830-1865* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); Anne Baker, *Heartless Immensity: Literature, Culture, and Geography in Antebellum America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006); Martin Brückner, *The Geographic Revolution in Early America: Maps, Literary, and National Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Michael F. Antonelli, "Nationalism in Early American Geographies: 1784-1845," *Journal of Geography* 69, no. 5 (May 1970): 301–5; Daniel H. Calhoun, "Eyes for the Jacksonian World: Willard C. Woodbridge and Emma Willard," *Journal of the Early Republic* 4, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 1–26; Matthew H. Edney, "Cartographic Culture and Nationalism in the Early United States: Benjamin Vaughan and the Choice for a Prime Meridian, 1811," *Journal of Historical Geography* 20, no. 4 (1994): 384–95; Yael Ben-zvi, "The Racial Geopolitics of Harriet Beecher Stowe's Geography Textbooks," *Legacy* 29, no. 1 (2012): 9.

were the work of those who have been considered—all too narrowly, I suggest—as writers of literature.

By examining the overlapping histories of literature and geography in America, this dissertation brings to light a subset of geographic thought and knowledge production that began to develop in the early nineteenth century. As a result of several societal, technological, and philosophical developments around the year 1800, the complexities of producing geographic texts started to become particularly evident, such that a number of seemingly unlikely geographers began to emerge, in the form of novelists, poets, and travel writers. Among these were the prominent American writers Charles Brockden Brown, Margaret Fuller, and Emily Dickinson, each of whom was in a position, in some cases literally so, to reflect on the state of geographical discourse in America and, thereafter, to conceive and pursue strategies for improving it, with the aim of more fully and adequately communicating the nature of the country.

That these writers were earnestly invested in addressing problems of geography has not been readily legible to either scholars of literature or scholars of geography. As this introduction will suggest, this is largely a consequence of an incongruity between the organization of modern scholarship and the organization of nineteenth-century knowledge production. Briefly put, prior to the development of specialized professional and academic disciplines in the mid-nineteenth century, those who sought to contribute to the production of knowledge operated in what Laura Dassow Walls refers to as a "common intellectual culture," characterized by low barriers to what would now be regarded as interdisciplinary work. In this so-called "pre-disciplinary" era, Walls notes, "various kinds of writing still operated across a common field: a political economist could turn his hand to ethnography; a poet could become a botanist, and a scientific explorer could

write poetry."[2] To scholars trained in the increasingly specialized and structurally differentiated disciplines that developed after the mid-nineteenth century, such multi-disciplinary writings might be only half-legible, such that a vital economy of geographical knowledge production in nineteenth-century America—for example—might go unnoticed by both scholars of literature and scholars of geography alike.

By uncovering American literary writers' studied engagements with matters of geography, this dissertation shows that the objectives of geography were being continuously and earnestly pursued in America throughout the nineteenth century—that geography was by no means beset by a "lack of vigour," as it has been claimed.[3] Moreover, it shows that the objectives of geography were being pursued by writers who were deeply sensitive to changing understandings of the nature of knowledge at a time when the grounds for the rational empiricism that characterized the late-eighteenth-century Enlightenment were beginning to be undermined by the notion that subjectivity was an adverse force in scientific pursuits. Given that the primary complexities that began to emerge for the pursuit of geography at this time were rooted in developing awareness of the subjectivity of perception and the resulting difficulty of adequately representing and communicating the nature of the external world in writing, this dissertation argues that writers of literature were uniquely equipped to recognize and address problems of geography using the descriptive strategies inherent to the forms of writing in which they were most practiced—namely, novels, poems, magazine essays, and travel writing.

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[2] Laura Dassow Walls, *The Passage to Cosmos: Alexander von Humboldt and the Shaping of America* (Chicago : The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 165.

[3] Margarita Bowen, *Empiricism and Geographical Thought: From Francis Bacon to Alexander von Humboldt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 109.

In order to make clear the significance of the developments in geographic thought and knowledge production in America that began to occur around the turn of the nineteenth century, it is necessary to begin with a brief account of how problems of geography were addressed during the preceding period, in the decades surrounding the founding of the United States.

The Problem of Geography in Eighteenth-Century America

Until the end of the eighteenth century, the matter of documenting the American continent was largely conceived as an empirical enterprise, to be achieved through practical logistical operations such as travel, measurement, and description. As historians of North American exploration describe it, eighteenth-century surveyors and explorers of Anglo and European origin—French, Spanish, British, and eventually American—were primarily concerned with replacing the various rumors, fables, and myths that had proliferated since the "discovery" of the New World with a body of true and accurate knowledge, to be created according to the rational empiricist principles of the era's Enlightenment science, with the goal of "turning the suggestive stories of western travelers into the natural history of a continent"[4] and transforming "hypothetical geography" into "solid fact."[5] This goal and the thinking it was based in are consistent with what Miles Ogborn and Charles W. J. Withers describe more generally as the Enlightenment-era approach to the matter of "knowing other places":

[4] Wayne Franklin, *Discoverers, Explorers, Settlers: The Diligent Writers of Early America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 26.

[5] See William H. Goetzmann, *New Lands, New Men: America and the Second Great Age of Discovery* (New York: Viking, 1986), 8–15, 61–76, 97–110; David N. Livingstone, *The Geographical Tradition: Episodes in the History of a Contested Enterprise* (Oxford, UK ; Cambridge, USA: Blackwell, 1993), 142–49; Susan Scott Parrish, *American Curiosity: Cultures of Natural History in the Colonial British Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 9; Deborah Allen, "Acquiring 'Knowledge of Our Own Continent': Geopolitics, Science, and Jeffersonian Geography, 1783–1803," *Journal of American Studies* 40, no. 2 (August 2006): 205–32. The phrase "hypothetical geography" comes from Goetzmann, 97; "solid fact" from Livingstone, 143.

> Those who sought to produce new, empirically grounded knowledge about the world operated on the basis that travel made truth. They were concerned to challenge or confirm the geographical knowledge that came from classical works, medieval travelers, or contemporary voyagers.[6]

In the American context, this mode of seeking to render the world solidly and finally known is particularly well-exemplified by the work of the botanist John Bartram and the mapmaker Lewis Evans, both of whom set out across the Allegheny Mountains in 1743 armed with classifying and stabilizing protocols typical of rational empiricism: Bartram with Linnaeus' taxonomic system, for the purpose of categorizing American flora and fauna and Evans with the latest cartographic techniques for the purpose of mapping the Ohio River Valley.[7] Their resulting works, Bartram's *Observations* (1751) and Evans' "General Map of the Middle British Colonies in America" (1755), served as primary sources of knowledge of the interior of the American continent during the subsequent decades, when general instability of the region beyond the Alleghenies, punctuated by the French and Indian War (1755–1763) and the American Revolutionary War (1775-1783), made independent geographical undertakings particularly difficult.

Earnest efforts to document the American continent recommenced in the 1780s and 1790s, as a matter of interest to agents of the new United States. In the early national period, geographical work proceeded according to what Patricia Cline Cohen calls the "quantitative mentality," a mode of geographical knowledge production characterized by a "predilection and

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[6] Miles Ogborn and Charles W. J. Withers, "Travel, Trade, and Empire: Knowing Other Places, 1660–1800," in *A Concise Companion to the Restoration and Eighteenth Century*, ed. Cynthia Wall, Blackwell Concise Companions to Literature and Culture (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 19.

[7] On Lewis Evans, see Thomas Hallock, *From the Fallen Tree: Frontier Narratives, Environmental Politics, and the Roots of a National Pastoral, 1749-1826* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 29–74; William Morris Davis, "The Progress of Geography in the United States," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 14, no. 4 (1924): 160–62. On John Bartram, see Franklin, *Discoverers, Explorers, Settlers*; Christoph Irmscher, *The Poetics of Natural History: From John Bartram to William James* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999); Hallock, *From the Fallen Tree*, 29–40, 52–57; Goetzmann, *New Lands, New Men: America and the Second Great Age of Discovery*.

respect for 'statisticks' and 'authentic facts',"[8] premised on the notion that "empiricism […] was objective and value-free" (55). This mentality is particularly evident, as Cohen shows, in the many geographical gazetteers and statistical surveys that were published during the era. Such texts, comprising tables of statistics and facts about all aspects of American society, including population, trade, occupations, and institutions, were conceived as a way to view the state of society unhampered by "theorizing and speculation" (35). As Cohen puts it, "[f]acts were objective and indisputable; opinions were idiosyncratic and debatable" (40). The same mentality is evident in the numerous "state inventories" that began to emerge in the immediate wake of U.S. independence, such as John Filson's *Discovery, Settlement, and Present State of Kentucke* (1784), Jeremy Belknap's three-volume *History of New Hampshire* (1784-1792), Samuel Williams' *Natural and Civil History of Vermont* (1794), and, most famously, Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1787).[9] Such texts offered detailed descriptions of the present physical, social, and economic conditions of their respective states or territories, such as they were at the time. Although Jefferson's *Notes* is often held up on its own as a major work in the history of American thought (marred as it is by Jefferson's racist and racialist thinking), it is less often recognized as one of the many works like it that constituted Americans' first efforts to produce a comprehensive body of American geographical knowledge, in the interest of fulfilling what Anne Godlewska describes as "the ultimate purpose of geography" at the time, namely, "to

[8] Patricia Cline Cohen, "Statistics and the State: Changing Social Thought and the Emergence of a Quantitative Mentality in America, 1790 to 1820," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (January 1981): 35. Subsequent references will be cited by page number.

[9] For an extensive list of such works see Cohen, 37 n. 6.

create a unified, true, comprehensive, and complete picture of the earth or of parts of the earth"—an accomplishment that would, it was thought, "in and of itself, expand knowledge."[10]

As fanciful as the prospect of creating a "complete picture of the earth" may sound now, given prevailing notions of the subjectivity of knowledge and the impossibility of arriving at final objective truths, it is important to recognize that those concerned with producing knowledge during the Enlightenment era operated under conceptions of subjectivity and objectivity that were less clearly defined.[11] As Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison describe in their history of scientific objectivity, it was not until after the turn of the nineteenth century that subjectivity and objectivity began to be regarded as antithetical, with the subjectivity of the observer starting to be regarded as a hindrance to the production of objective knowledge, necessitating concerted efforts to effect "the suppression of the subjective self."[12] Not until the nineteenth century, in other words, did "men of science [begin] to fret openly about a new kind of obstacle to knowledge: themselves."[13] This development in the field of scientific thought neatly correlates with the more general shift that Michel Foucault identifies in Western thought around the turn of the nineteenth century, a shift from the "Classical" episteme, characterized by the belief that signs—language, numbers, symbols—constitute adequate representations of things in the world, to the "Modern" episteme, characterized by the understanding that signs are indelibly marked by the idiosyncrasies of those who produce and deploy them. According to Foucault's argument,

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[10] Anne Godlewska, *Geography Unbound: French Geographic Science from Cassini to Humboldt* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 2.

[11] Walls, *The Passage to Cosmos*, 165–66; Barbara Maria Stafford, *Voyage into Substance: Art, Science, Nature, and the Illustrated Travel Account, 1760-1840* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1984), 445–46; Livingstone, *The Geographical Tradition*, 304–46.

[12] Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (New York: Zone Books, 2007), 32, 34–42.

[13] Daston and Galison, 33.

after roughly 1800 language could no longer be regarded as an adequate vehicle for communicating knowledge by virtue of its standing for another thing. Language, it became increasingly clear, was simply "one object of knowledge among others, on the same level as living beings, wealth and value, and the history of events and men."[14] As a result, terms like authentic, accurate, true, and fact began to be subject to critical scrutiny, especially when applied to accounts that purported to represent the world. Prior to this shift in understanding, there was little critical discussion on how subjectivity might adversely affect the production of American geographical knowledge.

Confidence in the objectivity of empirical approaches to knowledge production and ultimately in the possibility of producing a true and complete American geography is evident in many texts from the era, not just in the many and varied gazetteers and state inventories, "almost all of [which] proudly proclaimed that only 'authentic facts,' unsullied by personal opinion, were admitted to their texts," but even in the projects of the two most prominent figures of late eighteenth-century American geography, Thomas Jefferson and Jedidiah Morse.[15] As Deborah Allen puts it, Jefferson and Morse were both primarily driven in their quests to document the American continent by a "patriotic desire to counteract misinformation furnished by 'imperfect and erroneous sketches' describing the continent's geography by European writers."[16] In Jefferson's case, this "patriotic desire" is at the heart of his *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1787), a text largely written as a defense of the nature of the "New World" against prominent claims

[14] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London; New York: Routledge, 2005), 322.

[15] Cohen, "Statistics and the State," 38.

[16] Allen, "Acquiring 'Knowledge of Our Own Continent': Geopolitics, Science, and Jeffersonian Geography, 1783–1803," 205.

that its flora and fauna were both physically smaller and considerably less abundant than their "Old World" counterparts, an idea advanced most famously by the French natural historian George-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon. Jefferson makes his case for the richness and vitality of American nature by offering meticulously ordered accounts of the sizes and varieties of Virginia's plant and animal life and extended descriptions of Virginia's physical features—its mountains, rivers, waterfalls, etc. Morse's "patriotic desire," on the other hand, is manifest in the many geography textbooks he published beginning in the 1780s, with an explicit focus on correcting the work of Europeans, "who have been the sole writers of American Geography, and have too often suffered fancy to supply the place of facts."[17] Jefferson and Morse also have in common that the matter of producing a "complete picture" of America was not contingent on "the suppression of the subjective self," but was, more simply, a matter of assembling facts rationally derived and correcting inaccuracies perpetuated by non-Americans.

At no point in his detailed account of Virginia does Jefferson raise any questions about the soundness or validity of his approach to defending his country. This is not to say that Jefferson exercises no critical judgment in executing his task, only to say that he does not subject *his own* judgment to questioning, an indication that he does not consider his own subjectivity a hindrance to producing a faithful and true account of Virginia. Consider, for example, the table that Jefferson produces to compare the weights of various quadrupeds of Europe and America. Jefferson notes that the measurements listed in the table were made by various people—some he took himself, some were "furnished by judicious persons," and others were made by the French

[17] Quoted from David N. Livingstone and Charles W. J. Withers, eds., *Geography and Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 304, and Charles W. J. Withers, *Placing the Enlightenment: Thinking Geographically about the Age of Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 187.

naturalists he is challenging.[18] Predictably, Jefferson's only expressions of doubt pertain to the judgment of those whose specimens and measurements might be seen to contradict his claims. He implies a lack of rigor in the methods of his French counterparts, noting that the weights they provide come from "such subjects as came *casually* to their hands for dissection" (66, emphasis added). He later more vigorously questions the reputability of those travelers whose accounts of American animals suggest that they are "smaller than the European":

> But who were these travellers? Have they not been men of a very different description from those who have laid open to us the other three quarters of the world? Was natural history the object of their travels? Did they measure or weigh the animals they speak of? or did they not judge of them by sight, or perhaps even from report only? Were they acquainted with the animals of their own country, with which they undertake to compare them? Have they not been so ignorant as often to mistake the species? A true answer to these questions would probably lighten their authority, so as to render it insufficient for the foundation of an hypothesis. (74)

Sure of his own rational faculties, Jefferson never turns such pointed or extended questioning on himself or his own accounts, indicating his implicit trust of his own judgment and that of the "judicious persons" he knows.

It must be pointed out that Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* includes what are clearly subjective reports, most famously his encounter with the sublime at Virginia's Natural Bridge and his account of looking out over the Blue Ridge Mountains. Despite his clear emphasis on the personal feelings that arose from his encounters with Virginia's natural features, however, Jefferson treats these accounts as no less objective, in the sense of universally true and applicable, than his tables of weights and measures. He presents his experiences at Natural Bridge, the Blue Ridge Mountains, and elsewhere in both the first-person and the second-person, conflating the "I" and the "you," thereby implying the universality of his own response to the

[18] Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Matthew Carey, 1794), 66. Subsequent references will be cited by page number.

stimuli of American nature (23–24, 30–31). Describing his experience of standing on top of Virginia's Natural Bridge, he writes: "You involuntarily fall on your hands and knees, creep to the parapet and peep over it. Looking down from this height about a minute gave me a violent headache. […] It is impossible for the emotions, arising from the sublime, to be felt beyond what they are here" (31). The progression here from "you" to "me" to "it is" exhibits the even standing of subjective and objective knowledge that persists throughout Jefferson's account of his home state.

When Jefferson acknowledges, in the prefatory "Advertisement" printed in the first edition of *Notes*, certain shortcomings of his book's representations of Virginia, the character of his acknowledgement also reveals something about his understanding of the problem of geography in general. While he admits that the book suffers from various omissions and "imperfections," and that "[t]he subjects are all treated imperfectly; some scarcely touched on," he attributes these imperfections not to the inadequacy of his own judgment or to the impossibility of perfecting the geographical task itself, but to the particularly difficult circumstances in which he undertook the task, namely, in the midst of a war for independence and through the founding of a new nation:

> To apologize for [the book's imperfections] by developing the circumstances of the time and place of their composition, would be to open wounds which have already bled enough. To these circumstances some of their imperfections may with truth be ascribed; the great mass to the want of information and want of talents in the writer. ("Advertisement")

Jefferson's apology implies that a different writer, one of greater talent, in more ideal circumstances, or with greater access to information, would have been capable of writing a more complete—and perhaps even perfect—account of Virginia, if not of the continent and the world.

Perhaps not coincidentally, it is this very task that Jedidiah Morse took up shortly thereafter. Like Jefferson, Morse is very candid in the preface to the first edition of his *American*

Geography (1789) that the work he set out to accomplish was by no means complete or perfect. Also like Jefferson, Morse gives reasons for this that are not epistemological but logistical. He justifies the shortcomings of his work by appealing both to the relative nascence of American geography as a distinct enterprise and to the magnitude of the work required to carry off such a considerable project:

> To furnish [authentic information] has been the design of the author of the following work; but he does not pretend that this design is completed, nor will the judicious and candid expect it, when they consider that he has trodden, comparatively, an unbeaten path—that he has had to collect a vast variety of materials—that these have been widely scattered—and that he could derive but little assistance from books already published. Four years have been employed in this work, during which period the Author has visited the several States in the Union, and maintained an extensive correspondence with men of science; and in every instance has endeavored to derive his information from the most authentic sources: he has also submitted his manuscripts to the inspection of Gentlemen in the State, which they particularly described, for their correction. It is possible, notwithstanding, and indeed very probable, that inaccuracies may have crept in; but he hopes there are none of any great importance, and that such as may be observed will not be the subject of severe censure, but ascribed to some pardonable cause.[19]

At the very end of his preface, Morse ties his hopes for the success of his *Geography* to the progress of "the nation of which it treats," suggesting that the work of American geography, like that of American democracy, is contingent upon the participation of the people:

> like the nation of which it treats, [*American Geography*] is but an infant, and as such solicits the fostering care of the country it describes: it will grow and improve as the nation advances towards maturity, and the Author will gratefully acknowledge every friendly communication which will tend to make it perfect.[20]

As the closing words of his preface suggest, Morse imagined that his *American Geography* would be an ongoing project, that it would "grow and improve," even to the point of becoming "perfect." His words imply, furthermore, that this end as he imagined it was not contingent upon

[19] Jedidiah Morse, *The American Universal Geography*, Fourth Edition (Boston: Isaiah Thomas and Ebenezer T. Andrews, 1802), iii.

[20] Morse, iv.

his own powers as a geographer or on the nature of the geographic task itself, but on the nation's willingness to contribute to the project until its inevitable completion.

In both its appeal to the people's participation and its invocation of the concept of perfection, Morse's preface, dated March 12, 1789, echoes the opening lines of the U.S. Constitution, which had come into official effect just eight days prior. It is notable that in imagining his project becoming "perfect," Morse does not qualify his aim with the comparative "more" that distinguishes the Constitution's stated goal of "forming a more perfect Union." It is only in a subsequent edition, "revised, corrected, and greatly enlarged," that Morse changes the corresponding phrase to "more perfect," suggesting some tempering of his aims.[21] Because the method of his approach to geography did not radically change from one edition to the next, however, there is little to indicate that this change is anything other than rhetorical—an indication not of a reduction in his ambitions or a change in his understanding of the nature of knowledge, so much as a manifestation of his desire to more closely align the project of his geography with the project of the nation by more exactly echoing the language of the Constitution.

That both Jefferson and Morse have been described as "the father of American geography" is perhaps more a result of their being the most prominent Americans in their day to invest in the problem of American geography than it is a distinction earned by their original contributions to geographic thought and knowledge. The Europeans whose work they were trying to displace were at least as knowledgeable and productive in matters of American geography, if not more so. The German geographer Christoph Daniel Ebeling, for example, might have equal if not more claim to the title "father of American geography" on the basis of

[21] Jedidiah Morse, *The American Geography* (London: John Stockdale, 1794).

his German-language work, the multi-volume *Geography and History of North America* (1793-1816), which has been called "the first serious work concerning the geography of America."[22] Whatever the scope or "seriousness" of their work, what each of these geographers has in common, American and European alike, is their fundamental concept of geographical knowledge work as a matter of empirical fact-gathering. More broadly, they are united with other geographers of the time in their failure—or perhaps inability—to reflect on and question the validity of their empirical methods. In other words, they participate in the practice of eighteenth-century geographers, as Anne Godlewska characterizes it, of "describing the world without critically examining the theory upon which their descriptions were based."[23] The advantage that Jefferson and Morse had over their European counterparts, then, was not a superior method, but, more simply, a closer proximity to the continent, and therefore to information about the continent, and a "patriotic desire" to pursue accurate, and ideally perfect, representations of their country and the land on which it sat.

The Problem of American Geographical History

If in the eighteenth century the matter of documenting the American continent was regarded as a relatively straightforward operation, given prevailing faith in empiricism and the notion that "travel made truth," the same task became increasingly conceptually freighted in the nineteenth century. The more travelers crossed the continent, the more printed accounts of its nature proliferated, and the more possible it became to recognize the epistemological

[22] Geoffrey J. Martin, *American Geography and Geographers: Toward Geographical Science* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 4.

[23] Godlewska, *Geography Unbound*, 3.

complexities involved in the work of American geography, where "geography" is understood to mean what the word literally denotes, namely, earth-writing, or the practice of translating the natural world into written language. Among the many thorny issues that began to become apparent: the subjective nature of perception, the limits of representation (both linguistic and visual), the historicity of knowledge, and the distinction between circulating knowledge and communicating it. Around the turn of the nineteenth century, then, an idea that had only recently been taken for granted, that a comprehensive and complete, if not perfect, account of the American continent—and indeed of the world—was not only possible but imminent, was increasingly confronted by what Anne Godlewska refers to as "epistemological angst."[24]

Remarkably, this shift in thought has not been registered by historians of American geography. This is due in part to the nature of American geographical discourse itself and in part to the approaches to it taken by modern geography scholars. On the one hand, as the foregoing brief survey suggests, documentation of the American continent in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was highly dispersed, being undertaken by individuals with a wide variety of occupations, including travelers, surveyors, cartographers, and educators, among others. The resulting accounts of the continent were similarly dispersed in a wide range of forms and outlets, including maps, atlases, gazetteers, textbooks, statistical surveys, magazines and other periodicals, travel journals, expeditionary notes, and more. The task of examining and reconciling the inchoate and multiform set of texts and practices that constituted American geography prior to the organization and professionalization of geographic sciences in the mid- to late nineteenth century is one that historians of geography have only recently begun to take up. Previous historians have been occupied primarily with producing institutional and disciplinary

[24] Godlewska, 103.

histories, tracking the birth and development of the modern geographical sciences, an objective that has entailed the almost wholesale neglect of geographic work done earlier, in extra-institutional contexts. Such exclusion is particularly well-illustrated by the recent work of eminent historian of geography Geoffrey J. Martin, whose monumental volume on the subject, *American Geography and Geographers* (2015), signals its institutional (and teleological) focus in its subtitle, "Toward Geographical Science." Although Martin's history begins in the late eighteenth century, it starts in Germany rather than in America, in the interest of tracing the influence of German geographers on the rise of "school geography" in early nineteenth-century America. Any and all geographic work done in America before the 1820s is elided, including, most conspicuously, the work of Jedidiah Morse, whose popular and influential American geography textbooks were continuously reprinted and circulated in America from the late eighteenth century through the end of the nineteenth century. Martin offers no justifications for this exclusion, though he might at the very least have echoed other historians' dismissals of Morse and other early American textbook writers on the basis of their status as amateurs writing for popular rather than professional readers.[25] Instead, Martin tacitly perpetuates a narrow conception of American geography, understood as the professional scientific theories and practices that only began to be developed and codified in professional and institutional setting after the importation of German models in mid-nineteenth-century America.

This kind of institutionally-focused approach, which has largely defined American geographical history, has not been without its challengers. In his *The Geographical Tradition* (1993), for example, David N. Livingstone pointedly critiques geographical histories in general

[25] Bowen, *Empiricism and Geographical Thought*; Susan Schulten, *The Geographical Imagination in America, 1880-1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 70.

for being little more than "in-house reviews of disciplinary development," "internalist" overviews "written by geographers, about other geographers, for still other geographers."[26] Livingstone describes such works as "Whiggish" or "presentist" histories, in the sense that they use "their own definition of what constitutes geography as a lens through which to examine and reinterpret the past."[27] As an alternative, Livingstone advocates for a more inclusive conception of geography, one that incorporates currents of geographic thought and practice from sources outside of those typically linked to the development of modern geographical sciences. Along similar lines, Charles W. J. Withers describes the "presentist" practices of historians of geography as resulting in the general neglect and even obscuring of the extent to which, prior to the institutionalization of geography, geographic practices were "embedded in other subjects":

> What geography was—and is—at certain times and particular locations derives its meaning from the way it belongs to discourses and practices that are taken to be geographical, not from any predetermined sets of definitions or, even, from the prior existence of "geographers."[28]

In advocating for a more historicist conception of geography, Withers and Livingstone call for scholars to more carefully distinguish between geography's "textual tradition"—its "strictly institutional or disciplinary history"—and its "several discursive histories."[29] Innes M. Keighren even points out that such calls are not in fact new, identifying a similar strain of thought in the writings of American Geographical Society librarian John K. Wright, who in 1925 made what

[26] Livingstone, *The Geographical Tradition*, 4–5.

[27] Livingstone, 4–5.

[28] Charles W. J. Withers, "Eighteenth-Century Geography: Texts, Practices, Sites," *Progress in Human Geography* 30, no. 6 (December 2006): 718.

[29] Withers, 718.

Keighren describes as "an early call for an inclusive account of geographical thought and practice, embracing both professional and amateur ways of knowing."[30]

Despite the longstanding awareness of the narrow scope of geographical histories, there have been few concerted efforts to uncover geography's "several discursive histories," or what Withers describes as "the worlds of geography beyond geographers and the nature of geographical knowledge beyond geography."[31] The two most comprehensive undertakings in this regard focus on geographic practices in nineteenth-century Europe: Anne Godlewska's *Geography Unbound* (1999) and Chenxi Tang's *Geographic Imagination of Modernity* (2008). Both detail vital extra-institutional economies of geographical knowledge production, in France and Germany respectively, showcasing rich bodies of geographic thought and work that had been all but neglected by prior historians of geography.[32] To date, there are no similarly comprehensive accounts of the development of geographical knowledge production during the same period in America.

The most inclusive account of American geography in the early national period is Ben A. Smith and James W. Vining's *American Geographers, 1784-1812: A Bio-Bibliographical Guide* (2003), a directory listing of American geographers conceived in the broadest sense as "contributors of the body of knowledge that comprises American geography" and "individuals […] who produced materials or engaged in activities that we might today attribute to the work of

[30] Innes M. Keighren, "History and Philosophy of Geography I: The Slow, the Turbulent, and the Dissenting," *Progress in Human Geography* 41, no. 5 (October 2017): 1.

[31] Withers, "Eighteenth-Century Geography," 725.

[32] Chenxi Tang, *The Geographic Imagination of Modernity: Geography, Literature, and Philosophy in German Romanticism* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2008).

a geographer or one who was intent on spreading geographical knowledge."[33] By identifying over three hundred Americans who engaged in producing and "spreading geographical knowledge," Smith and Vining set out to overcome what they describe as one of the central challenges to studying geographic work in the period, namely, its decentralized and diffuse nature, given "that most early geographers were involved in a variety of activities and were not professionally trained as geographers" and their geographic work is not necessarily easily catalogued let alone categorized.[34] By bringing some unity to an inherently disparate field, Smith and Vining offer a valuable index and testament to the range and variety of geographic work that was being done in America around the turn of the nineteenth century. At the same time, however, the limited information provided in some of their book's entries indicates just how much there is left to learn—or even initially uncover—about the processes and products of geographical knowledge work in the early U.S., particularly when that work was being done by writers and thinkers who are now primarily known for their contributions to subjects other than geography.

Smith and Vining's entry on the early American novelist Charles Brockden Brown constitutes a particularly good example of the kind of gaps left by such a study and presents a test case for understanding how such gaps came about and how they might begin to be closed. The entry itself is quite brief, consisting of a summary account of Brown's schooling, a note on his early preoccupation with geography (his "favorite subject" as a child), a few lines on his later forays into magazine publishing, and a reference to one geographic publication titled *An Account*

[33] Ben A. Smith and James W. Vining, *American Geographers, 1784-1812: A Bio-Bibliographical Guide* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2003), x–xi.

[34] Smith and Vining, x.

of Louisiana (1803).[35] In both its substance and its brevity, the entry suggests that Brown, like many of his contemporaries, had a modest and chiefly personal interest in geography that culminated in one or two publications worth noting. As the next chapter will show in detail, however, Brown had a deeper and more intense investment in matters of geography than most if not all of his contemporaries, including those most often identified as pioneering figures of geography in America, Jefferson and Morse. This can begin to be indicated by a more complete listing of his publications on geography, which included numerous periodical essays and reviews on geographical topics, a translation into English of the French Comte de Volney's *View of the Soil and Climate of the United States* (1804), and a planned two-volume geography textbook that he began writing in 1808, to be titled *A General System of Geography*, of which he completed only the first volume, now lost, before his death from tuberculosis in 1810.

It is not surprising that such works—an assortment of unsigned reviews and essays, a translation, and a lost manuscript—could go unregistered, even in such an inclusive history of geography as that of Smith and Vining. But their absence from the history of American geography is not just due to the circumstances of their material histories; it is also due to the stark divisions that have arisen between discourses in the time since Brown wrote. Given that Brown is now best known as a novelist, scholarship on his life and career has typically focused on his fiction. As a result, comparatively little attention has been paid to his other work, including his work on geography, except for the purposes of advancing new or more nuanced readings of his novels. The tendency to prioritize Brown's fiction over his other output is less a product of scholarly neglect, however, than it is a reflection of a lack of correspondence between the highly specialized nature of modern knowledge production and the more fluid nature of

[35] Smith and Vining, 26–27.

knowledge work in the early nineteenth century. During Brown's time, one could set out to make meaningful contributions to what are now distinct discourses—such as literature and geography—without the risk of being dismissed as a dilettante or an amateur in one or the other. Given that only some early American geographers had occupational training similar to that of modern geographers (among these were "surveyors, military geographers, cartographers, engravers, and authors of geographic books that were not intended to be textbooks"[36]) most authors of geographic texts were trained in fields other than geography: they were architects, astronomers, clergymen, editors, historians, inventors, merchants, novelists, physicians, poets, and statesmen. As a result, geographical work from this period is not always readily identifiable, as it can be closely entwined with its authors' other occupations, both conceptually and materially. The next chapter argues that this has been the case with Brown's geographical work.

That said, the next chapter does *not* argue that Brown's geographical work is embedded in his novels. Rather, it argues that his novels and his later output—his periodicals, his translation of Volney, and his geography textbook—are all expressions of his lifelong engagement with matters of knowledge more generally. Focusing on his periodical publications, the chapter shows how Brown surveyed the state of geography with unprecedented critical acuity, drew distinctions between different approaches to producing and communicating geographical knowledge and, in doing so, effectively conducted the work of establishing geography—or at least attempting to establish it—as a distinct discourse, separate from others it had long been associated with, including history, natural history, and travel writing. In more than a decade of work on the subject, Brown developed a practical and theoretical basis for an approach to geography in the interest of redressing the shortcomings of commonly available

[36] Smith and Vining, x.

geography texts of the day, including the enduringly influential textbooks of Jedidiah Morse, the so-called "father of American geography." After developing his approach to geography piecemeal in his periodicals over the course of more than a decade, Brown set out to consolidate his geographical work in his own textbook, but succumbed to tuberculosis before that work could be completed. Although there were plans to publish the finished portion of his manuscript—reportedly the portion on American geography—those plans were never carried out and the manuscript was lost. As a result, Brown's considerable efforts toward identifying and addressing problems of geography were also lost, or at least lost sight of, folded as they were among articles on various concerns in his periodicals. Consequently, the more visible and widely available works of geography that Brown had initially set out to counter—Morse's *American Universal Geography* foremost among them—came to stand as representative of nineteenth-century geographical discourse in America, overshadowing other more vital currents of geographic thought and practice, such as those in texts otherwise identifiable as works of literature.

American Literature and Geography

In literary scholarship, the word "geography" is often used in the colloquial sense, in reference to the physicality of the world, effectively as a synonym for "landscape." This is particularly the case in studies of American literature, in which the distinctiveness of American texts is often correlated with, if not attributed to, the distinctiveness of America's physical features—its "geography" in the metonymic sense.[37] This matter of terminology does not

[37] See for example Myra Jehlen, *American Incarnation: The Individual, the Nation, and the Continent* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1986); Baker, *Heartless Immensity*; M.H. Abrams, "The Lyric as Poetic Norm," in *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953); Hsuan L. Hsu, *Geography and the Production of Space in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, Cambridge

necessarily detract from the substance of any individual argument in which it features, all of which can be taken on their own terms, so much as it emphasizes the fact that scholarship purporting to deal with "literature and geography" often has little, if anything, to do with "geography" in the technical sense of theories and practices of earth-description.[38]

The few studies of American literature that conceive of "geography" in the technical rather than the colloquial sense—such as Bruce Harvey's *American Geographics* (2001), Martin Brückner's *Geographic Revolution in Early America* (2006), and Martha Schoolman's *Abolitionist Geographies* (2014)—are beset by a somewhat different problem, namely, hewing too closely to the narrow picture of American geography that has been presented by historians.[39] Where American geography from the eighteenth-century U.S. is often simply glossed over by historians, as discussed above, American geography from the mid- to late-nineteenth-century is almost exclusively identified with the proliferation of primary and secondary school geography textbooks, and therefore unworthy of close examination. Margarita Bowen, for example, cites American school geography books as evidence of a distinct "lack of vigour" in nineteenth-century American geography, on the basis that such texts were written for younger students and

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Studies in American Literature and Culture 161 (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Christopher C. Apap, *The Genius of Place: The Geographic Imagination in the Early Republic* (Durham, New Hampshire: University of New Hampshire Press, 2016).

[38] Discussions regarding what precise methods, subjects, texts, and terms properly fit under the banner of "literature and geography"—and even what precise phrase should be written on such a banner—are ongoing, most visibly in a journal expressly dedicated to such problems, titled *Literary Geographies*. On the need for a truly interdisciplinary approach, described as the "interdiscipline" of literary geography, see Elizabeth Jones, "What Literature Is Spatial?," *Literary Geographies* 4, no. 1 (2018): 38–41. See also the work of Sheila Hones, especially *Literary Geographies: Narrative Space in Let the Great World Spin* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); "Text as It Happens: Literary Geography," *Geography Compass* 2, no. 5 (September 2008): 1301–17; "Literary Geography and Spatial Literary Studies," *Literary Geographies* 4, no. 2 (2018): 146–49.

[39] Harvey, *American Geographics: U.S. National Narratives and the Representation of the Non-European World, 1830-1865*; Brückner, *The Geographic Revolution in Early America*; Martha Schoolman, *Abolitionist Geographies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

general readers rather than for advanced study or professional geographers.[40] This tendency is also manifest in Martin's *American Geography and Geographers* (2015), the first two chapters of which trace the development of geography curricula in the United States schools, but which lists only the titles of the more famous geography textbooks, giving no account of their content.[41] Susan Schulten reinforces this position by characterizing the "relative consistency" of nineteenth-century geography textbooks, noting—accurately—that they were often revised and reprinted "with little change" from one edition to the next.[42] Granted, such characterizations of nineteenth-century American school geography as elementary and repetitious are not entirely unfounded. The most common geography books published in America in the nineteenth century were, in fact, school textbooks, many of which were republished with little change from one edition to the next. But historians' conflation of school geography texts with geography in general is not warranted, and has resulted in broader misunderstandings of the history of American geography.

Scholars of literature have generally taken historians' characterization of American geography for granted, accepting that school textbooks are both representative of geography in the era and, at the same time, relatively poor examples of geographic work. This is never more explicit than in Bruce Harvey's *American Geographics* (2001), a literary study that describes nineteenth-century geography textbooks as "the dross of the cultural past," as offering "only the odd allure of archaic knowledge: of tables of facts, maps, descriptions, and so on that quaintly do

[40] Bowen, *Empiricism and Geographical Thought*, 109.

[41] Martin, *American Geography and Geographers*, 73–74.

[42] Schulten, *The Geographical Imagination in America, 1880-1950*, 94.

not match our more modern, comprehensive, or precise renderings of the world."[43] In support of this characterization, Harvey appeals directly and exclusively to historians of geography: "Historians of geographical science and American education have found these early texts to be crude in method, a hodgepodge of natural history, topography, customs-and-manners description, geology and astronomy, and overtly moralistic and political social commentary" (34).[44] Rather than simply accepting this assessment and dismissing such books as naïve and inconsequential, however, as historians of geography typically do, Harvey argues for their importance, not as works of geography, per se, but as indexes to nineteenth-century American culture and its values. He bases this view on a crucial observation about nineteenth-century American geography books and their relation to practices of geography itself: Harvey recognizes that such books were often less concerned with matters of geography than they were with other areas of instruction particularly pertinent in the early U.S., such as the promotion of literacy and civic pride.

> Geography may have lapsed as a coherent academic science, yet it gained a new legitimacy at the primary sites of instruction—the schoolroom, the family circle—where its capacity to instruct the juvenile citizen-to-be about America's sociohistorical relations to the world at large was all the more efficacious. (34)

Similar to geographies written in the early U.S., such as those by Jedidiah Morse, geographies written in the 1830s and 40s were "composed by nonspecialists, usually New England pedagogues," Harvey notes. Unlike Morse, however, writers of later geographies "did not set themselves the arduous task of advancing the geographer's practice per se" (34). Their books did not present "advances in geography as a scientific discipline, but rather new methods of instruction that might—all the more important because of the increasingly lucrative schoolbook

[43] Harvey, *American Geographics: U.S. National Narratives and the Representation of the Non-European World, 1830-1865*, 27. Subsequent references will be cited by page number.

[44]On this subject Harvey cites William Warntz, *Geography Now and Then* (New York: American Geographical Society, 1964), 26–27.

trade—recommend their volumes for family and schoolroom use" (35). Their wide circulation, coupled with their "patriotic" rhetoric made geography books an important source for understanding American political ideology, as "discursive, pedagogic mechanism behind nation making" and "the primary means by which U.S. subjects defined themselves" even if it made them comparatively poor sources for understanding the latest advances in geographic thought. (27–29)

By realigning American school geography texts with their political and pedagogical purposes, this approach has helped to rescue such texts from broad charges of naivete and inconsequence. Several scholars of literature and American studies have joined Harvey in reading nineteenth-century American geography textbooks as indexes to the era's culture and values, highlighting in particular their role in promoting ideologies of U.S. nationalism.[45] Like the geography books in question, however, these reassessments reveal little about the nature of nineteenth-century geographic practices themselves (in the sense of earth-description and communicating the nature of the world) except to suggest that geographers during the period were only minimally concerned with it. This would only be true, however, if writers of geography textbooks were regarded as the only geographers of the time—or even as geographers at all. This last point is somewhat difficult to concede if only on the basis of Harvey's assessment that the authors of American geography books in the 1830s and 40s—the "New England pedagogues"—were not particularly concerned with "advancing the geographer's practice per

[45] See for example Martin Brückner, "Lessons in Geography: Maps, Spellers, and Other Grammars of Nationalism in the Early Republic," *American Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (1999): 311–43; Martin Brückner, "Literacy for Empire: The ABCs of Geography and the Rule of Territoriality Is Early-Nineteenth-Century America," in *Nineteenth-Century Geographies: The Transformation of Space from the Victorian Age to the American Century*, ed. Helena Michie and Ronald R. Thomas (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 172–90; Anne Baker, "Geography, Pedagogy, and Race," in *Heartless Immensity: Literature, Culture, and Geography in Antebellum America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 118–35; Ben-zvi, "The Racial Geopolitics of Harriet Beecher Stowe's Geography Textbooks"; Calhoun, "Eyes for the Jacksonian World: Willard C. Woodbridge and Emma Willard."

se," as much as they were with fostering other forms of awareness and competency.[46] Moreover, it would not be accurate to conclude that no one in nineteenth-century America was concerned with addressing the problem of geography. The question becomes where to look for such concern if not in the many books that bore the name of "geography."

Literature and Geographical Knowledge

Works of literature have often been regarded as rich articulations of the nature of space and place. Gaston Bachelard's classic text on the subject, *Poetics of Space* (1958), for example, presents poems as powerful expressions of phenomenological experiences in and of intimate human spaces and therefore vital registers of the spaces themselves.[47] Bertrand Westphal has recently proposed an expansion on Bachelard's premise, suggesting that works of literature can be regarded as registers not just of intimate spaces but of *all* places—cities, regions, and countries alike.[48] Westphal's scheme, which he names "geocriticism," advocates taking a "geocentered" rather than an "egocentered" approach to reading depictions of space and place in literature. Rather than considering an author's representation of a place as one element that would contribute to a fuller understanding of that author ("egocentered"), he suggests that several authors' representations of a place be taken together as a collective source of

[46] Geographical texts had been used promote non-geographical competencies prior to the work of the "New England pedagogues" that Harvey discusses. On the use of geographic writing to promote literacy in the early U.S., see Brückner, "Lessons in Geography: Maps, Spellers, and Other Grammars of Nationalism in the Early Republic," 321, 324–25, and Brückner, "Literacy for Empire: The ABCs of Geography and the Rule of Territoriality Is Early-Nineteenth-Century America." On Susanna Rowson's use of geographic texts as a basis for moral and religious teachings, see Baker, *Heartless Immensity*, 122, and Eileen Elrod, "Gender, Genre and Slavery: The Other Rowson, Rowson's Others," *Studies in American Fiction* 38, no. 1 & 2 (2011): 163–84.

[47] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994).

[48] Bertrand Westphal, *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces*, trans. Robert T. Tally (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

understanding about that place ("geocentered"). Much to his credit, Westphal is as committed to critically examining the underlying principles of "geocentricism" as he is to articulating the method in the first place: "We begin by questioning the legitimacy of the [geocritical method]. Is a geocentered approach viable?"[49] A more general way of asking this question might be: to what extent can works of literature be regarded as sources of knowledge—not just knowledge of the self, but knowledge of the external world? On the matter of answering this question, John Gibson identifies the importance of "reveal[ing] literary works *themselves* to have as one of their goals the offering of a form of understanding."[50] To do otherwise, he insists, would amount to "ignoring the texts" and "merely commenting on how we can enlist the text in our personal intellectual pursuits and ultimately saying nothing about how the literary work of art might embody knowledge of the world."[51] Because Westphal's method of geocriticism, like Bachelard's poetics of space before it, is not concerned with the text's own "goals," they can take as a source of geographic understanding texts that are only *incidentally* geographic. Such methods might offer some understanding of the nature of spaces and places, in abstract or in particular, but they can reveal little about the ways literature has been *intentionally* employed to address the problem of geography.

In the interest of assessing literature as what Kevis Goodman describes as a "neglected postern" for certain kinds of historical knowledge production, this dissertation examines texts that make clear their goals of participating in and contributing to discourse on matters of

[49] Westphal, 113.

[50] John Gibson, "Literature and Knowledge," in *The Oxford Handbook Of Philosophy And Literature*, ed. Richard Thomas Eldridge (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 470.

[51] Gibson, 473.

geography.[52] This participation is not premised on any formal resemblance between the texts and conventional works of geography, such as textbooks, atlases, and gazetteers. On the contrary, the works in question very much resemble works of literature: they are poems, magazines essays, and works of travel writing. What makes them geographic is not their form, but their "objects and views," as Charles Brockden Brown puts it in the text that constitutes this project's epigraph, taken from the "Prospectus" to his planned geography textbook: "the objects and views peculiar to each of the arts and sciences, inasmuch as they are branches of a description of the earth, may be comprehended under the appellation of geography."[53] That such texts "may be comprehended" as works of geography is not simply a matter of recategorization after the fact, but a matter of insistence on the part of their authors. A key aspect of this project and its claims about literature's role in the production of knowledge is that these writers were acutely aware of what they were doing, deliberate in their turns to literature to accomplish ends that they conceived other modes of writing incapable of accomplishing. That the works these writers produced were not incidentally but intentionally geographic is fundamental to the claim that these texts, which have been regarded primarily as works of literature, were also components of an economy of knowledge production. That they have not been regarded as such until now, despite clear internal evidence suggesting otherwise, reveals the extent to which literary texts have been presumed to be vehicles for communicating knowledge of the self, when, as this dissertation shows, they are often better and more productively read as they were conceived: as vehicles for communicating the nature of the world.

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[52] Kevis Goodman, *Georgic Modernity and British Romanticism: Poetry and the Mediation of History*, Cambridge Studies in Romanticism 59 (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 4.

[53] Charles Brockden Brown, *A System of General Geography* [Prospectus] (Philadelphia, 1809), 4.

Chapter Summaries

Each of the writers discussed in this dissertation had a distinct rationale for engaging with problems of geography, linked to their individual ideas about the value of geographical knowledge. Additionally, each developed their theories and practices as critical responses to alternative and, in their eyes, inadequate modes of representing the nature of the American continent in writing. By virtue of the critical stances they undertook, this dissertation regards these writers as engaging in critical geography.

Chapter one shows how Charles Brockden Brown's dedication to geography unfolded across the pages of the periodicals he edited around the turn of the nineteen century. Although Brown is now best known as a gothic novelist, he dedicated far more of his life to the study of geography than he dedicated to the writing of novels. As a periodical editor, Brown was in a position to become intimately familiar with the potentialities and vicissitudes of knowledge production and dissemination in the early American republic. His magazines not only offered him a regular forum in which to comment on the many problems he saw in the contemporary knowledge-economy (in such essays as "On Almanacks" and "On the Prevailing Ignorance of Geography"), but they also presented a ready vehicle in which to address those problems, through the publication of critical reviews and essays, frequently on the subject of geography. By placing Brown's magazines in the context of the history of geographical knowledge-production, this chapter argues that Brown was a vanguard of critical thought in the field of geography, a fact that has yet to be fully assimilated by literature and geography scholars alike, for the simple reason that Brown and his magazines operated in between and across the modern disciplinary distinctions that have, so far, organized, and therefore distorted, perceptions and receptions of his work.

Chapter two argues that Margaret Fuller's *Summer on the Lakes, in 1843* (1844) is most productively read not as a work of travel writing but as a sustained critique of geographical knowledge production in mid-nineteenth-century America. The most distinctive feature of *Summer on the Lakes* is its consistent reflection on and registration of its own methods and objectives, by virtue of which what might otherwise be—and what has often been read as—a disjointed and meandering account of one woman's travels through the Great Lakes region of the United States becomes an incisive critical account of the economy of knowledge that it sought to participate in. By looking at Fuller's writings from before, during, and after her travels in the summer of 1843—not just *Summer on the Lakes* itself, but also her private letters and her essays in *The Dial*—this chapter uncovers her long-standing investment in identifying, challenging, and overturning dominant ideas and forms that, in her view, devalued and actively undermined the production and circulation of knowledge of the country. Ultimately, this chapter finds Fuller addressing the task that she conceived—the problem of communicating the nature of "the country at large," as she put it—in the absence of any clearly established standards or prescribed methods for doing so. *Summer on the Lakes* is a record of Fuller's negotiation of the geographic task itself and the no less considerable discursive task of selecting—and electing—terms in which to describe and discuss it. Instead of characterizing her work in terms of geography or the task of the geographer, Fuller conceives of her methods and aims in terms of observation, communication, and criticism, and her task as that of the observer, the scholar, and the critic.

Chapter three finds Emily Dickinson engaging in and challenging contemporary geographical discourse in characteristically innovative ways: through Valentines published anonymously in local papers, through letters and poems exchanged with distant acquaintances, and, most often, through poems unseen and unread by anyone else until after her death. This

chapter begins by looking at the intellectual ambitions voiced in Valentines that Dickinson composed in the early 1850s, after her formal schooling had come to an end. Where typical Valentines exchanged in mid-nineteenth-century New England carried playful, exaggerated, and often ironic messages of personal and romantic devotion, Dickinson's Valentines gave voice to an earnest desire for knowledge in excess of what her schoolbooks could offer. In subsequent years, to fulfill her desire for both learning and learned discourse, Dickinson would go on to engage in near-constant written correspondence with friends and family, near and far. In her correspondence with Thomas Wentworth Higginson in particular, beginning in 1862, Dickinson sought to fulfill what she described in one early Valentine letter as her desire for "a mingling of opposite minds." In the letters and poems that she sent to Higginson, Dickinson raised persistent challenges to theories of writing about nature and the external world that he had published in his *Atlantic Monthly* essays over the preceding decade. Using her poems to convey both theory and proof, Dickinson contests Higginson's claims that writing about the external world best succeeds (produces "far fresher results") when based in direct experience. Dickinson ultimately overturns her early impulse to dispense with her schoolbooks, finding in her geography books in particular elegant and powerful methods for communicating the nature of the world. The chapter concludes by showing how Dickinson emulated her school geography books in order to communicate not just the nature of her home and yard in Amherst, Massachusetts—her own world—but also that of Heaven—the world to come.

CHAPTER ONE

"[T]he ground work of all knowledge": Charles Brockden Brown's Periodical Approach to American Geography

> With the progress of improvement in America, it may be expected that the literary and scientific horizon will be gradually enlarged; and that the light of the higher mathematical and astronomical studies will, in time, combine with that of poetry and the other fine arts to illuminate a hemisphere not long since overspread with darkness.
>
> – Review of Joseph Young's *New Physical System of Astronomy*, *The Monthly Magazine and American Review*, December 1800

Charles Brockden Brown is now best known as a novelist, regarded as one of the first Americans to receive international recognition in that capacity. The subject to which he turned most consistently throughout his life, however, was geography. According to Brown's friend and first biographer William Dunlap, geography was an "early and constant passion" for Brown and his "favourite science."[1] Dunlap recounts that as a boy Brown was "so intimately acquainted with the science of geography, that he became a sort of gazetteer to his father, and would point out to him on the map or chart almost any part of the world which [his father] made inquiry after; and could generally give some account of the place."[2] What began as a youthful preoccupation for Brown continued into his adulthood, with matters of geography surfacing in nearly all of his professional writings, from his novels and political pamphlets to his periodicals and historical accounts, to such an extent that one twentieth-century biographer describes geography and "its allied subjects" as "the strongest interests of [Brown's] life."[3]

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[1] William Dunlap, *The Life of Charles Brockden Brown*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: James P. Parke, 1815), 68.

[2] William Dunlap, *The Life of Charles Brockden Brown*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: James P. Parke, 1815), 13.

[3] Daniel Edwards Kennedy. "Charles Brockden Brown: A Biography" (c. 1923–1945). Typescript with manuscript additions. Charles Brockden Brown Bicentennial Edition Records (bulk 1917–1995). Special Collections and Archives, Kent State Libraries, Kent, Ohio.

In his youth, Brown approached the study of geography in the manner prescribed by geography textbooks, as underwritten by prevailing pedagogical theories of the time: he memorized and recited names, locations, facts, and accounts of places by rote. (Brown's success in this mimetic approach to geography is reflected in Dunlap's testimony, according to which he "became a sort of gazetteer.") As Brown's inquiries into matters of knowledge became increasingly sophisticated, however, so did the nature of his engagement with geography. In time, Brown began to take a more recognizably modern critical approach to geography, in the sense that he began to evaluate and question the contents of published geographical accounts, not on grounds of nationalist bias—which was a common approach to criticizing geographical accounts and justifying new publications, particularly of American geography—but on grounds of their relative success in "communicating," as one review in the magazine puts it, the "true state of things."[4]

By virtue of his careful engagement with matters of historiography and, by extension, his sensitivity to contemporary debates on matters of epistemology, as represented by the writings of John Locke and David Hume, Brown would have been well aware of the problems associated with any attempt to obtain "the truth." He recognized, for example, that even when it came to tallying the most basic quantitative geographical data, such as population or the area of a country, "the exact truth can never be obtained. It can only be approached."[5] Nevertheless, his belief in the inherent value of geographical knowledge encouraged him to seek methods by which the "true state of things," geographically speaking, might be, if not achieved, then at the

[4] "Miscellaneous Articles of Literary and Philosophical Intelligence, Domestic," *Monthly Magazine and American Review* 3, no. 2 (August 1800): 155. [B.]

[5] "Statistical View of the United States of America," *Literary Magazine and American Register* 2, no. 9 (June 1804): 180. [B.]

very least "approached." It was to this problem that Brown became increasingly devoted after he turned away from novel-writing around the year 1800.

Scholars have typically acknowledged the seriousness of Brown's dedication to geography by reference to his two standalone geographic projects: the first, a translation into English of the French Comte de Volney's *View of the Soil and Climate of the United States* (1804), accompanied by extensive critical commentary,[6] and the second, a projected two-volume geography textbook, to be titled *A System of General Geography*, that was the focus of Brown's work at the time of his death from tuberculosis in 1810 at the age of thirty-nine (the manuscript of which was subsequently lost). The nature and extent of Brown's engagement with geography is more fully represented, however, by the contents of the three periodical publications that he edited between 1799 and 1810: *The Monthly Magazine and American Review* (1799-1800), *The Literary Magazine and American Register* (1803-1807), and *The American Register, or General Repository of History, Politics, and Science* (1807-1810). The consistent issue of articles, sketches, reviews, and letters to the editor on geographical subjects in Brown's periodicals exhibit—insofar as they facilitated—the development of his understanding of geography,[7] far

[6] An account of Brown's geographical undertakings cannot be considered complete without due consideration of this translation, which constitutes both a contribution to and a critique of geographical discourse in turn-of-the-century America. Such consideration, however, must be reserved for a later iteration of this project.

[7] Because most items in Brown's magazines were printed without clear attribution, it can be difficult, if not impossible, to settle matters of authorship. The editors of the *Charles Brockden Brown Electronic Archive and Scholarly Edition* acknowledge that, on this account, "a comprehensive Brown bibliography necessarily remains open to change." Most of the items discussed in this chapter have been attributed to Brown by the editors of the *Brown Electronic Archive* at one degree of certainty or another: either "indisputably" or with a "high degree of confidence." Each item in the *Brown Electronic Archive* is assigned a letter to indicate its status: "A" (indisputable), "B" (high degree of confidence), or "H" (hybrid). The latter refers to a text that Brown "excerpts, summarizes, and otherwise creative edits and shapes." For each item discussed in this chapter, the assigned attribution status is noted in brackets after the first instance of citation. For more detailed discussion of attribution in regard to Brown's writing, see <https://brockdenbrown.cah.ucf.edu/bibliography.php>.

beyond his youthful devotion to school geography textbooks, and constitute his direct engagement with, if not his establishment of, geographical discourse in a modern critical sense.

Brown dedicated significant space in each of his periodicals to taking note of and evaluating the great variety of geographical texts that were being published around the turn of the nineteenth century in the U.S. and abroad: textbooks, gazetteers, maps, regional inventories, travelogues, and works of natural history, among others. In doing so, he came to recognize the deficiency—or, as he saw it, the nascence—of geographical discourse in the U.S., especially by comparison to its counterparts in England and Europe. In conducting his reviews, he discovered that even though geographical materials proliferated widely in the late eighteenth century, many of the most fundamental questions pertaining to the attainment and communication of geographical knowledge—not just questions of *how*, but also of *why*—remained unanswered or even unaddressed. As part of his interest in contributing to the development of America's intellectual well-being, Brown set out to use his periodicals not just for observing geographical discourse but also for improving it. To do so, he published works of geographical knowledge itself, in the form of descriptive accounts, statistical tables, and excerpts from recently published texts, but also critical commentary on matters related to geography, with the aim of establishing clear theories and methods for attaining and communicating geographical knowledge. Where scholars have generally held school geography textbooks to be representative of geographical discourse in the early U.S., Brown's periodical publications show that such textbooks were only one vehicle among many by which geographical knowledge was organized and communicated to American readers, and the least adequate at that. As a survey of Brown's survey, this chapter aims, first, to offer a detailed view of the state of geographical discourse in the early U.S., and

second, to showcase Brown's approaches to the problem of producing and communicating geographical knowledge in America.

Approaching Matters of Knowledge

Brown's life and work were marked by his earnest and persistent inquiry into all manner of questions related to the attainment and diffusion of knowledge. As a young man in 1780s Philadelphia, unsatisfied by the law apprenticeship he held, he established with a circle of like-minded friends a discussion and debate society called the Belles Lettres Club, later known as the Society for the Attainment of Useful Knowledge.[8] There Brown pursued the kind of intellectual development that had been unavailable to him in the law office by reading and discussing such varied subjects as political and moral philosophy, religion, poetry, and the sciences. In his introductory remarks at the first meeting of the Belles Lettres Club, he described the intense pull he felt toward these subjects and to the pursuit of knowledge in general:

> To those who testify to a relish for such studies, no argument is necessary to attach them still closer to their favourite object; few of them indeed can resist the strong attraction which they feel towards it. Fondly overcome by the bewitching charms of this their favourite pursuit, they become regardless of the voice of reason, and are totally immersed in the soothing pleasures of intoxicated fancy.[9]

It was his strong attraction to the pursuit of knowledge that led Brown to give up his law apprenticeship and move to New York City, where he joined another intellectual society, the

[8] Steven Watts, *The Romance of Real Life: Charles Brockden Brown and the Origin of American Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 29–30; Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, *Charles Brockden Brown*, Gothic Authors: Critical Revisions (Cardiff: Univ. of Wales Press, 2011), 8–9.

[9] Dunlap, *The Life of Charles Brockden Brown*, 1815, 1:25.

Friendly Club. Under the auspices of this club, with encouragement from its members, Brown founded his first periodical, *The Monthly Magazine and American Review* (1799-1800).[10]

Brown conceived of *The Monthly Magazine* as more than a means of delivering useful and interesting knowledge to American readers. More fundamentally, he conceived of it as a means of encouraging Americans to pursue intellectual work for themselves. As Brown described it, he wanted *The Monthly Magazine* to provide Americans with "sufficient inducement to labour" in the "intellectual soil of America," which he saw as unduly neglected and "comparatively sterile" next to that of Britain and Europe. According to Brown, this neglect and supposed sterility was not a result of Americans' lower aptitude but simply a matter of the expedience of relying on foreign publications. While Brown regarded Americans as "equally qualified to excel in arts" as their British and European counterparts, he also saw that it was far more practical and convenient for Americans, himself included, to "resort to foreign fields from whence all our wants are so easily and readily supplied." With his periodical, he sought to intervene in what he saw as an uneven transatlantic economy of knowledge by establishing a sustained American intellectual "field"—a periodical that would serve as both a "review" and a "magazine,"[11] offering at once a detailed account of the past and present state of American

[10] Bryan Waterman, *Republic of Intellect: The Friendly Club of New York and the Making of American Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007); David Lee Clark, *Charles Brockden Brown: Pioneer Voice of America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1952), 129.

[11] Frank Luther Mott distinguishes between "review" and "magazine" in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Anglo-American literary culture, noting that magazines bore a "strong connotation of entertainment," while reviews were associated with "serious informative articles." He also identifies Brown's *Monthly Magazine and American Review* as one of the earliest American reviews. Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines: 1741-1850* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1966), 7–8, 54, 218–22. For more on Brown magazine work, see Jared Gardner, *The Rise and Fall of Early American Magazine Culture*, ed. Edmund J. Sullivan (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012); Mark L. Kamrath, "'Annals of Europe and America' and Brown's Contribution to Early American Periodicals," in *The Oxford Handbook of Charles Brockden Brown*, ed. Philip Barnard, Hilary Emmett, and Stephen Shapiro (Oxford University Press, 2019), 203–21; Michael Cody, *Charles Brockden Brown and the Literary Magazine: Cultural Journalism in the Early American Republic* (Jefferson, N.C., and London: McFarland, 2004); Scott Slawinski, *Validating Bachelorhood: Audience, Patriarchy, and Charles Brockden Brown's Editorship of the* Monthly Magazine and American Review, 2005; Martin Brückner, "Sense, Census, and

intellectual labor and a "ready" forum for its future development. As Brown described it, the review section of his periodical would offer "a survey of the state of literature, arts, and science in America" that would, over time, "form a history of literature and knowledge in the United States," while the "magazine" section would offer "a ready market for the works of domestic hands and heads, that will, at length, generate and continue a race of artists and authors purely indigenous, and who may vie with those of Europe."[12]

At the same time that Brown was devising ways of intervening into the matters of knowledge in a material sense, he was also inquiring into more philosophical concerns on the subject. In particular, he was interested in questions about the foundations of knowledge as raised by the rival epistemologies of John Locke and David Hume: To what extent is the external world knowable, and through what means might one reliably acquire such knowledge? Is it as Locke's empirical philosophy suggests, that knowledge is acquired exclusively through the senses, and that such knowledge is generally trustworthy? Or is it as Hume's skeptical philosophy suggests, that is there no rational basis for trusting knowledge acquired through the senses? Is it possible, as Hume would have it, that every piece of supposed knowledge is subject to endless questioning, always resting on an uncertain foundation? Furthermore, if Hume's assertions were correct and no knowledge could ever be regarded as certain, how could one remain optimistic about, or even interested, in the pursuit of knowledge? As abstract as such questions may seem, they were foundational to Brown's interest in the problem of attaining and communicating geographical knowledge.

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the 'Statistical View' in the Literary Magazine and Jane Talbot," in *Revising Charles Brockden Brown: Culture, Politics, and Sexuality in the Early Republic*, ed. Philip Barnard, Mark Kamrath, and Stephen Shapiro, 1st ed (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2004), 281–309.

[12] "View of a Periodical Work Entitled The American Review, and Literary Journal" (New York, 1800), 1–7.

Scholars have generally aligned Brown's thinking on matters of knowledge with Hume's radical skepticism, characterized by the understanding that knowledge acquired through the senses is always subject to questioning. This alignment has largely been based on the contents of Brown's novels, where characters are often made to reckon with one kind of uncertainty or another. (Consider *Wieland*, for example, in which several characters discover, or more importantly fail to discover, the unreliability of their senses of hearing, or *Edgar Huntly*, in which the title character repeatedly has the foundations of his knowledge challenged, if not entirely undercut, by his tendency to sleepwalk.[13]) Scholars have also recently begun to uncover the influence of Hume's thought in Brown's writings about history, particularly in his approaches to the problem of attaining and conveying "unattainable" truths about the past.[14] As we will see, Brown approaches problems of geography in a way similarly indebted to his understanding of Hume, albeit less directly and therefore less legibly.

Brown's views on problems of history are most clearly expressed in an essay from *The Monthly Magazine* titled "Walstein's School of History" (August/September 1799), in which Brown presents the views of the titular Professor Walstein, said to be modeled on Friedrich

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[13] See Roland Hagenbüchle, "American Literature and the Nineteenth-Century Crisis in Epistemology: The Example of Charles Brockden Brown," *Early American Literature* 23, no. 2 (1988): 121–51; John Limon, *The Place of Fiction in the Time of Science A Disciplinary History of American Writing.* (Cambridge University Press, 1990); Chad Luck, "Re-Walking the Purchase: *Edgar Huntly*, David Hume, and the Origins of Ownership," *Early American Literature* 44, no. 2 (2009): 271–306; Weinstock, *Charles Brockden Brown*, 94; Christopher Sloman, "Navigating the Interior: Edgar Huntly and the Mapping of Early America," in *Writing the Environment in Nineteenth-Century American Literature: The Ecological Awareness of Early Scribes of Nature*, ed. Steven Petersheim and Madison P. Jones IV (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015), 1–14; Paul Gilmore, "Charles Brockden Brown's Romance and the Limits of Science and History," *ELH* 84, no. 1 (2017): 117–42.

[14] See James Dillon, "'The Highest Province of Benevolence': Charles Brockden Brown's Fictional Theory," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 27 (1998): 237–58; Mark L. Kamrath, *The Historicism of Charles Brockden Brown: Radical History and the Early Republic* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2010); Gretchen J. Woertendyke, "History, Romance, and the Novel," in *The Oxford Handbook of Charles Brockden Brown*, ed. Philip Barnard, Hilary Emmett, and Stephen Shapiro (Oxford University Press, 2019), 154–70; Gilmore, "Charles Brockden Brown's Romance and the Limits of Science and History"; Kamrath, "'Annals of Europe and America' and Brown's Contribution to Early American Periodicals."

Schiller.[15] The essay describes the fictive Walstein as "conscious of the uncertainty of history," understanding that one cannot discover and communicate the whole truth about the past but "can only make approaches to the truth" (336). The article acknowledges that such an understanding might lead to fatalism in regard to the prospect of attaining "the truth" about history: "The more attentively we observe mankind, and study ourselves, the greater will this uncertainty appear, and the farther shall we find ourselves from the truth" (336). But it goes on to posit that there are grounds for hope located, perhaps not incidentally, in the same place Hume finds it, in the notion of probability: "This uncertainty has some bounds. Some circumstances and some events, are more capable of evidence than others … Our guesses as to the motives of some actions are more probable than the guesses that relate to other actions" (336-337).

Brown's "Walstein" article effectively makes peace with the notion that historical knowledge is always in some degree the work of invention ("guesses"). Even if such guesses cannot be based on certain understanding about the relationship between causes and effects ("motives" and "actions"), they can be imagined by the historian on the basis of what is regarded as probable, as derived from the historian's understanding of customs and habits that can be said to govern behavior under specific circumstances. By accepting from the beginning the principle of uncertainty, the writer of history becomes unburdened of the impossible task of *arriving at* truth and can therefore endeavor to do all that is possible: to make "*approaches to* the truth." Wherever possible, the article suggests, historical accounts should be based on the clearest documentary evidence ("collected from the best antiquarians"), but elsewhere they can, and

[15] Woertendyke, "History, Romance, and the Novel," 160. "Walstein's School of History. From the German of Krants of Gotha [First Part]," *Monthly Magazine and American Review* 1, no. 5 (August 1799): 335–38. [A.] Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically by page number.

indeed must, be "artfully deduced from what is known, or invented with a boldness more easy to admire than to imitate" (337).

Recognition of the "invented" nature of historical knowledge led Brown to conceive of a rather blurry distinction between historical and fictional narratives. If fictional narrative and historical narrative are not separated by the question of their reference to real events, true or false, but only by the degree of their invention, the history/fiction distinction becomes not a binary but a spectrum. As Mark Kamrath puts it, Brown came to understand that "the boundary between 'history' and the 'novel' was fluid, not hard and fast, and historical writing was an imaginative, subjective undertaking as much as it was a factual, objective one."[16] The "Walstein" essay intimates this fluidity and, by extension, the legitimacy of fiction's place in historical writing in its remark that "Pure fiction is never employed [in historical accounts] but when truth was unattainable" (338). An essay published some months later, titled "The Difference between History and Romance" (April 1800), Brown continues to articulate his ideas on this subject, offering the somewhat radical proposal that historical knowledge is not best communicated by the "historian" but by what he calls the "romancer."

Brown describes the "historian," according to principles of Enlightenment historiography, as one who "carefully watches and faithfully enumerates the appearances which occur" in order to produce a catalogue of "disjoined" facts that are then left to speak for themselves.[17] Such a historian, he suggests, refrains from positing any causal relations between the "appearances" enumerated. Historical knowledge, Brown suggests, would therefore be much

[16] Kamrath, "'Annals of Europe and America' and Brown's Contribution to Early American Periodicals," 206–7.

[17] "The Difference between History and Romance," *Monthly Magazine and American Review* 2, no. 4 (April 1800): 251. [A.] Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically by page number.

better communicated by what he calls the "romancer" (not to say the novelist), understood as one who links the historians' "disjoined" facts together, "adorns these appearances with cause and effect, and traces resemblances between the past, distant, and future, with the present … a dealer, not in certainties, but probabilities" (251). An ideal historical account, he concludes, is one that combines the best attributes of both the "historian" and the "romancer":

> An action may be simply described, but such descriptions, though they alone be historical, are of no use as they stand singly and disjoined from tendencies and motives, in the page of the historian or the mind of the reader. The writer, therefore, who does not blend the two characters, is essentially defective. It is true, that facts simply described, may be connected and explained by the reader; and that the describer may, at least, claim the merit of supplying the builder with materials. The merit of him who drags stones together, must not be depreciated; but must not be compared with him who hews these stones into just proportions, and piles them into convenient and magnificent fabrics. (251)

These principles formed the basis upon which Brown assessed the work of leading historians; for example, his account of Hume, Robertson, and Gibbon in the second number of the *Monthly Magazine* (May 1799) declares Hume to be the most skillful in "deducing one event from another, and marking the influence of political transactions on the condition of those who are subject to that influence."[18] But scholars have also suggested that Brown's conceptions of historical knowledge and the task of the historian, as described in "Walstein" and "Difference," were at the heart of his own historical writings, such as his "historical sketches" and the "Annals" of his later periodicals.[19] In other words, it has been suggested that Brown combined

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[18] "Parallel between Hume, Robertson and Gibbon," *Monthly Magazine and American Review* 1, no. 2 (April 1799): 91. [A.]

[19] See Kamrath, "'Annals of Europe and America' and Brown's Contribution to Early American Periodicals"; Woertendyke, "History, Romance, and the Novel"; Dillon, "'The Highest Province of Benevolence': Charles Brockden Brown's Fictional Theory." Such readings raise significant questions about the common critical notion that Brown's career can be neatly divided between his early novel-writing and his later journalism, a division suggested most clearly in Stephen Watts' oft-cited assertion that "On or about April 1800 Charles Brockden Brown changed." Watts, *The Romance of Real Life: Charles Brockden Brown and the Origin of American Culture*, 131. It has been suggested, on the contrary, that Brown's work exhibits a striking continuity that has only been rendered obscure, or even illegible, by contemporary distinctions, in this case, between history and fictional narrative. Historicist analyses of Brown's writings have revealed, for instance, that he regarded both his novels and his historical writings as "moral instruments," each written to serve the same ultimate purpose: to "promote the

his familiarity with contemporary historical discourse—the theoretical and practical writings on history by Schiller, Hume, Robertson, and Gibbon, among others—with a sophisticated epistemological understanding in order to develop his own inventive approach ("approach" being an operative word) to writing history—that is, to communicating historical knowledge.

It would not be difficult to imagine that Brown could follow a similar program with regard to geography, except for the fact that no counterparts to Schiller, Hume, Robertson, and Gibbon had taken on problems of geography and established clear or readily accessible conceptual foundations upon which Brown could build. As Brown would observe, even the word geography, "as it is usually employed," was "capricious and anomalous," in the sense that it seemed "to comprehend every thing."[20] Because geography was conceived simply and broadly as a "description of the earth," there were no clear articulations of what constituted geographical knowledge *per se*—no precise terms upon which to differentiate between geography and a genre like travel writing. By taking account of geographical discourse in the pages of his periodicals, Brown could begin to see and address these and other issues—for example, the largely nationalist rationale for producing geographical knowledge and the inefficacy of many widely-available geographical materials. The most obvious problem of geography, Brown observed, was

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happiness of mankind" by modeling "right conduct." It was this very aim that justified the "certain license of invention" that Brown came to identify at the heart of fiction and history alike. ("Walstein's School of History. From the German of Krants of Gotha [Second and Last Part]," *Monthly Magazine and American Review* 1, no. 6 (September 1799): 407. [A.]) On Brown's views of his novels, see Ernest Marchand, "The Literary Opinions of Charles Brockden Brown," *Studies in Philology* 31, no. 4 (October 1934): 541–66; Jane Tompkins, "What Happens in Wieland," in *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 40–61; Dillon, "'The Highest Province of Benevolence': Charles Brockden Brown's Fictional Theory"; Thomas Koenigs, "'Whatever May Be the Merit of My Book as a Fiction': Wieland's Instructional Fictionality," *ELH* 79, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 715–45; Bryan Waterman, "Charles Brockden Brown and the Novels of the Early Republic," in *The Cambridge History of the American Novel*, ed. Leonard Cassuto, Clare Virginia Eby, and Benjamin Reiss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 51–66; Bryan Waterman, "Later Years, 1795–1810," in *The Oxford Handbook of Charles Brockden Brown*, ed. Philip Barnard, Hilary Emmett, and Stephen Shapiro (Oxford University Press, 2019), 23–43.

[20] "Geographical Systems," *Literary Magazine and American Register* 6, no. 36 (September 1806): 224. [B.]

simply that much of the world remained undocumented and therefore, from Brown's perspective, unknown. But even this basic problem remained critically unexamined. It was not precisely clear, for example, how much of the world was insufficiently documented or even what constituted that insufficiency. Geographical materials—globes, textbooks, maps, gazetteers—did not rigorously account for their blank spots. Brown recognized, however, that the production of geography could not proceed in earnest without the establishment, first, of a clear view of the present state and extent of geographical knowledge.

Surveys of the "Unknown"

Early in the run of Brown's first periodical, *The Monthly Magazine and American Review*, a letter to the editor titled "On the Stature of Man" addresses the question of whether it is possible that groups of humans radically greater or lesser in size than average exist somewhere in the world.[21] Noting that other species are "diversified in size, without material variations in organs and habits," the letter-writer asks, in all apparent earnestness

> Why may not the human species be susceptible of as great varieties of bulk as the cat, lizard, or monkey? What should hinder the belief of the possible existence of beings distinguished from other animals by the possession of reason and speech, but varying from each other in bulk, at all the intermediate degrees between ten inches in length to twenty feet? Is there any absurdity in conjecturing that these varieties have heretofore existed, or that the endless progress of time, and combinations of events may hereafter produce them? (248)

Recognizing that there is no doubt something absurd in the conjecture that "the fictions of Dean Swift, in his history of Lilliput, which have been deemed the most improbable of all fictions, might be literally realized," the writer shifts the ground of his argument from a basis in biology

[21] "On the Stature of Man," *Monthly Magazine and American Review* 1, no. 4 (April 1799): 247–54. [A.] Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically by page number.

to a basis in geography: “There is another reason why we should not hastily deny the existence of a *little* or *big* people, merely because we do not find any such in a survey of the globe. *Let it be remembered how imperfect our knowledge is of the globe we inhabit*” (250, emphasis added).

After issuing this reminder, the writer goes on to describe in great detail what he understands to be the present boundaries of geographical knowledge of each continent, asking the reader to consider, meanwhile, “With how much [of the world] are we so well acquainted as to be able to pronounce that it is inhabited by neither pigmies nor giants?” (250). Taking each continent and island in turn, totaling “about forty millions of square miles,” the writer demonstrates that even on landmasses “known with considerable accuracy”—such as Europe and “the rest of this continent, from the isthmus of Suez to Kamtchatka”—significant areas remained “wholly unknown”: “The coasts of Pegu, Siam, Malacca, and Cochin China, have been transiently surveyed”; of Borneo “we know little more than the aspect of its lofty shores”; of Africa, “we have sailed along its coasts and possess some knowledge of the banks of the Nile and Senegal, and of the coasts of the Mediterranean and Red Seas; but four fifths of the whole are entirely unknown”; of the western part of North America, the “northern portion” is “somewhat known,” but “to the disgrace of our own age and nation, the rest is quite as much unknown to us, as are the mountains of Upper Siam or the western rivers of New-Holland”; and of South America, “[we] may gain, perhaps, an adequate conception of the ignorance of the Portuguese and Spaniards, respecting their interior country, by comparing it with our own ignorance of the regions beyond the sources of the Mississippi and Missouri” (250-251).

The letter concludes by offering a general inference pertaining to its original question on “the stature of man,” declaring that judgment on that question ought to be withheld “while three fourths of the habitable globe have never been explored, and the creatures that inhabit them are

absolutely unknown to us." While this is perhaps an unsatisfying (if philosophically sound) conclusion, the letter-writer, likely Brown himself, arrives at it by undertaking a task that had never been discussed so directly: he offers an outline of the limits of world geographical knowledge and, in doing so, makes evident what he describes as "our unacquaintance with the world" (253).

At the time of this letter's publication just before the turn of the nineteenth century, the nature and extent of this "unacquaintance"—what Brown describes as "our own ignorance"—had not before been so clearly delineated. While there was certainly no shortage of geographical texts, such as maps, atlases gazetteers, and textbooks, from which limits of geographical knowledge might have been derived piecemeal, no texts, geographical or otherwise, had undertaken so directly the task of positively identifying areas, physical or conceptual, in need of further study. In this regard, geography had not yet developed into a distinct modern discourse in the way that other discourses had by that time, by virtue of reflexive critical accounts detailing discursive limits, objects of study, acceptable methods for studying those objects, and proper manners of speaking about them.[22] Geographical discourse was among the last of the sciences to modernize in this way, with critical accounts generally pointing to a time later in the nineteenth century.

[22] On modern knowledge formations, in particular the distinction between discourses and disciplines, see Peter Weingart, "A Short History of Knowledge Formations," in *The Oxford Handbook of Interdisciplinarity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 3–14; David R. Shumway, David Sylvan, and Ellen Messer-Davidow, eds., *Knowledges: Historical and Critical Studies in Disciplinarity*, Knowledge, Disciplinarity and Beyond (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993); Stephen Turner, "Knowledge Formations: An Analytic Framework," in *Oxford Handbook of Interdisciplinarity*, ed. Robert Frodeman, Julie Thompson Klein, and Roberto C. S. Pacheco, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 9–19. Also useful is Hayden White's Forward to Jacques Rancière, *The Names of History: On the Poetics of Knowledge*, trans. Hassan Melehy (Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), vi–xix.

That geographical discourse lacked clear definition at this time is illustrated quite plainly by an April 1804 report written by a subcommittee of the Harvard Corporation and Board of Overseers, composed of three future Harvard presidents, tasked with taking "a general view of Geography as a branch of study in a regular course of education." In a lengthy footnote, the subcommittee concedes that "in the present stage of the inquiry, it is not easy to give a particular description of what is conceived to be the confines or common boundary of Geography and those branches of knowledge with which it is most closely connected."[23] In a more practical context, the nascence of geographical discourse is exemplified in the original journals of the Lewis and Clark expedition, which departed the very next month, in May 1804. According to historian of geography William Morris Davis, these journals are certainly a "great body of carefully recorded facts," but their "geographical vocabulary was limited." Davis attributes this limitation not to any deficiency in the explorers' powers of observation or description, but to the nascent (or non-existent) state of geographical discourse at the time: "the really fundamental reason for imperfection of their geographical records was that there was no comprehensive scheme of geographical science then in existence." Davis notes, additionally, that "these two explorers did not seem to recognize the absence of such a scheme" and therefore "they made no conscious effort to develop it."[24]

Charles Brockden Brown, in contrast, was acutely aware of the "absence of such a scheme"—of the fact that there was no "exact" account, as he would put it, of "the actual

[23] Warntz, *Geography Now and Then*, 29–34.

[24] Davis, "The Progress of Geography in the United States," 162–63.

boundaries of our present & former knowledge."[25] This statement comes from a March 1803 letter from Brown to his friend the Reverend Samuel Miller in which he offers comments on the first edition of Miller's pioneering work of intellectual history, *A Brief Retrospect of the Eighteenth Century* (1803). Of all the topics covered in the first volume—physics, chemistry, natural history, and medicine—Brown focuses on Miller's handling of geography, claiming that it is "the only subject in which I was at all qualified to correct any mistakes you have committed." But rather than simply correcting Miller's mistakes, Brown puts his qualifications on full display by offering nuanced commentary on geographical knowledge and, most importantly, on the matter of accounting for geographical knowledge.

After insisting on his qualification to comment on geography, Brown declares that Miller's book has failed to give a sufficient account of the subject as a whole:

> I admire what you have done on Geography, but a Man whose favourite pursuit it was, would have given an exact, (& equally brief,) survey of the actual boundaries of our former & present knowledge.[26]

Brown's use of geographic terms to describe the matter of accounting for geographical knowledge—calling for a "survey" of its "boundaries"—is not just a clever conceit. Given that the limits of geographical knowledge at the time could be marked off by clear physical boundaries, as in the letter "On the Stature of Man," his proposal for a "survey" of geography could very well be taken literally, whereby a survey of geographical knowledge would be tantamount to a survey of the world itself. But his proposal also operates metaphorically, in the sense that it conceives of geographical knowledge itself as a spatial entity distinct from the

[25] Charles Brockden Brown, *Collected Writings of Charles Brockden Brown*, ed. Philip Barnard, Elizabeth Hewitt, and Mark L. Kamrath, vol. 1 (Lewisburg, PA : Lanham, Maryland: Bucknell University Press ; Co-published with The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc, 2013), 604.

[26] Brown, 1:604.

world, with boundaries that are not just physical but also conceptual. What constitutes the "unknown," in that case, is not the just the various expanses of land yet to be documented, but also concerns yet to be addressed, types of information yet to be gathered, and mistakes yet to be corrected.

Brown begins to signal this understanding of geographical knowledge in the letter's next sentence, where he uses the phrase "small compass" to convey in spatial terms what he sees as the limited scope of eighteenth-century advancements in geography: "The facts, actually added to the science & the Mistakes rectified [over the course of the eighteenth century], might have been brought within small compass."[27] This statement is a direct challenge to Miller's account of advancements in eighteenth-century geography, in which Miller claims—also using spatial terms—that no science was "more improved and extended" during that century than geography:

> At the beginning of the century, almost half the surface of the globe was either unknown, or the knowledge of it was so small and indistinct, as to be of little practical value. Since that time such discoveries and improvements have been made, that geography has assumed a new face, and become almost a new science.[28]

For Miller, unlike for Brown, the boundaries of the subject of geography were coterminous with the boundaries of the world. This conception is exhibited by Miller's discussion of geographical knowledge in terms of size, starting out "small and indistinct" and growing over the course of the eighteenth century by virtue of "expeditions of discovery and of scientific research." Each expedition, he claims, "contributed to enlarge the sphere of our information with respect to distant countries." By the logic of Miller's account, the "sphere of information" about the world should, ideally, expand over time until it matched the sphere of the world itself.[29]

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[27] Brown, 1:604–5.

[28] Samuel Miller, *A Brief Retrospect of the Eighteenth Century*, vol. 1 (New York: T. and J. Swords, 1803), 326–27.

[29] Miller, 1:327. In some cases, Miller praises a work of geography in qualitative terms, noting its "accuracy" and "faithfulness." Such judgments can hardly be taken as authoritative, however, as there was often no basis for making

That Brown conceived of geographical knowledge in a fundamentally different and more nuanced way is signaled in the next sentence of his letter, a seemingly offhand comment about the career of celebrated English geographer James Rennell: "The chief glory of Rennel [*sic*] has been to verify, & thus to revive the Knowledge of Herodotus & Strabo."[30] If his prior claim, that all the additions and improvements to eighteenth-century geography could be "brought within small compass," did not make clear to Miller his views on the recent progress of geography, this sentence would have. As Brown knew, Rennell's contributions to eighteenth-century geography far exceeded the volume on ancient geography ("the Knowledge of Herodotus & Strabo") that he had recently published. Indeed, by the time of Brown's letter, Rennell had garnered a significant reputation as a surveyor and mapmaker, his maps of India having earned him a fellowship in the Royal Society and considerable accolades. Miller's own account of Rennell's work, accordingly, praises his work on the "geography and condition of *Hindostan*," affirming that Rennell's "map of that country, and his memoir accompanying it, have been pronounced, by a good judge, one of the most instructive and valuable geographical presents ever made to the public."[31] Brown's assertion that Rennell's "chief glory" is not the sum of his most distinguished accomplishments to date but rather his recent work on the subject of ancient geography—an account of the so-called "ancient world," from the Middle East to the British Isles—is either an indication of

such judgments, especially in regard to the world's least-documented places. In his section on America, for example, Miller can offer little more than a list of names of those who had reported on different parts of the continent. Of recently published reports on Virginia, Kentucky, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Maine by Thomas Jefferson, Gilbert Imlay, Jeremy Belknap, Samuel Williams, and James Sullivan respectively, Miller offers only the assurance that each place had been "well illustrated" (350). Miller praises Jedidiah Morse's *Universal American Geography*, then, for being "well known" and "very honourably rewarded by public patronage." In all, very little is communicated about the "actual boundaries" of America and American geography alike.

[30] Brown, *Collected Writings of Charles Brockden Brown*, 1:605.

[31] Miller, *A Brief Retrospect of the Eighteenth Century*, 1803, 1:339.

Brown's lack of familiarity with Rennell's prior work or a pointed commentary on the relative value of his various contributions to the subject.[32] Judged as the latter, the clearest reason for Brown to value Rennell's study of ancient geography over his map of India is that he considered the former to do more than the latter to expand the "boundaries" of knowledge as *he* conceived them.

The full title of Rennell's book, as published in its second edition, is *The Geographical System of Herodotus Examined and Explained, by a comparison with those of other ancient authors, and with modern geography*. By recommending to Miller this work of comparative geography, which judged ancient authors next to modern geographers, Brown signaled not just the kind of geographical knowledge that he considered most valuable, but also the kind of *survey* of geographical knowledge that he considered most valuable: he did not just want a survey of the world, but also a critical and comparative survey of the *writing* of the world. While Rennell's map of India fulfilled Miller's idea of the expansion of geographical knowledge, through its documentation of a part of the world formerly regarded as "unknown," it was Rennell's study of ancient geography that fulfilled Brown's idea of the expansion of geographical knowledge, through its enrichment of existing geographical discourse: a detailed comparative account of "former & present knowledge" of parts of the world *already presumed to be known*. The "unknown," for Brown, was not just the various undocumented expanses of land on the globe, but also, and equally worthy of consideration, the various ideas, concerns, and subjects of inquiry that had not yet been sufficiently studied or adjudicated—about "unknown" and "known" places alike. A key consequence of Brown's alternative conception of improvement of geographical

[32] James Rennell is mentioned in passing (spelled "Rennel") in "The Scribbler No. II," in *The Portfolio* Feb. 1809 (cited in Kennedy, 32), in an essay on "the pleasures of study," including the study of subjects no one else seems to care about.

discourse a shift in conception of who should undertake such improvements. Reflexive surveys of "former & present knowledge" of geography would best be undertaken not by a geographer, whose object of study is the world itself, but by a person whose object of study was geographical knowledge—or, as Brown puts it, "a Man whose favourite pursuit it was." With his spatialized concept of geographical knowledge, as a field with "boundaries," Brown essentially conceives of the need for a second-order geographer: a geographer of geography.[33]

It is important to recognize that any critical shortcomings exhibited in Miller's report on geography—his focus on geographical knowledge in terms of quantity rather than quality, for example—are less a result of a deficiency in Miller's critical faculties than a consequence of the fact, discussed above, that geographical discourse had not yet been clearly defined. The relative nascence of geography as a distinct discourse is reflected by the disparity between Miller's handling of geography and his handling of history, which by that time had a robust critical tradition, developed largely by virtue of the contentious nature of ecclesiastical history. Geographic works, by contrast, were not so contentious as to have prompted similar treatment, as is made clear—as it might have been made clear for Brown—by a comparison of Miller's handling of history to his handling of geography.

[33] The conception of knowledge in the spatial metaphor of "fields" would only later become commonplace. The OED lists the earliest instance of this sense, as in "field of study," in 1825. Knowledge was more commonly conceived of as a tree, on which subjects are depicted as individual branches, each descended from the same body, and therefore all constituting a unified whole. Brown himself even employs this metaphor earlier in his letter to Miller, invoking the "chief branches of Knowledge discussed in the first volume." According to this conception, knowledge accumulates (or grows) outward in a linear fashion—new knowledge builds on but does not replace old knowledge, except in cases of error. (On Diderot's description of knowledge as a tree, see David Bates, "Cartographic Aberrations: Epistemology and Order in the Encyclopedic Map," in *Using the Encyclopédie: Ways of Knowing, Ways of Reading*, ed. Daniel Brewer and Julie Candler Hayes, SVEC, 2002:05 (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2002), 8.) Brown invoked the conceptual sense of "field" regularly in his periodical writing, in such phrases "field of inquiry," "field of thought," and "field of improvement." He also uses the phrase "field of investigation" in the preface to *Edgar Huntly*.

Miller begins his report on history, as he does his account of geography, by noting a significant increase in the *quantity* of knowledge produced in that field during the eighteenth century:

> No former period, certainly, can be compared to this with respect to the multiplication of historical records. Scarcely any portion of time, or the affairs of any nation, or the lives of any conspicuous monarchs, have escaped the notice of some writer who aspired to the rank of an historian. Indeed this, like every other department of modern composition, has become, within a few years past, so crowded with adventurers as to render the enumeration of them next to an impossible task.[34]

The report then turns to a discussion of improvements in the *quality* of historical work during the same period—a turn that does not occur in the report on geography. Miller praises eighteenth-century historians, for example, for "present[ing] their readers with a greater portion of *truth*, and instructive matter, than any preceding writers of the same class," particularly classical Greek and Roman historians, whose works, he notes, "are notoriously corrupted by a large mixture of fable."[35] Miller goes on to offer some comparative analysis of the qualitative discrepancy between ancient and modern historians, following the very same approach as James Rennell's, noting, for example, a difference in the nature of their respective source materials: ancient historians, he reports, were hindered by the fact that they had access only to "manuscripts and traditional records," which were "so obviously imperfect and fabulous that no prudent writer … would receive materials from it with confidence."[36]

[34] Samuel Miller, *A Brief Retrospect of the Eighteenth Century*, vol. 2 (New York: T. and J. Swords, 1803), 130.

[35] Miller, 2:130 (emphasis in original).

[36] Miller, 2:131.

In his section on geography, Miller suggests that geographical works might be subjected to a similar comparative assessment, but he leaves that to someone better acquainted with the subject:

> The difference in fulness and accuracy, between the geographical treatises published at the commencement of the eighteenth century, and those which appeared toward the close of it, can be adequately conceived by none but those who have compared them together.[37]

Miller's deferral to "those who have compared [such texts] together" resembles Brown's own deferral to "a Man whose favourite pursuit it was." Given Brown's well-established preoccupation with the subject, both might have even had Brown in mind for the job. Despite his qualifications, however, Brown would never produce such a comparative survey of geography. The closest he would come would be in the consistent coverage of geographic topics and texts in his periodical publications—coverage that began in the very first issue of his first periodical, *The Monthly Magazine and American Review*.

Geography in the Monthly Magazine

A letter to the editor in the first issue of Brown's *Monthly Magazine* (April 1799) titled "Parallel Between New England and Great Britain," embodies two key facets of Brown's approach to improving the state of geographical discourse in America: impartiality and ease of access.[38] The letter opens by expressing its intent to offer American readers an amusing and instructive geographical comparison:

> In examining lately a geographical treatise, I was accidentally led to consider in what circumstances, beside the name, that portion of our country called New-England, resembled the island of Great Britain, of which it is a sort of daughter. Some of your

[37] Miller, *A Brief Retrospect of the Eighteenth Century*, 1803, 1:351.

[38] "On the Parallels Between New England and Great Britain," *Monthly Magazine and American Review* 1, no. 1 (April 1799): 12–15. [Not attributed to Brown; no source identified.] Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically by page number.

> readers may be amused, and, perhaps, instructed, by knowing the result of my comparison. (12)

This letter's comparison of New England and Great Britain follows what Martin Brückner calls "textbook protocols," in the sense that it describes each place according to categories typically covered in geography textbooks: "dimension, latitude and longitude, climate, population, and character."[39] However, the piece deviates from the conventions of geography textbooks in two important respects: ideology and materiality. With regard to ideology, the letter anticipates readers' assumption that an assessment of "the moral and political condition" of the U.S. and Great Britain written by an American might be motivated by nationalistic rather than scientific concerns, resulting in a text that "might, perhaps, be deemed invidious." To avoid this, and to produce an account that will be "curious and instructive" rather than divisive, the writer pledges to offer only "few remarks on this head" and to "leave the reader to deduce his own inferences" about the moral and political differences between the U.S. and Great Britain (13). In other words, the writer attempts to avoid the kind of overt promotion of nationalist interests that underwrote other prominent works of American geography at the time, most notably those by Jedidiah Morse.

The letter deviates from its textbook counterparts also, and more obviously, in its materiality: not only is the letter a distillation, as it announces, of information from a "geographical treatise," but it is also published in what is described in the letter itself as the "more cheap and commodious" format of the periodical ("commodious" in the sense of "convenient") (13). By making this extract of comparative geography accessible in a periodical

[39] Brückner, *The Geographic Revolution in Early America*, 185.

format, Brown makes an effort to address a problem discussed in detail in the very next letter in the same issue: the problem of ready access to "liberal education" in America.

The letter in question, titled "On the State of American Literature," celebrates the arrival of the *Monthly Magazine* on the grounds that it could help mitigate the many structural problems that had impeded the advancement in America of "what is called *liberal education*"—that is, areas of higher learning outside of professional fields like law, medicine, and theology.[40] According to the letter-writer, such problems included the "defective plans of tuition in our Colleges and Universities," wherein professors were "wretchedly unqualified for their station"; the "small number of distinguished scholars" and people generally "entitled to the name of *learned*"; the hope of "very little reward" for pursuing intellectual labor in the United States; and, finally, "the scarcity of books, and the difficulty of procuring them" (16-19). The letter illustrates a diligent student's plight as he struggles to navigate such conditions, both physically and emotionally:

> The student, compassed about with obstacles at best, ought not to have the additional one of spending as much time and thought to obtain a book as the reading it ten times would cost; or the still greater mortification of being obliged to relinquish the pursuit after days, and, perhaps, months of diligent search. Nor are the deficiencies of our public libraries by any means supplied by private collections, or by the enterprise and literary character of booksellers. (19)

Given the conditions of "scarcity" and the prevalence of "obstacles," few Americans would have had the time or resources necessary to pursue a "liberal" subject with any depth or sophistication, and even a diligent student like the one imagined for the purposes of this letter could only hope for moderate results—for "a degree of information and of intellectual polish much less accurate and less extensive than is called by the same name in almost any other country" (15).

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[40] Samuel Miller, "On the State of American Literature," *Monthly Magazine and American Review* 1, no. 1 (April 1799): 15. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically by page number.

The letter ends on an optimistic note, declaring that "the remedies of the evil in question"—namely, the inadequate state of the American education system—"are obvious, and to a certain degree, quite within our power" (19). To that end, the letter-writer—Samuel Miller, author of *A Brief Retrospect of the Eighteenth Century* (1803)[41]—heralds the *Monthly Magazine* as "a prospect of considerable improvement in our [U.S. Americans'] literary taste and pursuits," concluding: "[I] cannot help flattering myself that the establishment of your Magazine will materially subserve the interests of letters and sciences in America" (19).

With regard to the improvement of geographical pursuits, Brown saw to it that such interests were "materially subserve[d]" in each of his periodicals—the *Monthly Magazine*, the *Literary Magazine* and even the radically reimagined *American Register*—in a variety of forms, from original and reprinted essays, brief notices, and letters to the editor (many authored by Brown himself), to detailed reviews and extended excerpts from recently published works. But Brown's approach to improving geographical discourse in the U.S. was not simply to increase the availability and variety of geographical materials. As mentioned above, geographical materials were not in short supply in the U.S. at the time. Brown's primary focus, then, was not on the circulation of geographical material but on the communication of geographical knowledge.

Brown's views on geographical discourse were in large part informed by the advances in geography that he saw in works produced in England and Europe, particularly in works on American geography. Historians of geography have often remarked that Europeans in the

[41] The essay is signed "M" in the *Monthly Magazine*, but Miller would later publish it under his own name, with some changes, in the final section of his *Brief Retrospect* (1803). For a brief comparison of the two versions, see Walter H. Eitner, "Samuel Miller's Nation 'Lately Become Literary': The *Brief Retrospect* in Brockden Brown's *Monthly Magazine*," *Early American Literature* 13, no. 2 (Fall 1978).

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries possessed more precise knowledge of the American continent than many Americans, who were "too busy exploring their country and [therefore] left description and analysis to foreign writers."[42] Brown calls attention to this phenomenon in a brief notice, printed in August 1800, marking the publication of a substantial volume of American geography by German history professor Christoph Daniel Ebeling:

> C. D. Ebeling, Professor of History, and Keeper of the Public Library in Hamburgh, whose fourth volume of American Geography, in the Germany tongue, was mentioned in the Medical Repository, published in this city, has published a fifth. It is a large octavo of more than eight hundred pages, and comprehends his account of the State of Delaware and Maryland. We cannot discover any diminution of the industry and talents displayed in the former parts of this laborious and interesting work.[43]

After beginning with a celebration of Ebeling's work and its contribution to American geography, the notice ends with an appeal to prospective American geographers to join Ebeling in his "laudable undertaking":

> Convinced of the utility of communicating to European writers a true state of things as they exist in America, we again express our hope, that the gentlemen of the United States who have leisure and opportunities, will aid Mr. Ebeling in this laudable undertaking, so that the accounts printed in the eastern hemisphere, concerning the present condition of the western, may be correct and authentic.[44]

In this notice, Brown shows that he is less concerned with the national origins of American geography, denoted by the nationality of the geographer, than he is with the production and dissemination of American geographical knowledge—what he refers to as "communicating … a true state of things as they exist in America." Brown clearly demonstrates this in his appeal to Americans to "aid Mr. Ebeling" in his "laudable undertaking." Compare this appeal to Jedidiah

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[42] Geoffrey J. Martin, *All Possible Worlds: A History of Geographical Ideas*, 4th ed (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 157. See also Walls, *The Passage to Cosmos*, 133.

[43] "Miscellaneous Articles of Literary and Philosophical Intelligence, Domestic," 155.

[44] "Miscellaneous Articles of Literary and Philosophical Intelligence, Domestic," 155–56.

Morse's proposition in the preface to the first edition of his *American Geography* (1789) that, in the wake of U.S. independence, European accounts of America ought to be supplanted by new *American* American geography:

> Europeans have been the sole writers of American Geography, and have too often suffered fancy to supply the place of facts, and thus have led their readers into errors, while they professed to aim at removing their ignorance. But since the United States have become an independent nation, and have risen into Empire, it would be reproachful for them to suffer this ignorance to continue; and the rest of the world have a right now to expect authentic information.[45]

Given its aim of promoting a sense of national identity and civic belonging among citizens of the new United States, such books did not serve the "strictly geographical" function that Brown conceived, in the sense of "communicating … a true state of things." The priority Brown placed on the communication of geographical knowledge is clearly expressed in his comments elsewhere on Ebeling's multi-volume American geography project, in which his most significant grievance is that Ebeling's work would not be accessible to most American readers, as it would not be translated from the original German: "We lament that this work, so judiciously and ably executed, and containing such a fund of information respecting our country, should be, in a great measure, lost to a large portion of our citizens for want of being translated."[46]

Brown's lament that Ebeling's work was inaccessible to "a large portion of our citizens" was in some ways assuaged by his finding newly published sources of geographical knowledge that *would* be accessible to American readers. In his review of John Drayton's *A View of South Carolina* (1802), for example, he proclaims his "great pleasure in meeting" (as if by accident) a detailed account of a whole U.S. state. In celebrating this work's contribution to increasing the

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[45] Jedidiah Morse, *The American Geography*, First Edition (Elizabethtown: Shepard Kollock, 1789), v.

[46] "Miscellaneous Articles of Literary and Philosophical Intelligence, Foreign," *Monthly Magazine and American Review* 3, no. 1 (July 1800): 78. [B.]

fund of American geographical knowledge, Brown also calls attention to that fund's relative poverty overall:

> We have great pleasure in meeting with a work of this kind. At present, the geographical and statistical condition of the United States is very little known; and it can only be known by the compilation of works like the present. The District of Maine, the States of Vermont and New-Hampshire are the only portions of our country, which have been made the subjects of particular histories or descriptions, before the present undertaking; and we now add the name of Drayton to those of Williams and Belknap, as the literary benefactors of their country.[47]

Furthermore, in declaring that the "geographical and statistical condition of the United States" can "only" be known through state-based accounts like those by Drayton, Williams, and Belknap,[48] Brown implicitly rejects the various other approaches to communicating geographical knowledge already widely available to American readers at the time, such as maps, gazetteers, and, most substantially, geography textbooks.

That such prevalent geographical works were insufficiently communicative Brown argued on the basis of what he identified as "the prevailing ignorance of geography." In an essay titled "On the Prevailing Ignorance of Geography" Brown dramatizes what he perceived as a curious feature of the economy of geographical knowledge in America: a disparity between the ready availability of geographic materials and Americans' general lack of acquaintance with geographical knowledge.[49] "In truth," Brown writes, "notwithstanding the facility with which geographical knowledge may be gained, there are few things with which men in general are less

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[47] "[Review of] *A View of South Carolina, as Respects Her Natural and Civil Concerns*... by John Drayton," *Literary Magazine and American Register* 1, no. 1 (October 1803): 30. [B.]

[48] As noted in the introduction above, there were many other state-based accounts, or inventories, then in print, most notably Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*. It is not clear why Brown lists only the works of Drayton, Williams, and Belknap.

[49] "On the Prevailing Ignorance of Geography," *Monthly Magazine* 3, no. 6 (December 1800): 410–12. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically by page number. [A.]

acquainted" (410). Brown illustrates this in a comical vignette at the opening of the article depicting a group of Americans at a social gathering trading stories and sharing a laugh over the ignorance of Welshmen regarding the geography of North America. In the course of reporting on others' geographical ignorance these Americans unwittingly betray their own ignorance, specifically on matters of Welsh geography: one refers to Wales as "the *city* of Wales," one confuses it with a suburb of Philadelphia called "North-Wales," and one describes it as being "in Europe," before confidently correcting himself and asserting that Wales is, of course, "part of England." The vignette ends with the ironic revelation that the conversation, amounting to a "series of geographical blunders," was conducted "in full view" of a large map of Europe:

> This series of geographical blunders was, perhaps, the more remarkable, as there was hung up in full view, on the wall of the apartment, a large map of Europe; and all the parties in this discussion had been, for a long time, accustomed to assemble conversationally in this room. (410)

Brown's point here is not to criticize these or other Americans for their ignorance of geography, or even for their hypocrisy, but to call attention to the conditions under which such ignorance could come to prevail, free from any meaningful challenge. That Brown does not mean to censure the individuals depicted in his vignette is substantiated by the fact that he quickly excuses their "blunders" by conceding the triviality of precise geographical knowledge, noting that such knowledge, as he puts it, is "not immediately connected with any of the common pursuits of life." Brown declares, with not a little hyperbole, that a person "may outlive Methusalem, and bear his part in ordinary transactions without discredit, who yet knows not whether Indostan be an isthmus or peninsula." Geographical knowledge, he goes on to say, is "doubtless" the least important column in the edifice of knowledge:

> Knowledge in general has been sometimes represented as a dome resting upon columns, which columns are the sciences. That column which contributes least to the grandeur or stability of the edifice, is doubtless physical geography, or the science which acquaints us with the mode in which land and water, mountain and stream, are distributed over the

surface of the globe. (411)

He illustrates this point by listing several questions pertaining to physical geography and insisting upon their lack of significance:

> Whether the isle of New-Zealand be hills or plains; whether the south pole be surrounded by continent or ocean; whether the Niger flows east or west; and whether the Nile proceeds, like other rivers, from springs in the earth or from hills in the moon, are points than which it is hard to imagine any less important to our happiness, or less conducive to the advancement in any of the useful arts or abstruse sciences. (411)

Given Brown's long-standing personal and increasingly professional interest in geography, it is difficult to reconcile what comes across in this essay as his concession to the irrelevance of geographical knowledge. If he is being disingenuous for effect, it is difficult to discern through the apparent frankness of his statements. It seems that Brown's point, then, is to call attention to something of an incongruity, that despite the apparent triviality of these geographical questions, a non-trivial amount of effort has been expended in attempting to answer them:

> Every one knows the time, pains, and *pence* which the investigation of the three last questions has occasioned, and how much stress has been laid, by very grave people, on their accurate decision; yet, surely human curiosity could scarcely be more idly employed. (411)

This, it seems is the real object of Brown's concern in this particular article, not that individuals are ignorant of geographical facts, but that certain attitudes toward geographical knowledge have allowed for that ignorance and perpetuated the degree of insignificance generally accorded to it.

It is important to point out that Brown does not call into question what Martin Brückner has shown to be the extraordinary "geographic literacy" of Americans in the early national period (characterized by widespread familiarity with the forms of geographical knowledge as a result of geographic texts being at the center of the era's pedagogy).[50] That is to say, Brown does

[50] Brückner, *The Geographic Revolution in Early America*.

not suggest that these Americans would be incapable of obtaining the geographical knowledge so readily available to them—indeed, hanging over their heads. It seems, rather, that he is highlighting their lack of incentive to do so. Their geographical ignorance has evidently had no negative effect on their "common pursuits" nor caused them any discomfort, as the vignette illustrates, in their social interactions.

Brown illustrates the perceived irrelevance of geographical knowledge in more material circumstances in a later piece titled "Literary Blunders" (1805), in which he insists that "geographical errors" are "more common in books than any other kind of errors."[51] At first Brown is inclined to excuse such errors, on account of "the infinite variety and number of particulars of which geography consists":

> On this account, a writer may be reasonably excused if, on some occasions, he should place an inland town on the sea-side, or remove a country a few hundred miles further from some other country than nature has done.

However, Brown quickly withdraws the basis for this excuse, pointing out the ease with which such errors could be avoided, given the ready availability of geographical texts:

> But these errors will be entitled to less excuse, when we reflect on the extreme facility with which every man of books may make himself acquainted with most points of geographical knowledge, whenever he has occasion for this knowledge. Maps are generally at hand, or easily procured, and when we are not certain, it becomes us to take the trouble to enquire, especially as that trouble is, in most cases, extremely small.

Again, Brown does not insist that Americans are incapable of attaining accurate geographical knowledge, simply that they have—or have been given—no incentive for doing so.

Brown does not offer a strong argument for the significance of geographical knowledge in either of these articles. In his note on "Literary Blunders" he simply says that "it becomes us to take the

[51] "Literary Blunders," *Literary Magazine and American Register* 3, no. 18 (March 1805): 188. [H. The portions of this item quoted here are attributed to Brown.]

trouble to enquire," while in his article on "Prevailing Ignorance" he concludes by suggesting only that geographical knowledge can be beneficial, although not essential, to understanding accounts of history:

> The value of geographical knowledge lies in its subservience to other arts or pursuits. It cannot boast of being a necessary handmaid to any; but, its benefits to the reader of history are most conspicuous. It serves to make images flowing from narrations more vivid and durable, though it is not necessary to make them intelligible. (411–412)

If Brown could not offer his own clear answer to such a fundamental question—why is geographical knowledge significant?—neither could he find a satisfying answer in any existing works of geography. Indeed, he found such books, ostensibly dedicated to the subject, to be such inadequate sources of geographical knowledge or discussion of geography that he did not consider them to be works of geography at all, declaring, quite bluntly, that "no compilation or system, merely geographical, has hitherto appeared":

> Books under this title contain a medley of information, historical, statistical, philosophical, and moral; and, I may also add, astronomical: but the geography of these productions is little more than is contained in the maps which sometimes accompany them. (411)

Brown expands on this critique in a later essay titled "Geographical Systems," published in his second periodical, *The Literary Magazine and American Register*.[52] It is in this essay that he expresses his uncertainty, as noted above, about the meaning of the word "geography," calling it a "capricious and anomalous" word that "seems to comprehend every thing" and carry little specific significance of its own "as it is usually employed" (224). He reaches this conclusion after a detailed review of the very type of texts where the word geography was "usually employed," so-called "geographical systems," the kind of two-volume geography textbooks

[52] "Geographical Systems," *Literary Magazine and American Register* 6, no. 36 (September 1806): 224–25. [B.] Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically by page number.

typically found in American homes and schools at the time, of which Jedidiah Morse's *American Universal Geography* was the most common. According to Brown's account, the content of such textbooks is so ranging and miscellaneous ("a medley of all kinds of knowledge") that only the order of presentation ("in the order of countries, as they stand upon the globe") justifies the use of the word "geography" in the title:

> In those works which are commonly called geographical systems, we find a medley of all kinds of knowledge. A little of civil history, of natural history, of politics, of morals, of philology, of all the arts, and of all the branches of natural philosophy; a hotch-potch of all these makes up a system of geography, in which the principal geographical circumstance is the arrangement. All these scraps and sketches being placed in the order of countries, as they stand upon the globe, serve as an excuse for the title. (224–25)

He goes on to declare that the information in such "systems" is far too afield of geographical knowledge to be considered "strictly geographical," and that the amount of miscellany contained in them inhibits their accomplishing even the most basic aims of geography, even when understood as simply as "description of countries":

> historical and philosophical details encroach upon the space that ought to be devoted to knowledge strictly geographical, and thus, though [the author] swells himself out to two bulky volumes, his description of countries is extremely vague and superficial, and never satisfies a curiosity that wishes to go beyond half a dozen general facts. (225)

While "geographical systems" like Morse's might very well have served their own stated purposes, namely, to foster a sense of national identity, Brown concludes that they were nevertheless inadequate sources of geographical knowledge and therefore poor representatives of the subject of geography.

Brown's review of geographical systems was published in September 1806, seven years since he first addressed the subject in his periodicals, during which time the state of geographical discourse in the U.S. had evidently improved little. Brown's sensitivity to this lack of progress is suggested by his republishing in the December 1806 issue of the *Literary Magazine and American Register* the essay "On the Prevailing Ignorance of Geography" that he had originally

published six years earlier, in December 1800.[53] Also republished in the December 1806 issue is an essay first published more than seven years earlier, in May 1799, that addresses in more direct terms the difference between the circulation of material and the communication of knowledge, in reference not to geographic materials but to the kind of text that was even more prevalent in the early U.S.: almanacs.[54] In doing so, the essay, titled "On Almanacks," articulates a theory of the value of communicating knowledge—that knowledge is a foundational necessity to establishing what he calls "the happiness of mankind"—that would become the basis for his response, in later writings, to the then-unanswered question of the ultimate import of communicating geographical knowledge.

"Diffusion of Knowledge" and the "Happiness of Mankind"

Presented as a letter to editor, but written by Brown himself, "On Almanacks" begins with the author recounting having once taken shelter from a storm, with a few others, in a fisherman's hovel. To fill the time while the storm passed, he reports, he began paging through an almanac that was hanging by a string from a nail in the wall. After perusing the almanac's miscellaneous contents "with much gravity and deliberation," he recalls inquiring of the woman sitting next to him, "what use do you make of this thing?" to which she responded, "why—I don't know—it's an almanac" (86). The woman was clearly familiar with the form and nature of almanacs—she identifies it by name, after the author refers to it as "this thing," and she reports

[53] "On the Prevailing Ignorance of Geography," *Literary Magazine and American Register* 6, no. 39 (December 1806): 467–69. [A.]

[54] "On Almanacks," *Monthly Magazine and American Review* 1, no. 2 (May 1799): 85–88. [A.]; "On the Use of Almanacs," *Literary Magazine and American Register* 6, no. 39 (December 1806): 424–27. [A.] Unless otherwise noted, quotations are taken from the May 1799 *Monthly Magazine* printing. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically by page number.

keeping one in her house, routinely purchasing the latest edition year after year. But she also admits to being completely ignorant of most of the almanac's contents. She used it, she said, "for nothing but the day of the month and the times that the sun rises," but could say nothing at all of the "sundry hard words" used therein—"Quinquagesima, Epiphany, Ascension"—nor could she decipher the many "uncouth characters, squares, and circles, and crosses" that filled its pages. Having received a thorough illustration of the woman's ignorance, the author reports that he "thought proper to put an end to the dialogue" (86). As in the "Ignorance of Geography" article, however, the purpose of this anecdote is not to lampoon anyone but rather to highlight the inefficacy of certain seemingly ubiquitous texts. As with the map on the wall of the parlor and the geography books on the shelf of the literary writer, the almanac on a string in the hovel is stationed within sight but nonetheless largely overlooked and only minimally understood:

> There is scarcely a family, however ignorant and indigent, without one copy hanging constantly in sight, and yet there is no production which fewer understand. (86)

Brown identifies the problem with the almanac as a formal one, a matter of the manner in which its contents are presented:

> The sense [the almanac] contains is not only abstruse and remote from vulgar apprehension, but it is exhibited in the most scientific and concise form. Figures, initials, symbolical characters, and half-words every where abound. (86)

He imagines that an onlooker—a "stranger," as he puts it, or perhaps a future scholar—might mistake the early U.S. for "a very astronomical and learned nation," on the basis that a book that presented information "in a way the most technical imaginable" was "bought annually by every family," "considered as an indispensable piece of household furniture" and "so placed as to be always at hand" (86). On the basis of his observations, however, he concludes that even the widest and most uniform circulation of materials does not necessarily imply the wide and uniform diffusion of knowledge. The information presented by both the almanac and the map

may very well reflect "the progress which the sciences, abstractly considered, have made," but they may nonetheless fail to communicate to any readership the substance of that progress and thereby fail to effectively reduce the "prevailing ignorance" of the subjects they address (88).

At stake in the almanac's failure to communicate its own contents, Brown determines, is what he refers to as "the happiness of mankind":

> The happiness of mankind depends not so much upon the progress which the sciences, abstractly considered, have made, but on the diffusion of the knowledge which already exists. A thousand truths are to be found in the books and meditations of the wise, of which mankind have profited nothing, because, in general, they remain ignorant of their existence. (88)

The phrase "happiness of mankind" and its close correlate "human happiness" are common in Brown's writings, constituting his summation of the end goal of moral, social, and political philosophy, as adapted perhaps most directly from the writings of William Godwin, a connection signaled by the title of Godwin's *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and its Influence on Morals and Happiness* (1793). Brown invoked the concept in both his fiction and his nonfiction. For example, he uses the phrase in *Wieland* to illustrate the depravity of Carwin, whom he characterizes as waging "a perpetual war against the happiness of mankind," and in "Walstein's School of History" to describe the fictive professor's views: "How men might best promote the happiness of mankind in given situations, was the problem that he desired to solve. The more portraits of human excellence he was able to exhibit the better."[55] It was also at the heart of his approach to evaluating cultural works. In the same December 1806 issue of the *Literary Magazine and American Register,* in which "On Almanacks" was reprinted, Brown invokes the phrase to address the question of whether theatrical exhibitions are useful, in a brief essay titled "Are Theatrical Exhibitions Useful?" Rather than coming to a firm conclusion on the matter, he

[55] "Walstein's School of History. From the German of Krants of Gotha [First Part]," 337.

enumerates the many factors that would need to be accounted for in order to come to a firm conclusion—is there a distinction between plays being read versus plays being performed; should one consider the usefulness to both the auditor and actor; what about the same play directed by different people; what about plays from different places or eras? The many factors notwithstanding, the same standard of judgment ultimately comes to bear—what is the effect on the "happiness of mankind":

> None of these circumstances are to be overlooked in a candid discussion of this subject, because they accompany every dramatic performance, and because none of them are neutral or indifferent with regard to the effects produced by this species of amusement on the morals and happiness of mankind.[56]

If the effect on "the happiness of mankind" had long been at the heart of Brown's value system, whether applied to historical writing, human nature, or cultural productions, the correlation he draws in his account of the value of almanacs between human happiness and the diffusion of knowledge is a correlation that would become increasingly important to him and one that can help explain his shift away from fiction-writing toward, among endeavors, the communication of geographical knowledge.

In "On Almanacks," Brown proposes that the diffusion of knowledge could be affected by making the knowledge in question more "simple, intelligible, and concise," "cheaper and more commodious," and available "in more popular and attractive forms":

> It seems as if a man, truly enlightened, should employ himself not in advancing the various branches of physical and moral knowledge to perfection by solitary experiments, and closet speculation; but in contriving and executing schemes for making simple, intelligible, and concise, the sciences in their present state of improvement; in making cheaper and more commodious, in cloathing in more popular and attractive forms, and putting into the possession of a greater number the knowledge already ascertained, and which is most conducive to their welfare. (88)

[56] "Are Theatrical Exhibitions Useful?," *Literary Magazine and American Register* 6, no. 39 (December 1806): 421. [B.]

In his exhortation against attempts to advance physical and moral knowledge by "solitary experiments" and "closet speculation," Brown seems to describe his own endeavors as a novelist. Brown's novels were deeply invested in advancing moral knowledge by depicting characters' responses to an array of extreme circumstances—ventriloquism in *Wieland* (1798), sleepwalking in *Edgar Huntly* (1799), a yellow fever epidemic in *Arthur Mervyn* (1799)—yet he was increasingly aware of the risks involved in that method. In the same December 1806 issue of the *Literary Magazine and American Register*, a negative review of Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther* hinges on the question of whether readers' minds are "strongly formed" enough to derive appropriate moral lessons from the depiction of depraved characters:

> It has been questioned by moralists whether Richardson should ever have drawn his character of Lovelace, because it exhibits a monster of depravity. […] The character of Lovelace is not dressed up in alluring colours like that of Werter [*sic*]; […] Werter, on the contrary, is drawn with a richness, that, however pitiable the real character might be, the danger of a mistaken passion or an immoral indulgence of affection is too great for a picture like this to be safely or prudently entrusted to the consideration of minds not strongly formed.[57]

If Brown's primary interest was in "advancing the various branches of physical and moral knowledge," he might have found narrative fiction to be a vehicle imperfectly suited to the task, particularly after his several novels met with only moderate success, not just in terms of their financial return, but also, perhaps more importantly, in terms of their communicative reach—the priority of which is suggested by Brown's emphasis, in "On Almanacks," on the value of putting knowledge "into the possession of a great number."

With regard to the proper vehicle for effectively communicating "physical and moral knowledge," Brown's essay on almanacs does not conclude, as might be expected, with a clear endorsement of the kind of text in which it appears—the periodical. Instead, it declares that

[57] "The Sorrows of Werter," *Literary Magazine and American Register* 6, no. 39 (December 1806): 451. [B.]

almanacs might be remade into the ideal "instrument" for "the dissemination of truth and happiness":

> I cannot conceive an instrument more useful to this end, and an opportunity more favorable to the dissemination of truth and happiness than an almanack affords. (88)

However, Brown's thinking on the matter of which specific print "instrument" would be best suited to accomplishing the diffusion of knowledge was, evidently, not particularly rigid or uniform. In the same issue of the *Monthly Magazine* in which the essay on almanacs was originally published he also refers to newspapers as ideal "vehicles of knowledge," using language strikingly similar to that used in the promotion of almanacs:

> The virtue and happiness of a people depend chiefly upon two things, the quantity and equal distribution of knowledge and property. […] No vehicles of knowledge were ever conceived more cheap and commodious than newspapers.[58]

Similarly, alongside the second printing of "On Almanacks" appears a lengthy essay (also a reprint, from October 1800, where it was presented as a letter to the editor) defending the value of American newspapers.[59] The piece takes the form of an argument between the author and a "splenetic friend" about the usefulness of American newspapers. This friend regards newspapers in their present state as effectively useless to the general reader, given that they contain, he argues, little more than hastily compiled misinformation on current events and technical information only relevant to merchants and traders:

> How powerful in the cause of true virtue and beneficial knowledge might this instrument be made! … How might the knowledge diffused through costly, or inaccessible, or widely scattered volumes, be compressed, with new forms, arrangements and illustrations, into this easy and current vehicle! How might the truths of science, the maxims of morals and economy, be modelled and distributed anew, be familiarized, and

[58] "On the Parallels Between New England and Great Britain," 13.

[59] "Thoughts on American Newspapers," *Monthly Magazine and American Review* 3, no. 4 (October 1800): 259–64. [B.]; "On American Newspapers," *Literary Magazine and American Register* 6, no. 39 (December 1806): 434–38. [B.] Unless otherwise noted, quotations are taken from the December 1806 *Literary Register* printing. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically by page number.

> rendered, at the same time, captivating and intelligible, in a daily paper! Such are its possible uses; but it is mournful to reflect on the actual application of it. Three-fourths of its contents are wholly useless and foreign to nine-tenths of its readers. (436)

The author then quickly comes to the defense of newspapers, particularly in the context of the early U.S.:

> Instead of lamenting that three-fourths are otherwise engrossed, the friend of mankind should rejoice that literature and morals occupy so large a portion of a production that so widely circulates; and instead of censuring the connection that is thus formed between literature, and lucre, and politics, he should give honour to his countrymen for permitting the alliance, and ardently approve of *such effectual means for introducing the teacher of virtue*, and the preceptor in useful arts, to the counters, desks, and tea-tables of every rank and profession in society. (438, emphasis added)

In defending both the practical and moral value of newspapers, the author declares that it as something of a moral imperative to "[rectify] the ignorance of others":

> In all transactions with our fellow men, we must make account for the influence of passions and prejudices, and draw from their folly, their precipitation, and their selfishness, new motives for industry in searching for truth for ourselves, and for perseverance and ardour in combating the passions and *rectifying the ignorance of others.* (437, emphasis added)

But, the author goes on to say, it is a moral imperative not just to communicate knowledge but also to take an active and vocal critical stance in relation to others' efforts to do the same:

> If newspapers be, in general, the vehicles of falsehood, and men are betrayed, by faithless guides, in the pursuit of their true interest, and the selection of their true friends, *it is criminal to stand idly aloof,* or to content ourselves with reviling either the deceiver or the dupe. No; *it is our business to exert ourselves to show them their preferable path*; and, by shunning all absurd reproaches, all groundless calumnies, all personal altercations, which obscure the penetration in proportion as they inflame the passions of men, we may confer the most signal and illustrious benefits upon our countrymen. (437; emphasis added)

Brown's view that his own periodicals were working to fulfill this imperative is suggested by aspects of the article as originally printed, in the October 1800 *Monthly Magazine*. Presented in that instance as a letter to the editor, the piece concludes with the author (likely Brown) addressing the magazine's editor (certainly Brown) to insist that the *Monthly Magazine* has all of

the same useful potential as newspapers: "Your efforts, Mr. Editor, to attain these useful ends, will gain you the approbation of every lover of his country, and, among the rest, of a [signed] LOOKER-ON."[60]

The same line of thought, on the potential for periodicals to improve the moral condition of its readership through the communication of knowledge, is then taken up in the next letter in the issue: a complaint about the contents of the *Monthly Magazine* up to that point on the grounds that they had not sufficiently fulfilled its moral imperative.[61] The letter-writer, styled "A.Z.," and likely Brown himself, criticizes the editor for producing a magazine that fails to achieve "the two-fold purpose of cultivating, at the same time, the intellectual and moral faculties." The writer notes several articles from previous issues of the magazine that he regards as particularly deficient (one on "the operations of nature in the production of a shark," for instance) before calling on the editor to make "an appropriation of a much larger portion of your Magazine to the labours of the moralist," assuring him that doing so "would procure it a more extensive circulation, and consequently enhance your interest and the benefit of the public" (265). Responding in the adjacent column, the editor—again, also possibly Brown—defends the magazine, declaring that "[l]iterature and science have a strong connection with morality," that "the department of morals is not limited," and that he "cannot but think that a plan which comprehends other branches of knowledge, will be approved by the majority of readers."[62]

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[60] "Thoughts on American Newspapers," 264.

[61] "[A Letter] To the Editor of the Monthly Magazine [Containing a Criticism of the Monthly Magazine]," *Monthly Magazine and American Review* 3, no. 4 (October 1800): 264–65. [B.] Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically by page number.

[62] "Answer to a Letter from A.Z. 'To the Editor of the Monthly Magazine,'" *Monthly Magazine and American Review* 3, no. 4 (October 1800): 265. [B.]

By orchestrating—or fabricating—this back-and-forth between reader and editor, Brown performs the exertion he calls for, the refusal to "stand idly aloof," in order to produce the opposite of "vehicles of falsehood"—vehicles of the "true state of things"—and, by extension, the "happiness of mankind." Geography's place in this scheme would be established by Brown's eventual conclusion, in one of his last works, that geography constituted nothing less than, as he would put it, "the ground work of all knowledge."[63] Arriving at that conclusion—a reversal of his earlier statement that geography was "doubtless" the least important column holding up the "dome" of knowledge—was the work of more than a decade of reflection on the nature of geographical knowledge, largely accomplished through critical assessment in his periodicals of publications related to geography. Of particular importance to Brown's critical process in this regard were works of travel writing, in relation to which he honed his conception of what constituted geographical knowledge and set about presenting that conception and arguing for its significance to American readers.

Travel Writing and Geographical Knowledge

Brown regularly published accounts of places around the world in his periodicals. The first volume of the *Monthly Magazine*, for example, included selections from Mungo Park's travels in the interior of Africa and James Dallaway's notes on Constantinople, as well as sketches of Portugal, Rome, Peru, Morocco, and Hungary. Such accounts often took the form of travel narratives, in the sense that they recounted the experiences and impressions of specific, sometimes famous, travelers, offering descriptions of their visits to well-known sights, reports on their interactions with local populations, notes on logistics of travel, and even such minutia as

[63] Brown, *A System of General Geography* [Prospectus], 5.

details of meals eaten. But the accounts of places that Brown published were by no means uniform in fulfilling the tropes of travel writing. A sketch of Morocco in the first issue of the *Monthly Magazine*, for example, despite bearing the byline "By a Traveller" does not recount any personal interactions or experiences of a traveler, or even make reference to any observer. Instead, it focuses on the observed, communicating the features of the country itself, such as the arrangement and construction of its buildings and the contents and locations of its gardens.

> The public buildings are mosques, kaiseria, or market-places, and the buildings of the great. The mosques, some of which are spacious, are built in a similar, but some what worse style than the structures of the same kind in Natolia and Greece. The kaiseria are mean in their structure, and make but a beggarly display of merchanize [sic]. They are much inferior to the bezesteens in Turkey, places appropriate to the same purpose.[64]

By virtue of its focus on the observed rather than the observer, this account of Morocco could be described as more objective than subjective, especially in contrast with accounts typically produced by travelers, in which the subject—the observer—constitutes a central, even dominant figure. Compare this above description to a brief selection from Mungo Park's travels in the same issue, in which descriptions of the traveler and his interactions take precedence over descriptions of the world around him:

> Leaving Medina, Mr. Park proceeded onwards, and, on the 21st of December, reached Fatteconda, the capital of the kingdom of Bondon. The king of this country was a Pagan, like that of Woolli; but he had adopted the Moorish name of Almami, and seems also to have imbibed somewhat of the Moorish disposition; for, though Mr. Park presented to him his umbrella and some other articles, he compelled him to strip in his presence and surrender his coat, which he said he should reserve for his own wearing on great and public festivals. In return, however, he gave our traveler five drachms (*minkallies*) of gold dust, and loaded him with provisions.[65]

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[64] "Description of the City of Morocco," *Monthly Magazine and American Review* 1, no. 1 (April 1799): 95. [Not attributed to Brown; no source identified.]

[65] "[Selection from] *An Account of Mr. Park's Journey into the Interior Parts of Africa*. From the Proceedings of the African Association, 1798," *Monthly Magazine and American Review* 1, no. 1 (April 1799): 63.

The account of Morocco does not call direct attention to its descriptive mode, but that does not mean that the potential value of such impersonal (or even depersonalized) accounts went unremarked upon or, in other words, untheorized. An article in a subsequent issue of the *Monthly Magazine* (July 1799) directly addresses the matter of communicating the nature of a country by highlighting the limitations of subjective travel writing.[66] The article, excerpted and translated from an influential Peruvian journal called *Mercurio Peruano*,[67] begins by announcing that its "principle object" is "to convey a better knowledge of the country we inhabit"—that is, Peru (308–9). Its reason for doing so, it says, is to counter the "many fictions and absurdities" that "foreign writers have published": "The Peru which they have described to us, appears to be a country altogether different from the one with which we are practically acquainted" (309). To convey "a better knowledge" of Peru, the article offers detailed descriptions of the country's physical and cultural features, such as the locations and sizes of its mountains and rivers, the makeup of its population, and the nature of its commerce, manufacturing, agriculture, and climate, using an impersonal mode similar to that found in the article on Morocco:

> A chain of barren and rugged mountains; several sandy plains, which in a manner reach from one extremity of the coast to the other; and several lakes of many leagues in extent, some of which are situated on the summits of the above chain of mountains, occupy a great part of the Peruvian territory.— Throughout, the breaks, and the valleys, which enjoy the benefit of irrigation, present to the view an extensive range of delightful plains, replete with cities and towns, and the climate of which is highly salubrious. That of the elevated spots of la Sierra is extremely cold. In the Pampas le Bombon, Fahrenheit's thermometer is constantly at from 34 to 40 degrees above zero. (310-311)

Although it does not describe its account in terms of subjectivity and objectivity (those terms and the concepts they would come to designate were not available at the time) the article closes with

[66] "General Description of Peru. Translated from a Peruvian Journal Published at Lima.," *Monthly Magazine and American Review* 1, no. 4 (July 1799): 308–13. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically by page number.

[67] Brown likely reprinted this and other articles from *Mercurio Peruano* from previous reprintings in London periodicals.

a statement that suggests its intent to approach something like the latter, not by virtue of what it does but by virtue of what it does *not* do: "We have thus fulfilled our promise, by giving an idea of Peru in general terms, not subject to a determinate point either of history or of literature." That is, the article makes an effort to convey a comparatively "better knowledge" of the country by dissociating its descriptions from (rendering them "not subject to") any particular time ("history") or convention ("literature"). In a subsequent issue of the *Monthly Magazine*, Brown would adopt and elaborate on the same approach in regard to the problem of representing his own country.

In an article called "On a Scheme for Describing American Manners (Addressed to a Foreigner)," Brown frames the issue of depicting America as a matter of overcoming the limitations of the individual traveler's perspective.[68] Despite its title, Brown's article is less concerned with addressing the matter of foreigners attempting to describe American manners than it is with spelling out the difficulties that anyone would face, regardless of nationality, when attempting to describe a country, particularly a country as expansive and varied as the U.S.:

> Are you aware of the many difficulties attending such a scheme? Only reflect upon the motliness, the endless variety of habits, ranks, and conditions in our country. The theatre itself is too wide for you to traverse: a thousand miles one way, and fifteen hundred the other; various in climate from the ceaseless arduous of the tropic to the horrors of the arctic winter; divided into near a score of separate states, in each of which there are very great peculiarities of constitution and laws; each of which has climate, soil, productions, distributions of property and rank somewhat different from those of its neighbors. (8)

Though the essay is "Addressed to a Foreigner," Brown points out that such difficulties are not a function of a person's nationality but rather a natural consequence of what he calls "the laws of

[68] "On a Scheme for Describing American Manners. (Addressed to a Foreigner)," *Monthly Magazine and American Review* 3, no. 1 (July 1800): 7–10. [B.] Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically by page number.

his existence," which, according to Brown's description, necessarily prevent a person from obtaining first-hand knowledge of the world beyond certain limits:

> What is presumptuous and chimerical in a mere sojourner, like you, is not much less so in a native of the country, who, by the laws of his existence, is hindered from knowing any thing beyond his own family or city, or, at least, his own state. […] As a traveller from abroad, so is a native of the country, in every part of it but that where he was born and educated, and habitually resides. (9)

But the most significant problem, Brown points out, is not simply logistical, a matter of physical access to all parts of a country. Rather, it is rooted, more fundamentally, in a person's necessarily limited powers of observation. To illustrate, Brown posits a person for whom logistics would not be an issue, who could take whatever time necessary to travel the extent of the country in order to take account of its varied characteristics:

> He may ascertain the price of every species of property; he may faithfully describe the size and population of towns and townships; the quantity, materials, form, and expense of every kind of building, furniture, dress, and food; the state of all the arts, liberal and mechanical, from sowing turnips to tuning a fiddle, from cobbling an old shoe to managing a controversy in the senate. He may find the number, legal qualifications, and usual profits of every rank, office, and profession. (9)

Brown suggests that it would be possible to accomplish such tasks in "four or six years," but he also argues that doing so would require certain mental and perceptual faculties: "All this he *may* do, in four or six years, provided his sagacity be eminently acute, his knowledge abundant, his intelligence comprehensive, and his observation incessant." (9) And, what's more, even such "an accomplished observer," as Brown describes this idealized figure, working under the most ideal conditions—"conditions, indeed, seldom realized"—would still only be able to produce an incomplete account:

> But not to mention the rareness of even *such* skill, this skill will merely enable him to draw the *outlines* of an ample scene. It will not prolong days into years. It will not enable him to be in several places at one time. It will not make stone-walls transparent, or heighten whispers into clamours. (10)

Brown concludes, finally, that any observer, ideal or not, is always subject to the limits of his own senses and his own concepts—in this case, concepts of what is "worthy to be known":

He is a stranger and sojourner, busy in examining what his senses can discover, and inattentive, reasonably inattentive, to that which is less worthy to be known, and which can only be known by longer and stricter attention than his situation allows him to bestow.

Here, in a recurrence of his earlier sense that geography constitutes the least important column holding up the "dome" of knowledge, Brown is facing the idea that certain kinds of knowledge are perceived as "less worthy to be known" than others. But in this instance he recognizes that when it comes to knowledge, perceptions of value—in this case, of the triviality of detailed knowledge of a country—do not necessary follow from any aspect of that knowledge itself. Rather, they follow from the nature of the perceiver, as a function of the values he or she has been conditioned to pursue and, therefore, to perceive. He articulates this most clearly in his description of the idealized "accomplished observer," specifying that the character of that observer's perceptions will always be "in proportion to his knowledge and experience" (9). With regard to geographical knowledge, it remained the case at that time, July 1800, that no clear arguments had yet been made for its value in and of itself, for its own sake. Rather, it had been valued only incidentally, in proportion, as Brown himself put it, to its "subservience to other arts or pursuits,"[69] for instance, for its use in consolidating national identity among young Americans and developing their skills in reading and writing, geographical exercises being a common basis for reading and spelling workbooks (see, for example, works attributed to "Peter Parley").

As Brown recognized—per the implicit arguments of "On Almanacks" and "On the Prevailing Ignorance of Geography," discussed above—communicating the value of certain

[69] "On the Prevailing Ignorance of Geography," December 1800, 411.

kinds of knowledge would take more than simply circulating instances of that knowledge or even positively reviewing and commenting on geographical works. In the first issue of his second periodical publication, *The Literary Magazine and American Register*, from October 1803, Brown took a different approach, arguing for the value of geographical knowledge not implicitly, through accounts of places, or directly, through reviews and commentary, but *negatively*, through an insistent act of withholding.

In a letter to the editor titled "A Jaunt to Rockaway, in Long-Island,"[70] Brown takes on the persona of a fictive traveler addressing a friend whom he knows is interested in learning about the town of Rockaway, New York, to which the traveler had recently journeyed for the purposes of bathing in the sea. Before recounting his "jaunt," however, the traveler warns that he will be a poor source of information on the town itself, that he will be unable to satisfy his readers' particular interests in that regard. He describes his shortcomings in this regard as a matter of the particulars of his perceptual framework:

> I cannot dignify trifles, or give to vulgar sights a novelty, by making them pass through my fancy. That fancy, you well know, has no particle of kindred to that of poet or painter, and nobody should pretend to describe, who does not look through the optics of either painter or poet. (10)

More than just "optics," the traveler also describes his shortcomings as a function of his ignorance, recalling the correlation Brown drew, in the case of the "accomplished observer," between perception and "knowledge and experience": "Besides, my ignorance circumscribes my curiosity. I have few objects of remembrance with which to compare the objects that I meet with." As a result, he goes on to say, the external features of places—"faces, fences, houses, barns, cultivated fields"—leave no impression on him. They simply "pass rapidly across my eye,

[70] "A Jaunt to Rockaway, in Long-Island," *Literary Magazine and American Register* 1, no. 1 (October 1803): 10–14. [A.] Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically by page number.

without leaving a vestige behind them" (10). In short, the Rockaway traveler is the antithesis of Brown's "accomplished observer."

According to his own description, the Rockaway traveler is far more similar to a typical travel writer, in the sense that he focuses not on "the scene" of the place around him but on his "own sensations" and his "own character":

> 'Tis true, as you say, that such an unobservant wretch as I represent myself to be, may yet amuse by relating his own sensations, and his narrative, if it give no account of the scene of his journey, will, at least, comprise a picture of his own character. (11)

To establish the value of this kind of travel account, the only kind that he is capable of producing, the traveler directly contrasts it with "a system of geography," claiming that "[a]n accurate history of the thoughts and feelings of any man, for one hour, is more valuable to some minds, than a system of geography" (11). While this statement might have been true for the letter-writer, and even perhaps for the friend he was addressing, it certainly would not have been true for Brown himself. In fact, Brown's interest in geography comes through in the traveler, as he demonstrates a striking familiarity with the categories and contents of geographical texts. In imagining the kind of information that his reader will want in an account of a place, he produces a list of the very kind of questions that would be answered in a "system of geography":

> You will of course ask me, how the fields are inclosed? How are they planted? What portion is tilled; what is wood, and what is waste? Of what number, materials, dimensions, and form, are the dwellings, the granaries, the churches, the bridges, the carriages? What is the countenance, the dress, the deportment of the passengers, and so forth? through an endless catalogue of interrogatories. (11)

After enumerating such a precise list of questions, however, the writer flatly admits his inability to address them: "I cannot answer a word to all of these questions" (11). In doing so, he reveals his geographic literacy—his familiarity with the forms of geographical texts—and substantiates the "prevailing ignorance of geography" that Brown would later identify, characterized by lack of familiarity with the particulars of geographical knowledge.

The traveler further illustrates his acquaintance with the form, if not the substance, of geographic texts by describing in minute detail the observational tendencies of his reader, which, contrary to his own, resemble those of Brown's idealized "accomplished observer":

> Your attention, on the contrary, during such a journey, would be incessantly alive: you would take exact note of all these particulars, and draw from them a thousand inferences as to the nature of the soil, the state of agriculture, and the condition of the people. While your companions were beguiling the time by a map: by looking eagerly forward to the bat[h]ing place, and asking the driver now and then, how many miles he had to go to dinner, or cursing the dust, the heat, the jolting, and the hard benches, or conversing with each other, all your senses, and your whole soul would be chained to passing objects. Not a stone would you meet with, but should instantly pass through your crucible; not a tree or a post, but would serve as a clue to the knowledge of the soil, climate, and the industry of the island. You would count the passengers, take an inventory of their dress, mark their looks and their steps; you would calculate the length, breadth, and height of all the buildings; and compare everything you saw, from the church to the pig-pen, and from the parson to the plowboy, with all that you had seen elsewhere. […] Such is the traveller, my friend, that you would have made; and you have known more of Long-Island in a few hours, than many who have lived within sight of it these fifty years. (11)

But the traveler closes by again asserting his ignorance: "I, alas! Am one of those whom fifty years of observation would leave in the same ignorance in which they found me" (11).

Finally, after a long preamble, the letter-writer begins to narrate his journey, proceeding in the only way he can, by offering a detailed account of his experience: riding in stagecoaches, arriving at the shore, bathing in the sea, staying at a boarding house, and returning home. In the course of his narrative, though, he continuously reminds his reader of the kinds of knowledge that he does not, and *cannot*, offer—namely, knowledge of the place itself:

> I confess to you then that my mind was much more busily engaged in reflecting on the possible consequences of coming off without several changes of clothes in my handkerchief, and with an umbrella to shelter me from sunshine and rain, than with the fields and woods which I passed through. (12)

> I hope you will be sparing of your questions respecting Jamaica, [New York,] for I can answer none of them. *I asked not a single question statistical or topographical of our hostess*. I did not count the houses, and therefore can form no notion of the population. It is a spacious, well-looking village, many of whose houses appear to be built as summer retreats for wealthy citizens, *and that is all I can say of it*. (12, emphasis added)

> On my return, I was just as unobservant of the passing scene as before, and *took as little note of the geography of the isle*. Set me out on the same journey again, and I should scarcely recognize a foot of the way. (13, emphasis added)

In light of these deficiencies, the letter concludes on a note of regret, with the writer lamenting his failure—or, more precisely, his inability—to observe and report differently: "This jaunt to Rockaway has left few agreeable traces behind it. All I remember with any pleasure, are the appearance of the wide ocean, and the incidents of bathing in its surges. … As it was, I set my foot in the city with no other sentiment, but that of regret, for not having employed these days in a very different manner" (13).

The writer's conclusion is not entirely negative, however. He dedicates much of his final paragraph to reflecting on whether or not, and under what circumstances, he might have "employed" himself differently on his journey and been left, as a result, with more than just "a few agreeable traces." He begins with a few thoughts on the nature of observation itself, noting, first, that it is an active operation, something that can be controlled and directed:

> To give time wings, my attention must be fixed on something: I must look about me in pursuit of some expected object; I must converse with my companion on some reasonable topic; I must find some image in my own fancy to examine, or the way is painfully tedious. (13)

He then notes that observation is subject to training, imagining how the result of his journey would have been different if he had been trained to observe particular phenomena:

> Had I been a botanist, and lighted upon some new plant; a mineralogist, and found an agate or a petrifaction; a naturalist, and caught such a butterfly as I never saw before, I should have reflected on the journey with no little satisfaction. (13)

But the writer was trained—or conditioned—to observe not as a botanist or a mineralogist or a naturalist, but as a traveler. The purpose of his journey, then, as he understood it, was "not to exercise the reasoning faculties, or to add to knowledge, but to unbend, to dissipate thought and care, and to strengthen the frame, and refresh the spirits, by mere motion and variety." This is, he

admits, was the frame of mind that he had been brought into by his friends: "This is the language which my friends hold." As a result, the "expected object" that guided his observation was not the nature of the external world but the nature of his own experience—the sensations he would have upon bathing in the sea. The pleasure he found there was therefore the only trace he was left with: "All I remember with any pleasure, are the appearance of the wide ocean, and the incidents of bathing in its surges." Facts of any other kind—botanical, mineralogical, or natural, but also geographical, topographical, and statistical—fell outside the scope of his expectation and intention, and he was therefore incapable of observing and communicating them: "I saw trees and shrubs and grasses, but I could not name them, being as how I am no botanist" (13).

That the Rockaway traveler is not a guise for Brown himself is suggested by something Brown wrote in a letter following a journey of his own, from New York to Connecticut, in June 1799. Brown describes undergoing a mental "revolution" after simply adopting the intention of describing the places he was passing through on his journey:

> I had a vigilant eye for passing objects, roads, dwellings and passengers. My curiosity was awakened by the intention I had formed of describing what I saw. In this respect my mind has undergone a sudden and memorable revolution. Instead of being as I used to be, sluggish, torpid and inattentive, my eye was watchful and my mind busy in arranging and comparing objects.[71]

Rather than dramatizing such a "revolution" in the Rockaway letter, culminating in a thorough and detailed account of Rockaway, New York, Brown instead calls attention to a gap, not just in geographical knowledge (the reader learns little to nothing about Rockaway from this letter) but also in the discourse *around* geographical knowledge. The traveler has no problem imagining himself observing as a botanist, a mineralogist, or a naturalist, whose objects of study ("expected object[s]") and procedures of observation had been better defined and more precisely modeled

[71] Quoted in Dunlap, *The Life of Charles Brockden Brown*, 1815, 2:48.

than those of geography. But with regard to geography, the best he can do is recognize after the fact the knowledge that he had failed to obtain, by comparison with the kinds of questions that would be answered in a "system of geography." Simply being familiar with a geography textbook and its positive examples of geographical knowledge did not prepare him to observe like a geographer. In the Rockaway letter, then, Brown devises a character who is less a satisfied traveler than a failed geographer—a negative model for readers of the periodical to learn from. In other words, Brown recreates for his reader, and attempts to make very clear, the conditions he found himself in: lacking knowledge of certain parts of the world but also lacking a clear set of procedures for obtaining and communicating that knowledge.

A System of General Geography

Brown's most direct effort to address the problems he saw regarding geographical discourse also happened to be one of his last and most ambitious projects: a two-volume textbook to be titled *A System of General Geography*. Brown reportedly finished the manuscript of the second volume, focusing on the eastern hemisphere, before succumbing to tuberculosis in 1810 at the age of thirty-nine. What happened to the manuscript thereafter is uncertain, and it is now generally regarded as lost.[72] The only vestige of the project is a "Prospectus" that Brown published in 1809, wherein he advertises the project and the describes its rationale, in an attempt to solicit subscribers.[73]

[72] David Lee Clark, *Charles Brockden Brown: Pioneer Voice of America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1952), 216; Dunlap, *The Life of Charles Brockden Brown*, 1815, 2:85.

[73] Brown, *A System of General Geography* [Prospectus]. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically by page number.

To justify the publication of a new system of geography, Brown reiterates some of the same criticisms of existing works that he had printed earlier in the article "Geographical Systems," discussed above, calling particular attention to the miscellaneous nature of their contents. His central point in this regard is that geographical systems tended to be governed less by a clear and precise idea of what constituted the subject of geography than by "that particular branch of information […] in which the writer is most conversant, or to which he is most addicted"—whether that be astronomy, history, politics, law, botany, zoology, or chemistry (2). As a result, he says, "[o]ne branch of the subject may be skillfully handled, while the rest, being foreign to the compiler's favourite pursuits, are neglected" (4).

To assure his reader (and potential subscriber) that he has avoided this problem, Brown declares that his own geographical system will be anchored by what he understands to be the "essential part of a geographical work" which has nevertheless "generally been more cursorily and inaccurately treated than any other," namely, "description of the surface of the earth":

> A description of the surface of the earth, first, physically, as divided into land and water, hill, plain, and valley, with the influence of local circumstances on the climate and soil; secondly, politically, as divided among tribes and nations, seems to come more strictly under the proper definition of geography than any other view of the subject. (5)

Brown goes on to declare that such description is not just important, but in fact the foundation of all other knowledge of the world. Only after such foundational description has been produced, he insists, can other subjects even begin to be endeavored upon: "When the surface of the earth is delineated as fully as the materials in our possession admit, we may make excursions, in almost any direction, over the world of man and nature." It is through such "excursions" that Brown promises to offer to his reader "views" of the relationship between man and the natural world ("that relation in which soils, minerals, plants, and the lower animals bear to the well being and subsistence of men") as well as reports on human culture and society, detailing the "population

of every nation," the variation of population at different times, the distribution of people into classes, professions, and religious institutions, their "general accommodation as to diet, clothing, and habitation," and their modes of government, education, and agriculture. In the end, Brown summarizes the ultimate aim of his geographical system: "in fine, all those particulars, which fix the station of any people among civilized nations, will be drawn into such concise, comprehensive, and instructive views, as the judgment and industry of the writer put into his power" (5).

If the geographical system described above does not come across as particularly remarkable or distinct, it may be because Brown felt himself unable to articulate its merits, or even his own qualifications, in advance of the work's completion:

> Every reader must be aware that the merit of such a work will wholly lie in the skill with which it is executed. The writer, therefore, can say nothing which would avail to produce in his readers a favourable opinion of his qualifications for this work. (5)

He might have attempted, regardless, by noting that his system would be the culmination of a lifelong interest and more than a decade of close study of matters related to geography, as embodied in the consistent issue of reviews, articles, sketches, and letters to the editor on the subject in his periodicals. His system, then, would not be an outlet for some other area of expertise, as it was geography itself was the subject in which he had become, over the preceding decade, "most conversant," to which he was "most addicted" (2).

But his previous publications on the subject, he said, were not representative of this culminating project: "He cannot appeal to former productions, because he has published nothing of which the plan is similar to that of his present undertaking" (5–6). In other words, Brown regarded his periodical work on geography as only preparatory. Because there were no courses of study to follow, no programs to enroll in, and no masters to apprentice to, his periodicals were his vehicle for self-study, a means of accumulating the breadth and depth of critical

understanding necessary to undertake a more comprehensive—not to say final—project. Importantly, that preparatory work did not bring Brown closer to creating perfect a system of geography but instead enabled him to recognize more clearly the impossibility of doing so. The point that he wanted to emphasize, over and above any of his own qualifications, and that made his approach to geography truly remarkable and distinct, was that the same conditions that made a new work of geography justifiable were those that would render such a work out of date almost immediately. Works of geography were not primarily warranted by the existence of places yet considered unknown, or even by the fact that places underwent changes over time, both political and physical. Rather, Brown noted, new works of geography were warranted by changes in the observer:

> There is one claim to attention, however, which he may safely urge. There is no branch of knowledge in which the progress of new discoveries is more rapid and important than in geography. Every day new regions are explored; countries hitherto familiar to us are traversed by more candid and sagacious observers; the errors of former travellers are detected; new views are opened to us. The lapse of a single year is sufficient to make the most important additions to our knowledge, and to render existing geographical works in some measure obsolete. This fact, true at all times, was never more so remarkably true as at the present æra. Human curiosity was never before more active, more sagacious, directed by wiser maxims, and to more valuable objects. (6)

When Brown talks of "new discoveries" in relation to geography here, he means not simply physical discoveries, of new places, but also conceptual discoveries, as evidenced by his attention to geography as a "branch of knowledge." For him, this involves a recognition of new ways of observing and new concepts of value, revealing original, or perhaps just previously overlooked, "expected objects":

> That curtain which conceals half of the world from the other half is continually lifted higher and higher, and wider as well as more accurate views are continually breaking in upon us. (6)

No place, Brown insists, no matter how "familiar" it seems, could not—and *should* not—be subjected to such views:

> This is true even of Europe, which is traversed by a constant succession of book-making travellers, more and more exact and enlightened. It is more remarkably true of Africa and Asia, but the truth is still more memorable in relation to America. That veil which political jealousy has for centuries drawn over the southern portion of our continent has been nearly rent away in the present age, and the passing year has produced so much curious and authentic information, as alone to render indispensable a new geographical work. (6)

Nevertheless, he reiterates, any new work, even his own, can hold its value only for a short time:

> No writer can hope to keep pace with this progress, the most perfect work will be made essentially defective by the lapse of a very few years … and the latest compilation will thus have no small title to regard and authority, merely because it is the latest. (6)

By this logic, all that was lost in the system of general geography that never saw publication was a neatly assembled and institutionally recognizable embodiment of Brown's understanding of geography. Much, if not all, of this understanding, however, continues to be available in its preliminary form, in the periodical publications that Brown prepared as a course of study for himself, but made available, at the same time, to his readers, in his time and ours.

CHAPTER TWO

"[T]o the Absent": Margaret Fuller's Communication of the American Country

> Literature is a poor trick when it busies itself to make words pass for things.
>
> – Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Thoughts on Modern Literature" (1840)
>
> Nature is the literature and art of the divine mind; human literature and art the criticism on that; and they, too, find their criticism within their own sphere.
>
> – Margaret Fuller, "A Short Essay on Critics" (1840)

Margaret Fuller's *Summer on the Lakes, in 1843* (1844) is easily mistaken for a work of travel writing. Through its title alone, the book would have announced itself to mid-nineteenth-century readers as a "summer book," a genre of vacation travel writing popular in 1840s America, the product of men and women of the emerging American middle class enjoying increased leisure time and ease of access to the interior of the country and documenting their travels in various forms—diaries, letters, travelogues—for the benefit of readers on the east coast.[1] The affiliation of *Summer on the Lakes* with the genre of "summer book" is corroborated by the book's chapter headings, which offer a clear itinerary of the author's route through America's Upper Midwest: from "Niagara" to "The Lakes," to "Chicago Again," to "Wisconsin," "Mackinaw," and finally "Sault Ste. Marie." Beyond its framing materials, however, the text of *Summer on the Lakes* charts a path nowhere near as neat as its chapter titles suggest, often venturing well away from the daily occurrences of travel, presenting readers with something like a miscellany: a collection of loosely related texts in a variety of forms, including letters, poems, dialogues, poetic fragments, book reviews, and interpolated tales.

[1] William W. Stowe, "'Busy Leisure' Margaret Fuller, Nature, and Vacation Writing," *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 9, no. 1 (January 1, 2002): 28.

The eclecticism and tendency toward digression that characterize *Summer on the Lakes* have led many readers to regard it as a flawed, or even failed, example of its apparent genre.[2] An early review in *The Christian Examiner* (Sept. 1844) for example notes that Fuller "often draws into her journal things quite unlooked for and most remote from her field of observation," concluding that *Summer on the Lakes* is at best an "uncommon book, not at all like an ordinary journal of travel" and at worst a book "unintelligible to those who are not in the secret of [Fuller's] thoughts."[3] Writing more than a century later (in his own edited anthology of Fuller's writings, no less), Perry Miller dismisses *Summer on the Lakes* in similar if more extreme terms, as "a potpourri of a sort fashionable in the nineteenth century but tedious today":

> [R]eports on scenes alternate with random associations or with insertions of brazenly extraneous matter, especially with *ad hoc* poetic flights. Thus the real theme of the narrative—the trip itself—becomes miserably confused; the effect on the modern reader is that of an intolerable monstrosity.[4]

Miller attempts to explain the "confused," and confusing, nature of *Summer on the Lakes* by appealing to shifting tastes and genre conventions, implying that what mid-twentieth-century readers would find to be an "intolerable monstrosity" would have been not only tolerable but "fashionable" to readers in the nineteenth century. However, Miller not only cites no examples of the kind of nineteenth-century "potpourri" that *Summer on the Lakes* evidently resembles but he also overlooks the fact that several prominent nineteenth-century readers—Lydia Maria Child, Orestes Brownson, Thomas Wentworth Higginson—were similarly befuddled by the book's lack

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[2] On the contemporary reception of *Summer on the Lakes*, see Thomas Wentworth Higginson, *Margaret Fuller Ossoli* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1890), 195–200. and Joan von Mehren, *Minerva And The Muse: A Life Of Margaret Fuller* (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), 181–82.

[3] *The Christian Examiner*, vol. 37 no. 2, (Sept. 1844): 274–276.

[4] Perry Miller, *Margaret Fuller, American Romantic: A Selection from Her Writings and Correspondence* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1969), 116.

of resemblance to so-called "ordinary" works of travel writing.[5] Rather than becoming a "monstrosity" over time, then, it seems that *Summer on the Lakes* had been one all along.

That readers in the mid-nineteenth century would have found *Summer on the Lakes* full of unexpected turns—to put it more gently—is suggested most clearly by Fuller herself, in the reflective commentary that she includes throughout her book, particularly in places where it deviates from what she understood to be the expected tropes and conventions of her book's apparent genre. She does not do so to excuse or apologize for her book's idiosyncrasies, but to call attention to them—to defend and justify them, even, and especially, where they might come across as "brazenly extraneous" and "most remote from her field of observation": "Do not blame me that I have written so much about Germany and Hades, while you were looking for news of the West"; "I am here reminded that I have omitted that indispensable part of a travelling journal, the account of what we found to eat"; "The narrative might have been made much more interesting, as life was at the time, by many piquant anecdotes and tales drawn from private life."[6] The present chapter begins by reading such reflective comments as manifestations of Fuller's interest in guiding her readers' expectations of *Summer on the Lakes* for the purpose of bringing their judgment, and ultimately their appreciation, more closely in line with the book's true aims: not to disseminate more of the expected fare of mid-century travel writing—"piquant

[5] Orestes Brownson wrote in his *Quarterly Review*, Oct. 1844, 1:4 p (546–547): "Her writings we do not like. We dislike them exceedingly. They are sent out in slipshod style, and have a certain toss of the head about them which offends us. Miss Fuller seems to us to be wholly deficient in a pure, correct taste, and especially in that tidiness we always look for in woman" (546). Lydia Maria Child called the book "highly agreeable," but "too full," adding "there is too much furniture in your rooms. This is the result of a higher education than popular writers usually have; but it stands much in the way of extensive popularity." Quoted in Mehren, *Minerva and the Muse*, 181. Higginson noted that certain digressions "showed the waywardness of a student and talker, rather than the good judgment which she ought to have gained in editing even the most ideal of magazines [i.e, *The Dial*]." *Margaret Fuller Ossoli*, 197.

[6] Margaret Fuller, *Summer on the Lakes, in 1843* (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1844), 165, 246, 67. Hereafter abbreviated *SL* and cited parenthetically by page number.

anecdotes," etc.—but to provide her readers with something that she found, in her extensive reading on the subject, was not readily available, namely, a means of access to knowledge of the country.

At the end of the third chapter of *Summer on the Lakes*, Fuller briefly reflects on the account she has just given of a two-week excursion through the western Illinois prairies. Perhaps sensing that the foregoing account has deviated from her readers' expectations, she attempts to articulate the aims of her book:

> I have not been particularly anxious to give the geography of the scene, inasmuch as it seemed to me no route, nor series of stations, but a garden interspersed with cottages, groves and flowery lawns, through which a stately river ran. I had no guide-book, kept no diary, do not know how many miles we travelled each day, nor how many in all. What I got from the journey was the poetic impression of the country at large; it is all I have aimed to communicate. (SL 67)

With this statement, Fuller registers her reluctance to organize her account of the country in a way that would be at odds with the nature of the country itself. As she understood it, to give the "geography of the scene" would be to render the country as linear, precise, and highly regimented—a "route" or "series of stations"—rather than the way it "seemed to [her]," namely, planar and inexact—"a garden interspersed with cottages, groves and flowery lawns, through which a stately river ran." Additionally, Fuller's statement indicates her disinclination toward giving an account that is overly personalized. By keeping neither a diary nor a log of the miles she traveled, she resists communicating the minute particulars of her journey—her own daily experiences and encounters, the specific pace of her movement through the country—in favor of communicating what she calls "the poetic impression of the country at large." The statement of aims that Fuller offers here is characteristically vague, its meaning by no means self-evident, as Fuller articulates far more precisely, here and throughout *Summer on the Lakes*, what she is *not* doing than what she *is* doing. Nevertheless, Fuller is able to clearly identify her particular object

of interest, the "country at large," and, relatedly, to emphasize her resistance to over-personalization, using the definite article "the"—"*the* poetic impression"—rather than the personal possessive pronoun that might be expected—*my* poetic impression. The impulse to depersonalize here is also evident in the very title of the book: she offers an account of "summer on the lakes, in 1843," not "*my* summer on the lakes, in 1843."

Fuller attempts to characterize the aims of her work once more in the same section—again negatively—by highlighting the absence of a common feature of popular travel writing, namely, intimate glimpses of peoples' domestic lives:

> The narrative might have been made much more interesting, as life was at the time, by many piquant anecdotes and tales drawn from private life. But here courtesy restrains the pen, for I know those who received the stranger with such frank kindness would feel ill requited by its becoming the means of fixing many spy-glasses, even though the scrutiny might be one of admiring interest, upon their private homes. (*SL* 67)

By leaving out such "anecdotes and tales" and, importantly, calling attention to their absence, Fuller reaffirms that her book is not particularly invested in offering accounts of daily life—either her own or that of others—as many popular travel narratives were, as part of what was known as the "customs and manners" tradition, exemplified by Frances Trollope's influential, if controversial, *Domestic Lives of the Americans* (1833) and, more recently, Caroline Kirkland's *A New Home, Who'll Follow?* (1842).

What is more striking in this statement is Fuller's intimation that the principles of selection and presentation are not governed by, or even correlated to, appealing to her readers' "admiring interest," noting her intentional choice to exclude material that would make her narrative "much more interesting." Though Fuller attributes her restraint in this instance to her "courtesy," not wanting to repay those who showed her kindness by making them subject to "scrutiny" of any kind, positive or negative, she was also restrained by her general disinclination to simply satisfy her readers' expectations. She affirms this more directly in the book's final

chapter, where she acknowledges that she has forgone what she calls an "indispensable part of a travelling journal"—an account of the food that she had eaten during her travels. Conceding that she cannot "hope to make up, by one bold stroke, all my omissions of daily record," she provides instead a brief overview of the food generally available in the region she traveled through:

> I am here reminded that I have omitted that indispensable part of a travelling journal, the account of what we found to eat. I cannot hope to make up, by one bold stroke, all my omissions of daily record; but that I may show myself not destitute of the common feelings of humanity, I will observe that he whose affections turn in summer towards vegetables, should not come to this region, till the subject of diet be better understood; that of fruit, too, there is little yet, even at the best hotel tables; that the prairie chickens require no praise from me, and that the trout and white-fish are worthy the transparency of the lake waters. (*SL* 246–47)

By describing a "daily record" of meals as an "indispensable part of a travelling journal" and then promptly dispensing with it, Fuller offers a negative characterization of her book, in contrast with a "travelling journal." But the account of food that she does offer, in lieu of a "daily record," gives some indication of what she regarded as "indispensable" to her own work. She makes very clear that she describes the food she found not in order to fulfill the conventions of a "travelling journal" but only in order to prove herself not inhuman—to "show [herself] not destitute of the common feelings of humanity"—by issuing a fair warning to any who might expect to eat well while traveling in that part of the country. In doing so, she exhibits the kind of concerns that her book aims to address: not satisfying readers' curiosity about the particulars of her own journey, but communicating knowledge about the nature of the country independent of her own experience.

A reader need not get far into *Summer on the Lakes* to find Fuller characterizing her book in positive terms rather than just negatively, in contrast to works of travel writing. Prior to the first chapter—a chapter set at Niagara Falls, with which critics typically begin—there are two prefatory poems in which Fuller aligns her book with the work of a "scholar," announcing from

the outset its primary aim: not to offer an account of her personal experiences, but to communicate ("to tell") what knowledge she has acquired about the country she has traveled through. In the first poem, titled "Summer on the Lakes," the speaker immediately identifies as a "scholar" who had been taught "well" by an instructor, the "Summer days of busy leisure" that she had spent traveling (*SL* 1). Rather than simply beginning to communicate the nature of the "new-world," however, the poem exhibits the book's general critical reflectiveness by instead discussing the unusual difficulty of its intended undertaking. The majority of the poem is an expression of the speaker's lament for the fact that she, "the scholar," does not have the "means to tell" what she wants to tell:

> Summer days of busy leisure,
> Long summer days of dear-bought pleasure,
> You have done your teaching well;
> Had the scholar means to tell
> How grew the vine of bitter-sweet,
> What made the path for truant feet,
> Winter nights would quickly pass,
> Gazing on the magic glass
> O'er which the new-world shadows pass;
> But, in fault of wizard spell,
> Moderns their tale can only tell
> In dull words, with a poor reed
> Breaking at each time of need.
> But those to whom a hint suffices
> Mottoes find for all devices,
> See the knights behind their shields,
> Through dried grasses, blooming fields. (*SL* 1)

This poem frames the inability "to tell" the nature of the country not as a deficiency of the author, but as an epistemic and epochal condition, a consequence of the limitations of modern means of communication: "Moderns their tale can only tell / In dull words, with a poor reed / Breaking at each time of need." To illustrate this limitation, the poem invokes a prior, fantastical epoch and its epistemology: the early medieval period of Arthurian legend, in which knowledge

of the world, past, present, and future, are made to appear in Merlin's "magic glass."[7] Given that Fuller, as one of the "Moderns," has no access to such a device ("in fault of wizard spell"), she accepts that she must do what she can to communicate what she has learned with the tools she has: "dull words" and a "poor reed." She recognizes, however, that the success of her efforts to communicate the nature of the country will depend at least as much on her own ingenuity—which will always be limited by the "dull" means of communication available to her—as on the ingenuity of her reader. The "dull words" she can offer are blunted not just by a "poor reed," in the sense of both a writing instrument and a musical instrument—a reed pipe—but also by a "poor *read*." Since "dull words" can only offer a "hint" of the nature of the country, the poem warns that the work that follows—*Summer on the Lakes*—might succeed in communicating knowledge of the country only to certain readers: "those to whom a hint suffices," whether they understand immediately or, more likely, make an effort to see "Through dried grasses, blooming fields." Even this final line puts equal responsibility on both writer and reader: the "blooming fields" materialize by virtue of both the reader's effort to see them "Through dried grasses," but also by virtue of the writer's effort to write, or play, them "Through dried grasses"—either a "dull pen" or a reed pipe.

Where the first prefatory poem suggests that *Summer on the Lakes* can offer only "dull" if enticing "hints" to any reader, the second poem, titled "To a Friend," presents the book as something more intimate and more potentially welcome: a presentation of "gifts" (*SL* 2). Following the first poem's lament of the impossibility of the book's project, the second poem

[7] That this is a specific reference to Arthurian legend is substantiated by Fuller's reference in the Wisconsin chapter—to be discussed in a later section—to the "magic globe" given by Merlin to the character Britomart in Spenser's *Fairie Queene,* "on whose pure surface Britomart sees her future love, whom she must seek, arrayed in knightly armor, through a difficult and hostile world" (158).

focuses more optimistically on what successes, however few, such a project might achieve. The second poem picks up where the first leaves off, offering as its first "gift" the "dried grasses" promised in the preceding poem's final line:

> Some dried grass-tufts from the wide flowery plain,
> A muscle shell from the lone fairy shore,
> Some antlers from tall woods which never more
> To the wild deer a safe retreat can yield,
> An eagle's feather which adorned a Brave,
> Well-nigh the last of his despairing band,
> For such slight gifts wilt thou extend thy hand
> When weary hours a brief refreshment crave?
> I give you what I can, not what I would,
> If my small drinking-cup would hold a flood,
> As Scandinavia sung those must contain
> With which the giant gods may entertain;
> In our dwarf day we drain few drops, and soon must thirst again. (*SL* 2)

Like the poem preceding it, this poem highlights the speaker's interest in communicating the particular features of the country, while still regretting the limited nature of the "slight gifts" it can offer: "I give you what I can, not what I would, / if my small drinking-cup would hold a flood." Again, Fuller presents this limitation not simply as the fault of the author, but as a function of the limitation of the means of communication afforded by her time and place. ("conditions of possibility"). What was a "poor reed" is figured here as a "small drinking-cup," the implement of "our dwarf day," minuscule by comparison to the kind of cup used by "giant gods," that can "hold a flood," a fantastical figure for perfect communication and, importantly, its impossibility, analogous to the "magic glass" of the previous poem.

There are distinct risks entailed in relying on two brief, somewhat cryptic prefatory poems to set the terms on which a book ought to be read: first, that such poems can be difficult to parse to those who make an effort to read them, and second, a symptom of the first, that many make no effort to read them at all, opting instead to skip straight to the narrative. That Fuller had

these problems in mind is suggested by the poem at the very end of the book, the title and subtitle of which indicate her thinking:

The Book to the Reader
Who Opens, As American Readers Often Do, At The End,
With Doggerel Submission.

In this poem, the book itself addresses a set of specifically American readers who—characteristically, we are told—open first to the end of the book, perhaps in the interest of quickly learning its conclusion or moral (*SL* 255). Rather than simply scolding these readers for attempting to take a shortcut, however, this poem attempts, like the prefatory poems, to introduce the aims of the book at hand. To do so, perhaps in an attempt to appease the shiftless reader it addresses, it offers a more legible narrative work of "Doggerel" verse in place of the compact, intricate verse of the prefatory poems. In this simplified form, the poem still attempts to communicate the same ideas, regarding the book's interest in communicating the nature of the country and the reader's central role in accomplishing that exchange. Written in the second-person, the poem places the reader ("you") directly in the "country," visiting a "country cousin" and going on a hunt for "the sweetest berries." The poem uses this hunt for berries as an allegory for both travel and reading, arguing that the rewards of each can only be obtained by those willing to endure the difficulties each presents:

> To see your cousin in her country home,
> If at the time of blackberries you come,
> "Welcome, my friends," she cries with ready glee,
> "The fruit is ripened, and the paths are free.
> But, madam, you will tear that handsome gown;
> The little boy be sure to tumble down;
> And, in the thickets where they ripen best,
> The matted ivy, too, its bower has drest.
> And then, the thorns your hands are sure to rend,
> Unless with heavy gloves you will defend;
> Amid most thorns the sweetest roses blow,
> Amid most thorns the sweetest berries grow." (*SL* 255)

The second stanza restates the warnings of the country cousin, about the difficulties involved in hunting for berries in the country, but also builds on her promises, declaring that "undeterred" reader ("you") will discover a "sweeter fruit" even than roses and berries—a sensory bounty, an overflow of "wild, gay feelings" and "bird-like pleasures":

> If, undeterred, you to the fields must go,
> You tear your dresses and you scratch your hands;
> But, in the places where the berries grow,
> A sweeter fruit the ready sense commands,
> Of wild, gay feelings, fancies springing sweet—
> Of bird-like pleasures, fluttering and fleet. (*SL* 255)

The poem goes on to underscore the necessity of enduring difficulties by describing the reader's failed attempt to replicate the pleasures of the country artificially by making blackberry jam at home, with "housewife skill." Having experienced first-hand the pleasures of obtaining "country" fruit, the reader finds that the "best pleasure" is not derived from the sweetness of the blackberry—which can be approximated by other foods, like "Cherry or crab-apple"—but from the experience of venturing to "the places where the berries grow," despite, or perhaps because of, the difficulty of getting there:

> "'Tis pretty good," half-tasting, you reply,
> "I scarce should know it from fresh blackberry.
> But the best pleasure such a fruit can yield,
> Is to be gathered in the open field;
> If only as an article of food,
> Cherry or crab-apple are quite as good;
> And, for occasions of festivity,
> West India sweetmeats you had better buy." (*SL* 256)

In its penultimate stanza, the poem reveals itself to be an allegory of reading *Summer on the Lakes*, noting that the book's offerings can only approximate the rewards of the country. Echoing the second prefatory poem, which presents the book as a "small drinking-cup" capable of offering only "slight gifts," this poem presents *Summer on the Lakes* as a modest "dish of homely sweets":

Thus, such a dish of homely sweets as these
In neither way may chance the taste to please. (*SL* 256)

Despite recognizing the book's fundamental limitations, this poem urges its reader onward, offering some suggestions for doing so, like taking the book in only a bit at a time ("Yet try a little with the evening-bread") and reading with acute attention, employing a "good needle" in order to make effective use of the "spool of thread" that constitutes its contents. Still, the poem ends by conceding that the book will never sufficiently communicate the nature of the country itself. It expresses this by invoking the distinction between gold specie and paper money, identifying the country as a "mint," where true value is held and where one "can get gold instead" of the paper notes—both in the sense of banknotes and travel notes—that only purport to hold its true value.[8] By positioning these poems as bookends, Fuller attempts to both set the terms of her book and to guide her readers' engagement with it by setting their expectations for what it intends to offer—knowledge of the country—and how best to receive its offerings, namely, by approaching it, like its author, as a scholar.

By introducing in the framing poems the principle that the reader cannot acquire knowledge of the country passively through the work at hand but must actively participate in acquiring what it offers, often by overcoming difficulties it presents, Fuller differentiates her book from the pedagogical methods commonly used by school books in the nineteenth century, aligning it instead with the progressive theories of education in which she was schooled. Fuller was first educated by her father who was influenced by the progressive pedagogical theories of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi.[9] Rather than following the traditional

[8] Fuller might have in mind the related pun in the title of Charles Dickens' recently-published American travelogue, *American Notes for General Circulation* (1842).

[9] Charles Capper, *Margaret Fuller: An American Romantic Life. Vol. 1: The Private Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 30.

approach used in American schools for much of the nineteenth century, premised on rote memorization and recitation from standard textbooks, Fuller was encouraged to develop original critical thought and independent discovery of knowledge through interaction with primary texts, maps, and scientific instruments. Fuller's father instructed all of his children in the same manner so that they would, as he put it, "know history and geography, not like a school boy by rote, but intelligently & familiarly as subjects not for exhibition but for daily use."[10] This mode of education was also implemented at Fuller's primary school, the Boston Lyceum for Young Ladies, under the direction of the innovative headmaster Dr. John Park, who "de-emphasized memorization, stressed weekly composition and utilized a variety of maps and scientific instruments, which he imported from Europe"[11]: "with an abundance of maps, charts and instruments, [Park] gave great reality and vividness to studies which had before that time been taught almost entirely by rote."[12] After her father's death from cholera in 1835, Margaret, age 25, became responsible for educating her younger siblings and continued to instruct them according to the method she had been trained in. After working as an assistant to Bronson Alcott in his Temple School in 1837, a school founded in explicit imitation of Pestalozzi, Fuller would go on to implement similar methods both as a schoolteacher in Providence, Rhode Island and in the adult-education programs that she led in Boston, known as her "Conversations."[13]

[10] Capper, 30.

[11] Capper, 57.

[12] Edward H. Hall, "Reminiscences of Dr. John Park," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 7, no. 1 (1890): 85.

[13] Wesley T. Mott, "Education," in *The Oxford Handbook of Transcendentalism*, ed. Sandra Harbert Petrulionis, Laura Dassow Walls, and Joel Myerson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 157.

Drawing on the manner of her education in her work as a writer and editor, Fuller conceived of the ideal relationship between a text and a reader as one premised on the reader's actively working to derive meaning from the text. She describes this view explicitly in the preface to her second book, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, published a year after *Summer on the Lakes*, in November 1845, defending that work's longer, more cumbersome original title—"The Great Lawsuit: MAN versus MEN, WOMAN versus WOMEN"—from when it was first published as an article in her journal *The Dial*. As in the prefatory poems to *Summer on the Lakes*, Fuller argues that there is more value to be derived from a text that requires the reader to expend "some thought to see what it means":

> Objections having been made to the former title, as not sufficiently easy to be understood, the present one [*Woman in the Nineteenth Century*] has been substituted as expressive of the main purpose of the essay; though, by myself, the other is preferred, partly for the reason others do not like it, *i.e.* that it requires some thought to see what it means, and might thus prepare the reader to meet me on my own ground.[14]

In Fuller's view, a text that is "easy to be understood," from which a reader could be satisfied to receive information with little resistance and therefore little critical thought, could not be as instructive as a text from which a reader must strive to develop their own understanding. In the reflective comments interspersed throughout *Summer on the Lakes*, Fuller repeatedly urges her reader to give "some thought" to parsing the text on its own terms, to meet her, as she puts it, "on [her] own ground," rather than trying—fruitlessly, she knows—to reconcile it with the conventional categories and standards that it resists at nearly every turn.

Fuller's repeated efforts to govern her readers' judgments of her book, by highlighting and justifying its deviations from expected tropes, is in part a result of her sensitivity to the

[14]Quoted in Mary Jo Haronian, "Margaret Fuller, Perceiving Science," in *Margaret Fuller's Cultural Critique: Her Age and Legacy*, ed. Fritz Fleischmann (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), 132.

possibility that expectations and preconceptions can significantly undermine, by overdetermining, one's understanding of the nature of a phenomenon, in this case, both her book and "the West" alike. Fuller addresses both matters simultaneously in what has typically been regarded as the most "brazenly extraneous" section of *Summer on the Lakes*: her extended synopsis of a German book called *The Seeress of Prevorst*, which constitutes more than half of the "Wisconsin" chapter.

It has been suggested that Fuller included a synopsis of *The Seeress of Prevorst* into the text of *Summer on the Lakes* for the purpose of satisfying readers in her coterie who had expressed curiosity about the book.[15] As Fuller herself notes: "I insert some account of this biography at the request of many who have been interested by slight references to it" (*SL* 126). This reading has Fuller acting as translator of a book that was at the time available only in German. (She insists that her account is "a paraphrase, not a translation," noting that she has "taken liberties with the original for the sake of condensation, and clearness" [*SL* 163–64].) But there are also conceptual justifications for the placement of this synopsis in *Summer on the Lakes*, connected to both Fuller's wariness of adherence to convention for its own sake and her interest in providing readers with an understanding of a part of the country that she refers to as "the new region" (*SL* 30). After reading *The Seeress of Prevorst* in Milwaukee, Fuller was reminded of how significantly understanding can be shaped, and misshaped, by expectation and preconception. As a result, she comes to recognize the shallowness of her initial survey of "the life around" her in that region, which she described as "spontaneous, instinctive life, so healthy and so near the ground" (*SL* 125). By offering both a synopsis of the book and an account of her

[15] Nicole Tonkovich, "Traveling in the West, Writing in the Library: Margaret Fuller's Summer on the Lakes," *Legacy* 10, no. 2 (1993): 79–102.

reading, she attempts to make the same recognition available to her reader, along with both a more nuanced understanding of the region and a concept of the difficulty and necessity of overcoming the forces of convention and expectation when trying to survey and communicate the nature of what she comes to see as a "new" place.

The Seeress of Prevorst is an 1829 work of medical biography by a German physician, Justinus Kerner, detailing his treatment of a woman named Friederike Hauffe who suffered from a number of apparently mystical maladies, including "attacks of convulsion and spasm," trances, visions, and communications with spirits (*SL* 139). Fuller introduces Hauffe's story into her text immediately after concluding her account of an excursion into the country outside the city of Milwaukee, following in the wake of a "torrent of emigration": "the mothers carrying their infants, the fathers leading the little children by the hand, seeking a home, where their hands may maintain them" (*SL* 113). Fuller begins her synopsis by acknowledging the clear discordance between a book of German mysticism and the immediate surroundings of Wisconsin:

> Returning to Milwaukie much fatigued, I entertained myself for a day or two with reading. The book I had brought with me was in strong contrast with the life around me. Very strange was this vision of an exalted and sensitive existence, which seemed to invade the next sphere, in contrast with the spontaneous, instinctive life, so healthy and so near the ground I had been surveying. (*SL* 125)

Such a "strong contrast" notwithstanding, Fuller offers what she calls a "slight and conversational account" of Kerner's treatment of Hauffe.

According to Fuller, Kerner began by insisting on using only methods of conventional medicine to treat Hauffe, trying to ignore her trances and spiritual pronouncements, "to pay no attention to her magnetic situation, and the orders she gave in it; … to do all possible to draw her out of the magnetic state, and to treat her with attention, but with absolutely none but the common medical means" (*SL* 142). After some time, however, Kerner found that conventional methods of treatment were not only ineffective but counterproductive: "the medicines constantly

produced effects opposite to what I expected" (*SL* 143). Only then did Kerner begin to consider the treatments that Hauffe herself had been proposing from the depths of her "magnetic trance":

> In her now more infrequent magnetic trance, she was always seeking the true means of her cure. It was touching to see how, retiring within herself, she sought for help. The physician who had aided her so little with his drugs, must often stand abashed before this inner physician, perceiving it to be far better skilled than himself. (*SL* 144)

To his surprise, Hauffe's recommendations proved effective. At one point, when he asked her in her sleep what he should do for her, she "described a machine … which she wished to have made for her use; it was so, and she derived benefit from it" (*SL* 144). Fuller, following Kerner, notes that this was not the first time that Hauffe had proposed her own treatments, it simply the first time that anyone had taken her suggestions seriously: "She had indicated such a machine in the early stages of her disease, but at that time no one attended to her" (*SL* 144). The account goes on to describe the mystical abilities that Hauffe continued to demonstrate throughout her life, such as "sleep-waking" [sic] and second sight, once she had achieved a stable physical condition by virtue of the treatment she prescribed for herself.

It is important to note that Fuller does not affirm the mystical nature of Hauffe's condition nor the scientific or medical efficacy of the self-treatments that she proposed, but allows that her conditions and supposedly mystical abilities might have been, at least to some degree, fabricated or self-imposed. As presented by Fuller, then, what is significant about the story of the "Seeress" is not its account of Hauffe's purported mystical abilities so much as its illustration of the inefficacy of staunch insistence on using conventional approaches to address novel problems.

If there is any parallel between Fuller and Hauffe, it is in their insistence on being regarded as authoritative not despite but by virtue of their radical divergences from convention. Fuller recognizes that her book is attempting to address a novel problem: communicating the

nature of a country that she comes to see as "new," in the sense that it is undergoing processes of radical transformation, embodied in this chapter by the "torrent of emigration" that she encountered in Wisconsin and in subsequent chapters by evidence of the forced migration of Native Americans to lands west of the Mississippi. Like Hauffe proposing approaches to treating her trances from within her trances, Fuller advocates for approaches to reading her book from within her book, emphatically distinguishing it from a "travelling journal" and presenting it, instead, as the work of a scholar to be read as a scholar, or, as the coming sections will discuss, as what she calls both a "faithful observer" and "comprehensive critic." When Fuller's guidance is disregarded and her *Summer on the Lakes* is assessed in terms of conventions that it repeatedly disclaims—for example, in comparison to works of vacation travel writing—it can only be found to fall short of achieving what it never set out to accomplish. Alternatively, when Fuller is granted the authority that she makes a claim to and *Summer on the Lakes* is read on its own terms, it can be found to address the aims it sets up for itself, namely, providing readers with access to knowledge of the country *as it is* rather than as they expect it to be.

As a case in point, when the *Seeress* section has been read in relation to conventions of travel writing, it is judged negatively, as something out of place—"brazenly extraneous," "egregiously unrelated"[16]—on the basis of its incongruity with conventions of travel writing but also, importantly, on the basis of its contrast to the kind of life presumed to be found in Wisconsin in 1843, like what Fuller herself initially describes: "spontaneous, instinctive life, so healthy and so near to the ground" (*SL* 125). However, when Fuller is granted the authority that she has a claim to, both as an author and as an observer of life in Wisconsin, her inclusion of the *Seeress* section can be seen for what it is: an attempt to communicate those aspects of "life" in

[16] Tonkovich, 80.

Wisconsin that were imperceptible to her before she had read *The Seeress of Prevorst*, when she "had been surveying" the region initially, and that only became clear in the process of reading and synopsizing Hauffe's story. What Fuller comes to conceive, and tries to help her reader conceive, is that life in Wisconsin and, by extension, in what she calls the "country at large," is not as "near the ground" as an initial survey, guided by expectations and preconceptions, might suggest.

Immediately after concluding her synopsis of *The Seeress of Prevorst*, detailing both Hauffe's treatments and her visions—including one in which she projects the pleas of lost souls in Hades—Fuller defends her apparent digression by asserting her authority to communicate the nature of "the West" without regard for her readers' expectations for what such an account should include. She begins by absolving herself of any responsibility for her readers' dissatisfaction or lack of understanding of the foregoing chapter, placing blame instead on their overdetermined expectations:

> Do not blame me that I have written so much about Germany and Hades, while you were looking for news of the West. Here, on the pier, I see disembarking the Germans, the Norwegians, the Swedes, the Swiss. Who knows how much of old legendary lore, of modern wonder, they have already planted amid the Wisconsin forests? Soon, soon their tales of the origins of things, and the Providence which rules them, will be so mingled with those of the Indian, that the very oak trees will not know them apart,—will not know whether itself be a Runic, a Druid, or a Winnebago oak. (*SL* 165)

Fuller has found "the West" to be a place undergoing constant and profound change, to the extent that even its sense of itself is altered: "the very oak trees … will not know whether itself [sic] be a Runic, a Druid, or a Winnebago oak." By definition, "news" of such a place cannot simply conform to readers' preconceptions and reflect back whatever they are "looking for," but must be accepted as whatever is offered in the latest book, like hers—including those parts that are unexpected or not readily intelligible.

In support of this claim, Fuller insists that her synopsis of *The Seeress of Prevorst* is not as out of place as it may seem in an account of the country outside of Milwaukee. Given the ongoing influx of European immigrants into the region, she proposes that the Wisconsin woods are in the process of being suffused with an ever-increasing variety of faiths, philosophies, and knowledges, not unlike those discussed in and represented by *The Seeress of Prevorst*—"old legendary lore," "modern wonder," "tales of the origins of things, and the Providence which rules them"—that could not be anticipated ("looked for") from an outside standpoint. This is a view that Fuller came to as a result of reading *The Seeress of Prevorst*. Even for one traveling in a place, discovering and communicating its nature is not a straightforward operation, as indicated by Fuller's realization of the poverty of her initial view of Wisconsin, characterized as "spontaneous, instinctive life, so healthy and so near the ground." This description of Wisconsin closely corresponds to Fuller's earlier characterization of the "life" she found in Illinois, which she found to exhibit no depth of feeling or reflective thought but just "the rudeness of conquest and the needs of the day" (*SL* 28). Similarly, in a letter to Emerson sent from Chicago just prior to her visiting Wisconsin, and therefore prior to her reading *The Seeress of Prevorst*, Fuller characterized the West as "all life and no thought," exhibiting a "merely instinctive existence, to those who live it so 'first rate' 'off hand' and 'go ahead'."[17] Reading *The Seeress of Prevorst* convinces Fuller, or perhaps reminds her, to shed her own Kerner-like adherence to convention in the face of novel problems. Her approach to observing and communicating the nature of Wisconsin and its life deepened as a result. At the end of her synopsis, and the end of the

[17] *The Letters of Margaret Fuller*, ed. Robert N. Hudspeth, vol. 3 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 143. On the phrase "go ahead" in relation to Emerson's concept of individualism, see Wesley T. Mott, "The Age of the First Person Singular," in *A Historical Guide to Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Joel Myerson, Historical Guides to American Authors (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 82–85.

"Wisconsin" chapter itself, Fuller offers a revised statement on the relationship between "life" and "the ground" in the place that she is attempting to describe, in which she suggests that life in Wisconsin is not "so near the ground" that it can be passively "surveyed"—that is, observed, documented, and communicated according to conventional methods of reckoning. Instead, she suggests that some other kind of "power" is necessary to make the nature of the place and its life both appreciable and communicable: "Some seeds of all growths that have ever been known in this world might, no doubt, already be found in these Western wilds, if we had the power to call them to life" (*SL* 166).

As in the first prefatory poem, in which Fuller wishes for a "magic glass," she is drawn to the kind of mystical power that the Seeress claimed, by which she might see the fullness of "life" in "these Western wilds," such as the ability to see through the veil of appearances to a person's "real or destined self," or to see the future "in mirrors, cups of water; in soap-bubbles" (*SL* 157–58). She recalls the "magic glass" directly by invoking the character of Britomart from Spenser's *Faerie Queene* using a "magic globe" to see "Whatever thing was in the world contayned , / Betwixt the lowest earth and hevens hight; / So that it to the looker appertayned" (*SL* 158). Fuller also invokes the novel *The Devil on Two Sticks*, which she happened to encounter in Milwaukee, to imagine how her account of Wisconsin might have been enhanced if she had been able to fly through the night peering into the windows of people sleeping and reading their dreams, as the protagonist of that novel does:

> Could I but have flown at night through such mental experiences, instead of being shut up in my little bedroom at the Milwaukie boarding house, this chapter would have been worth reading. (*SL* 166)

Despite briefly indulging in such fantasies, imagining the use of mystical means to acquire and offer knowledge of the "life" found in Wisconsin, Fuller does not rest her hopes on that kind of power. Instead, she turns to what she considered to be Hauffe's greatest powers—not the powers

of sight, from which her title of "Seeress" came, but, more practically, those powers that Fuller had learned to appreciate and advocate by virtue of her progressive education: powers of rational thought ("the natural motion of the mind when left to itself" [*SL* 154]) and original expression.

Fuller finds these powers exemplified in Hauffe's invention of a language in which to express her novel insights and observations—an improvement, Fuller says, on the "language we habitually use [that is] so broken, and so hackneyed by ages of conventional use" (*SL* 154). Importantly, Fuller holds that Hauffe's invention of a language was the product not of any mystical means but of her own mental ingenuity: "no gift from without, but a growth from her own mind" (*SL* 154). She insists, then, that anyone possessing novel insights or observations, derived from whatever source, and finding conventional modes of expression not suitably communicative, would have the potential to foster the development ("growth") of a similarly novel and suitably communicative mode of expression, as Hauffe did. Moreover, Fuller insists that this is not just a possibility but already a common, if seldom recognized, practice: "Most persons make one [an original language] more or less clear from looks, tones, and symbols:—this woman, in the long leisure of her loneliness, and a mind bent upon itself, attempted to compose one of letters and words" (*SL* 154). Fuller considers Hauffe's story valuable, then, not for its account of fantastic or extreme abilities, as embodied in one person, but for its making visible, by virtue of its fantastic and extreme nature, the kind of abilities potentially accessible to all—namely, paying zealous attention to "the motions of the mind" and, equally importantly, "seek[ing] out means clearly to express them to others" (*SL* 154). Fuller emphasizes the value she places on the ordinary, rather than the extraordinary, when she discusses Hauffe's purported ability to draw mystical figures—"her power of drawing correctly her life-circle, and sun-circle":

> I attach no especial importance to her circles:—we all live in such; all who observe themselves have the same sense of exactness and harmony in the revolutions of their

> destiny. But few attend to what is simple and invariable in the motions of their minds, and still fewer seek out means clearly to express them to others. (*SL* 154)

Fuller's American Scholar

It is in the context of *The Seeress of Prevorst* that Fuller draws her book's claims—that there is more to "the West" than can be conceived from a distance or understood and expressed by conventional methods—most directly into conversation with the views of her friend and colleague Ralph Waldo Emerson. Fuller's initial defense of her interest in the story of Hauffe takes the shape of a dialogue between herself, under the name of "Free Hope," and three others, each occupying a different "mental position" on the relationship between mysticism and the production of knowledge (*SL* 126). A figure named "Good Sense," for example, admonishes against trusting "observations or experiments" that one cannot see and verify for oneself, arguing that the case of Kerner and Hauffe, and their claims about accessing "the next sphere," should not be valued more than "[o]ur capacities, our instincts for this our present sphere": "let us be completely natural, before we trouble ourselves with the supernatural" (*SL* 126–27). Speaking as "Free Hope," Fuller agrees with "Good Sense" that there is virtue in attending to "the miracle of every day," but also argues that "our faculties [are] sharpened" by engagement with what exceeds the every day, "the infinite," insisting that knowledge and understanding ("the capacities of man") cannot advance to their full potential if limits established by convention are adhered to:

> I acknowledge no limit, set up by man's opinion, as to the capacities of man. "Care is taken," I see it, "that the trees grow not up into heaven," but, to me it seems, the more vigorously they aspire the better. … I know of no inquiry which the impulse of man suggests that is forbidden to the resolution of man to pursue. (*SL* 130)

Here, a figure understood to be a stand-in for Emerson, named "Self-Poise" (playing on Emerson's concept of "self-trust"), interjects to question the value and prudence of a program of inquiry premised, in his view, on extravagance, asking "what is the use of all this straining?"

before going on to invoke Emerson's own conviction that there is no justification for seeking knowledge in far-off places that could be acquired just as well in one's own study:

> Far-sought is dear-bought. When we know that all is in each, and that the ordinary contains the extraordinary, why should we play the baby, and insist upon having the moon for a toy when a tin dish will do as well. … Sit at home and the spirit-world will look in at your window with moonlit eyes; run out to find it, and the rainbow and golden cup will have vanished and left you the beggarly child you were. (*SL* 130)

Responding as "Free Hope," Fuller proclaims that the Emersonian position imposes unnecessary limits and does not leave "room enough for the lyric inspirations, or the mysterious whispers of life." In "[e]very fact," she insists, there is potential that, like the "news of the West," cannot be anticipated, or "looked for," in advance: "Every fact is impure, but every fact contains in it the juices of life. Every fact is a clod, from which may grow an amaranth or a palm" (*SL* 132). Fuller vividly describes her preference for seeking knowledge and understanding through direct experience—corresponding with the mode in which she was educated—fully prepared to accept both the rewards and the risks of trial and error:

> I had rather walk myself through all kinds of places, even at the risk of being robbed in the forest, half drowned at the ford, and covered with dust in the street. I would beat with the living heart of the world, and understand all the moods, even the fancies or fantasies, of nature. I dare to trust to the interpreting spirit to bring me out all right at last—to establish truth through error. (*SL* 132)

She then concludes her dialogue by summarizing her differences with the Emersonian "Self-Poise" and, by extension, with Emerson himself, identifying the exclusionary nature of his methods and asserting her obligation, in response, to "deny and oppose" him:

> You, Self-Poise, fill a priestly office. Could but a larger intelligence of the vocations of others, and a tender sympathy with their individual natures be added, had you more of love, or more of apprehensive genius, (for either would give you the needed expansion and delicacy) you would command my entire reverence. As it is, I must at times deny and oppose you, and so must others, for you tend, by your influence, to exclude us from our full, free life. We must be content when you censure, and rejoiced when you approve; always admonished to good by your whole being, and sometimes by your judgment. (*SL* 133)

This dialogue, with its all-but-direct condemnation of Emerson, is the culmination, rendered in highly abstract terms, of a long-standing debate that Fuller and Emerson had conducted more or less directly, in their personal correspondence and in *The Dial*, over matters of knowledge and knowledge production, a debate framed in terms of the task of the scholar and aimed at addressing the proper methods and aims of the natural sciences.

That Fuller conceived of the task of the scholar and, by extension, the aims of *Summer on the Lakes*, in relation to Emerson's conceptions of knowledge and knowledge production is first suggested in a letter she wrote to him in the autumn of 1843, shortly after she had concluded the summer-long tour that would be the basis for *Summer on the Lakes*. Fuller begins her letter by announcing her plans to publish a book based on the notes and letters that she had written during her travels, which she refers to as her "record of the West": "Some leaves are written of my record of the West out of which I hope to make a little book."[18] Rather than writing a book based solely on her own "record," she tells Emerson of her desire to situate her book in relation to books of a similar type, books "about the West," written by "the old travellers." To do so, in the midst of her other obligations—such as writing and editorial work for *The Dial*, the journal that she and Emerson, with others in their circle, had founded in 1840—she took up residence in Harvard College Library, for the purpose of reading as many books "about the West" as she could find. Such a program of reading, she says, was necessary before she could continue writing up what she called "[her] own little experiences":

> Yet I hope to write your piece about Strafford, for I have thought it out in some measure, and I mean to do it soon, while I am reading books in the College library about the West, the old travellers I am reading. I like now to go over the ground with them and shall not

[18] *The Letters of Margaret Fuller*, 1984, 3:159.

continue my own little experiences till I have done with theirs.[19]

This letter reveals less about the content and aims of Fuller's book than it reveals about her intent to approach it in the manner of a critical scholar, as epitomized, first, by her desire to produce a book not primarily personal in nature, about her "own little experiences," but, as she puts it, a "book about the West," and, second, by her interest in situating her book within an ongoing discourse, in relation to the books of "the old travellers." She gives no details on what she intends to include in her book, what purposes she expects it will serve, or even what relation it will have to the books by "the old travellers." Even as her work progressed, she struggled to find any clear model for her project, or even precise terms in which to describe it. As a coming section will show, Fuller registers this difficulty in the finished text, noting that in the process of conceiving and developing her book, both on her journey and afterward, all the works that she encountered that purported to be "about the West" she found to be flawed in one way or another—whether inadequate, misleading, or simply "about" something else entirely.[20] To define her project, Fuller undertook significant reflection and negotiation, with existing books "about the West," with her own concepts of producing and communicating knowledge, and, as this letter begins to reveal, with the values and expectations of Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Even at this early stage Fuller recognized that her project did not align with Emerson's ideals. Immediately after mentioning the idea of publishing a book based on her "record of the West," Fuller warns Emerson that the final product might fail to meet his expectations: "Don't expect anything from the book about the West. I can't bear thus disappointing you all the

[19] Fuller, 3:160.

[20] Among the many authors cited in *Summer on the Lakes* are: George Catlin, Sir Charles Augustus Murray, Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, Anna Jameson, Washington Irving, Thomas McKenney, William Cullen Bryant, Charles Dickens, Louis Hennepin, James Adair, Jane Johnston Schoolcraft, Philip Van Arteveld, Morris Birkbeck, Jonathan Carver, and Alexander Henry.

time."[21] Fuller does not specify exactly why or how her work might be "disappointing" to Emerson, but her inclusion of this warning alone indicates that she recognized their meaningfully different views on the potential value of a new "book about the West," to the extent that such a book might fail to amount to "anything" in his estimation.

It is possible that Fuller had in mind the many disparaging comments Emerson had made about travel writing and even travel itself. In "Self-Reliance," for example, he calls travel "fool's paradise,"[22] while in his "American Scholar" address he describes travel writing as the province of those who have no more to say on their usual topics: "Authors we have in numbers, who have written out their vein, and who, moved by a commendable prudence, sail for Greece or Palestine, follow the trapper into the prairie, or ramble round Algiers to replenish their merchantable stock."[23] But given Fuller's own tendency to question the merits of travel writing conventionally conceived, as shown in the previous section, and, more to the point, her stated intention to write a "book about the West" more than an account of her "own little experiences," this warning to Emerson can be read more consistently in terms of their different views on the value of certain kinds of knowledge and methods of knowledge production.

Fuller's invocation of "the scholar" in the first prefatory poem as one tasked with communicating particular features of the American West can be read as a direct response, and challenge, to one of the principle attributes of the scholar that Emerson described in his famous "American Scholar" address, delivered in 1837 to Harvard's Phi Beta Kappa Society. In that

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[21] Fuller, *The Letters of Margaret Fuller*, 1984, 3:159–60.

[22] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays & Lectures*, ed. Joel Porte, The Library of America (New York: Library of America, 1983), 278.

[23] Emerson, 61. Quoted in Barbara L. Packer, "Travel Literature," in *The Oxford Handbook of Transcendentalism*, ed. Joel Myerson, Sandra Harbert Petrulionis, and Laura Dassow Walls, Oxford Handbooks (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 397.

address, Emerson discusses the production of knowledge in a way similar to that voiced by "Self-Poise" in *Summer on the Lakes*, arguing against the "constant accumulation and classifying of facts" that occupied many scholars up to the point in order to promote, instead, more rational processes of contemplation and reflection, with the ultimate goal being to become what he calls "Man Thinking."[24] Instead of taking on the mundane task of documenting specific facts of nature, the "American scholar," according to Emerson, should instead take on the more valuable task, in his view, of seeking to comprehend nature's general laws. Emerson argues this point based on his view that nature is a unified and interconnected "web of God," each point of which is connected to every other point: "Man is surprised to find that things near are not less beautiful and wondrous than things remote. The near explains the far."[25] *Summer on the Lakes* constitutes Fuller's sustained argument against this view, advocating at the same time for both a different kind of knowledge and therefore a different kind of scholar. It is a culmination, however, of a sustained disagreement on such matters that had surfaced over several years in the pages of *The Dial*.

In an essay titled "Thoughts on Modern Literature," published in the second issue of *The Dial* (October 1840), Emerson describes the mid-nineteenth century as the tail end of an age of exploration, an age that had precipitated and made possible both a global economy of knowledge and an economy of global knowledge. According to Emerson, two factors distinguished the pursuit of knowledge in the present age: first, the ready availability of printed knowledge from previous ages ("all books"), and second, a marked increase in travel, as a result of advances in

[24] Emerson, *Essays & Lectures*, 55.

[25] Emerson, 69.

transportation technology ("facilities for locomotion"). Emerson begins his account by describing the former:

> In the first place, [the present age] has all books. It reprints the wisdom of the world. How can the age be a bad one, which gives me Plato and Paul and Plutarch, St. Augustine, Spinoza, Chapman, Beaumont and Fletcher, Donne and Sir Thomas Browne, besides its own riches? Our presses groan every year with new editions of all the select pieces of the first of mankind,—meditations, history, classifications, opinions, epics, lyrics, which the age adopts by quoting them.[26]

According to Emerson, the ready availability of books gave rise, in turn, to the emergence of writers from all sectors of society: "The time is marked by the multitude of writers. Soldiers, sailors, servants, nobles, princes, women, write books" (142–43). Moreover, he finds these writers to be increasingly focused on the work of gathering and publishing knowledge about the world:

> The progress of trade and the facilities for locomotion have made the world nomadic again. Of course it is well informed. The age is not to be trifled with: it wishes to know who is who, and what is what. Let there be no ghost stories more. Send Humboldt and Bonpland to explore Mexico, Guiana, and the Cordilleras. Let Captain Parry learn if there be a northwest passage to America, and Mr. Lander learn the true course of the Niger. Pückler Muskau will go to Algiers, and Sir Francis Head to the Pampas, to the Brünnens of Nassau, and to Canada. Then let us have charts true and Gazetteers correct. We will know where Babylon stood, and settle the topography of the Roman Forum. We will know whatever is to be known of Australasia, of Japan, of Persia, of Egypt, of Timbuctoo, of Palestine. (143)

The character of Emerson's brief survey of the state of geographical knowledge production reveals his limited concern with, or investment in, the subject. This is most clearly encapsulated in his description of its objects of inquiry in only the most general terms: "who is who," "what is what," and "whatever is to be known." More striking, though, is Emerson's failure to mention of any of the recent or ongoing efforts to explore and document the western part of North America.

[26] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Thoughts on Modern Literature," *The Dial* 1, no. 2 (October 1840): 141–43. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically by page.

It would seem, at the very least, that the highly publicized expeditions of Lewis and Clark or Zebulon Pike would have warranted inclusion on his list with the others. But his omission of American exploration, coupled with the fact that he names only British and European writers and explorers, suggests a low opinion of knowledge production in America that correlates with what he expresses later in the essay, that American scholars are "few and idle" and that Americans in general only "read easy books and sleep after dinner" (154). It seems that for Emerson there was little value to be attained, in terms of "modern literature," from "striving" in the West.

Emerson's neglect, however, is countered by the two texts that immediately follow it in the same issue of *The Dial*, both of which take care to distinguish the West from New England in order to argue for the value of the kind of distant "striving" that Emerson questioned. The first, a poem titled "First Crossing the Alleghenies" written by James Freeman Clarke, describes the difficulties of traveling westward and argues for the virtue of persisting in that direction rather than remaining in "that loved household circle," in "the home of [one's] fathers."[27] ("Wanderer, tremble not before this grand Panorama, / Let not this mighty scene weary thine heart or thine eye.") The second, a review essay titled "A Sign from the West" by Christopher Pearce Cranch, discusses a pamphlet written by Andrew Wylie, a theologian and president of Bloomington College, Indiana, inveighing against Christian sectarianism, a cause of interest to Transcendentalists at the time.[28] Cranch presents the pamphlet as valuable for its having come not just from "an eminent Calvinistic divine" but from "the West," rather than from "that comparatively enlightened and liberal section of the country," New England.[29] That Clarke and

[27] James Freeman Clarke, "First Crossing the Alleghenies," *The Dial* 1, no. 2 (October 1840): 159–60.

[28] Christopher Pearce Cranch, "A Sign from the West," *The Dial* 1, no. 2 (October 1840): 161–72.

[29] Cranch, 161.

Cranch believed in the distinct value to be found beyond one's familiar "circle" is reflected in the fact that they are two of the few transcendentalists who lived outside of New England for significant periods of time.[30]

Given that Fuller was the editor of this issue of *The Dial*, the placement of these two texts immediately following Emerson's essay suggests some effort on her part to compensate for, or at least to supplement, his incomplete account of "Modern Literature," particularly in regard to its neglect of the American continent outside of his immediate vicinity. This tactic of facilitating some internal dissent between pieces in *The Dial* is not inconsistent with the editorial policies Fuller adopted during her time as its editor. As she explains in an introductory essay to the first issue, title "A Short Essay on Critics," Fuller sought to avoid what she refers to as the "greatest mistake in the conduct" of other journals: the mistake of adhering to an "external consistency" to such a degree that simply "from the title of [the] journal [one] can infer the tenor of all its chapters."[31] She later explained to Emerson that rather than reject works that did not correspond with her own thinking, as Emerson did during his tenure as editor, she made an effort to "put in what those connected with me liked, even when it did not well please myself, on this principle that I considered a magazine was meant to suit more than one class of minds, … that it should represent with some fidelity the state of mind among us as the name of Dial said was its intent."[32] This principle allowed Fuller to publish conflicting and even contradictory works in the same issue, reflecting the conflict and contradiction that sometimes arose among transcendentalist thinkers themselves. In the same issue, for example, Fuller published an article

[30] See Christopher M. Ohge, editor, "A Digital Edition of Christopher Pearse Cranch's 'Journal. 1839'"
[31] Margaret Fuller, "A Short Essay on Critics," *The Dial* 1, no. 1 (July 1840): 9–10.

[32] *The Letters of Margaret Fuller*, 1984, 3:160.

titled "The Art of Life,—The Scholar's Calling," written by Frederic Henry Hedge, that argues for the principles of knowledge-production that Fuller herself sought to challenge in *Summer on the Lakes*.[33] Echoing Emerson's "The American Scholar," Hedge claims that "[a]ll that is best in human attainments springs from retirement," that is, from cultivation of the rational mind rather than exploration of the external world. Hedge cites the methods of Gibbon, Newton, and Luther in support of his claim, declaring that "[w]hoso has conceived within himself any sublime and fruitful thought, or proposed to himself any great work or life, has been guided thereto by solitary musing."[34] Disagreement about the proper methods and tasks of the scholar would surface more forcefully a little over year later, arising from Emerson's clear preference for "solitary musing" over the "accumulation and classifying of facts" in the context of an emerging conflict between him and a young Henry David Thoreau.

In the spring of 1842, Emerson suggested to Thoreau, then twenty-five and beginning to contemplate a literary career, that he should write a review essay for *The Dial* on the subject of several recent state-sponsored reports of Massachusetts flora and fauna. As Emerson conceived it, this review would be an opportunity for Thoreau to showcase and reflect on his many interests and activities in the state's natural settings, resulting in something more like a personal essay than a book review. When Emerson described his conception of the review in a letter to Fuller, he reported that he had "set Henry Thoreau on the good track of giving an account of [these books] in the Dial, explaining to him the felicity of the subject for him as it admits of the

[33] Frederic Henry Hedge, "The Art of Life,—The Scholar's Calling," *The Dial* 1, no. 2 (October 1840): 175–82.

[34] Hedge, 179. See Alfred G. Litton, "The Development of the Mind and the Role of the Scholar in the Early Works of Frederic Henry Hedge," *Studies in the American Renaissance*, 1989, 95–114.

narrative of all his woodcraft boatcraft & fishcraft."[35] The essay that Thoreau wrote, however, was not the "narrative" of "woodcraft boatcraft & fishcraft" that Emerson had envisioned. Instead, it was an earnest review of the books at hand, assessing their relative successes and failures in reporting on the present state of nature in Massachusetts, and concluding that they mark an auspicious, if fledgling, start to American natural history:

> These volumes deal much in measurements and minute descriptions, not interesting to the general reader, with only here and there a colored sentence to allure him, like those plants growing in dark forests, which bear only leaves without blossoms. But the ground was comparatively unbroken, and we will not complain of the pioneer, if he raises no flowers with his first crop.[36]

Thoreau's failure to fulfill Emerson's conception of the essay might have constituted only a momentary divergence between writer and editor, protégé and mentor, but Emerson evidently took it far more seriously, as an indication of budding philosophical and methodological differences between them. As David Dowling characterizes it, Thoreau's essay made "a significant departure from the Emersonian method of treating nature as a large, abstract concept" by virtue of his insisting on using "direct observation as the basis for his discussion of nature" and "physical immersion in nature as the impetus for his larger generalizations."[37] By exhibiting an empirical approach, premised on a wide survey of nature's particulars, Thoreau's essay tacitly rejects Emerson's conception—as discussed briefly above and articulated by Emerson, among other places, both in his "American Scholar" address and in his first book, *Nature* (1836)—that nature need not be surveyed in its entirety in order to be understood as a unified and

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[35] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Selected Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Joel Myerson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 274.

[36] Henry David Thoreau, "Natural History of Massachusetts," *The Dial* 3, no. 1 (July 1842): 39.

[37] David Dowling, *Literary Partnerships And The Marketplace: Writers And Mentors In Nineteenth-Century America* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012), 121–22.

interconnected whole. Where for Emerson, careful scrutiny of *any* part of the natural world should be sufficient to glean an understanding of the whole, for Thoreau, each part of nature only promises to offer *a* truth, not necessarily truth in its entirety: "Let us not underrate the value of a fact; it will one day flower in a truth."[38]

The seriousness of this early episode in their relationship between Emerson and Thoreau is signaled by Emerson's disclosing his disappointment with Thoreau's essay in a letter to Fuller, declaring not only that he "did not like his piece very well" but also that he was beginning to fear that Thoreau himself would ultimately be a disappointment to him, a person whose extraordinary potential might fail to materialize—a "threatening attitude" that "finally never struck."[39] Given that Fuller's "book about the West," like Thoreau's "Natural History of Massachusetts," was to be concerned with direct observation of the country rather than the more Emersonian rumination on "Nature," this episode might have given her sufficient reason to anticipate, and even possibly fear, Emerson's censure, let alone his disappointment, in a similar degree.

Regardless of what led Fuller to project Emerson's disappointment in her "book about the West," the exchanges in *The Dial* that preceded this projection and the attitude that it represents substantiate her ongoing engagement with problems related to methods and rationale for gathering knowledge about the world. In Fuller's circle, in the context of the then-emergent formation of the natural sciences, discussion of these problems has been staged most prominently in terms of an opposition between Thoreau and Emerson, to the exclusion of Fuller. In Laura Dassow Walls' foundational pair of books on the subject, for example, Thoreau and Emerson are

[38] Thoreau, "Natural History of Massachusetts," 39.

[39] Quoted in Robert Sattelmeyer, "'When He Became My Enemy': Emerson and Thoreau, 1848–49," *New England Quarterly* 62, no. 2 (June 1989): 193.

presented as the embodiment of two divergent approaches to natural science as it was coming to be understood at the time, as a "law-seeking" endeavor, characterized by the goal of discovering the universal laws that established nature's unity.[40] By Walls' account, Thoreau is a "model for the empirical approach" to this goal, "working literally from the ground up" through what Emerson describes as the "constant accumulation and classifying of facts."[41] Emerson, on the other hand, is Walls' model for the "rational" approach to this goal, premised on rumination and mediation on discrete parts of nature—more a practice of "solitary musing" than of counting and charting. Margaret Fuller does not figure into this account or the binary conception of the natural sciences that it presents, largely as a consequence of the fact that she did not participate in natural science in its specific configuration as a "law-seeking" endeavor, intent on discovering how natural phenomena can be "rationalized according to a priori laws."[42] Emerson himself presents Fuller as uninvolved in this type of natural science in his edition of her *Memoirs*, declaring that "[s]he had never paid,—and it is a little remarkable,—any attention to natural sciences. She neither botanized, nor geologized, nor dissected."[43] He then goes on to wholly dismiss her engagements with the natural world, describing her activities as "short country rambles," during which she made "vain" and "vapid" attempts to describe "the impressions made

[40] Laura Dassow Walls, *Seeing New Worlds: Henry David Thoreau and Nineteenth-Century Natural Science*, Science and Literature (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995); Laura Dassow Walls, *Emerson's Life in Science: The Culture of Truth* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2003).

[41] Walls, *Emerson's Life in Science*, 1. See also Nina Baym, "Thoreau's View of Science," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 26, no. 2 (April 1965): 221.

[42] Walls, *Emerson's Life in Science*, 65.

[43] *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli* (New York: The Tribune Association, 1869), 263.

upon her" by her surroundings: "Of course, her raptures must appear sickly and superficial to an observer, who, with equal feeling, had better powers of observation."[44]

Scholars who have taken Fuller's engagements with matters related to natural science more seriously than Emerson have nevertheless done so on his terms, seeking to redeem her "powers of observation" and uncover a concern with the discovery of natural laws that Emerson insisted she lacked. One notable approach to this effort has been to argue for the influence of Goethe's scientific study, *Theory of Colors* (1810), on Fuller's understanding of the subjective nature of perception, a view according to which the observer does not passively receive impressions from external reality but rather "actively produces his or her individual visual experience."[45] There is little doubt that Goethe's *Theory of Colors* had a significant influence on Fuller's understanding of perception, given the depth and intensity of her engagement with Goethe's works. But to prioritize the influence of *Theory of Colors* on Fuller is to fold her work, and her views more generally, into a specific conception of natural science that has dominated the philosophy of science since the mid-nineteenth century, according to which scientific legitimacy is premised on the pursuit and discovery of general laws. This view has been referred to as a *nomothetic* ("law-making") conception of natural science, as opposed to an *idiographic*, or descriptive, conception. The general dominance of the former has raised challenges, beginning in the late nineteenth century, from disciplines that hold idiographic procedures as no less significant to the advancement of knowledge about the natural world. Prominent challenges have been issued, for example, from the discipline of geography, which has often been compelled to

[44] 263–64.

[45] Tina Gianquitto, *"Good Observers of Nature": American Women and the Scientific Study of the Natural World, 1820-1885* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 67. See also Mary Jo Haronian, "Margaret Fuller's Visions," *ESQ* 44, no. 1 and 2 (1998): 35–59; Haronian, "Margaret Fuller, Perceiving Science."

defend itself as a necessarily blended approach.[46] A precursor to this debate is found in the challenges that Margaret Fuller issued to Emerson arising from his reductive and dismissive characterization of Goethe, whom he viewed—ironically enough, given the method of *Theory of Colors*—as a scholar overly occupied with faithful description of the natural world at the expense of what he (Emerson) regarded as a more valuable occupation, the pursuit of natural law. Based on Fuller's debate with Emerson over the merits of Goethe's work and methods, her invocation of "the scholar" in the first prefatory poem of *Summer on the Lakes* can be read not just as a refutation of Emerson's "American Scholar," but also, by extension, as an endorsement of the kind of scholar Goethe represented and an indication of her efforts to pursue specifically Goethean methods for documenting the American West.

In the final third of the essay discussed above, "Thoughts on Modern Literature," Emerson presents his view of Goethe as a model of scholarly industry. Calling Goethe "the king of all scholars" and declaring that he "learned as readily as other men breathed," Emerson offers him as an example that any aspiring American scholar would do well to emulate:

> In these days and in this country, where the scholars are few and idle, where men read easy books and sleep after dinner, it seems as if no book could so safely be put in the hands of young men as the letters of Goethe, which attest the incessant activity of this man to eighty years, in an endless variety of studies with uniform cheerfulness and greatness of mind. They cannot be read without shaming us into an emulating industry.[47]

The results of Goethe's industry, however, his writings themselves, Emerson regarded as utterly inconsequential, as a consequence of their being overly preoccupied with faithful documentation of worldly phenomena—in other words, exemplifying an *idiographic* rather than a *nomothetic*

[46] See Martin, *All Possible Worlds*, 171–75, 414–21, 520–24; Richard Hartshorne, *The Nature of Geography: A Critical Survey of Current Thought in Light of the Past* (Lancaster, PA: Association of American Geographers, 1939), 366–459.

[47] Emerson, "Thoughts on Modern Literature," 154. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically by page.

approach to natural science. Emerson characterizes Goethe's work dismissively, not unlike his characterization of Fuller's "country rambles," declaring: "He thought it necessary to dot round with his own pen the entire sphere of knowables." He then goes on to compare Goethe's writing (unfavorably) to writing in a newspaper:

> I find [in Goethe's work] actual men and women even too faithfully painted. I am, moreover, instructed in the possibility of a highly accomplished society, and taught to look for great talent and culture under a grey coat. But this is all. The limits of artificial society are never quite out of sight. The vicious conventions, which hem us in like prison walls, and which the poet should explode at his touch, stand for all they are worth in the newspaper. I am never lifted above myself. I am not transported out of the dominion of the senses, or cheered with an infinite tenderness, or armed with a grand trust. (155)

While Emerson admits that Goethe was a singularly gifted observer ("To look at him, one would say, there was never an observer before"), he ultimately determines that Goethe used his writings only to represent objects in the world *as they were* and therefore failed to create anything *new*:

> Here was a man, who, in the feeling that *the thing itself* was so admirable as to leave all comment behind, went up and down from object to object, lifting the veil from every one, and *did no more*. (154, emphasis added)

As a result, Emerson felt that Goethe fell short of being a creator "in the high sense"—that is, in the sense of being a poet. His work lacked the "dramatic power" or the "miracles of poetry" (153), Emerson explains, like those found in the work of his ideal poet, Shakespeare. Goethe is therefore, he says, "the poet of the Actual, not of the Ideal; the poet of limitation, not of possibility; of this world, and not of religion and hope, in short […] the poet of prose, and not of poetry" (156). (Emerson elaborates on this distinction in two chapters of his *Representative Men* (1850), where he presents Goethe as "The Writer" and Shakespeare as "The Poet.") Given his view that the writer, or the poet of the actual, does not create anything new, Emerson finds Goethe's work to be both futile and fruitless, a squandering of his singular observational abilities and unmatched scholarly industry. He declares that "a man gifted like him should not leave the

world as he found it," implying that Goethe, despite his output, ultimately added nothing to the world (157).

Emerson's outright dismissal of Goethe reflects what he declares at the beginning of his essay, and the very claim that Fuller tries to challenge in *Summer on the Lakes*, that "[l]iterature is a poor trick when it busies itself to make words pass for things" (139). His criticisms of Goethe therefore align with his general criticisms of idiographic natural science, in the sense that he considered both to be unnecessary and ultimately detrimental intermediaries between man and nature. To Emerson, any books that merely document the world and do "no more" are merely "rude helpers," offering only impressions of nature that are secondary to one's own and a diminished means of accessing "higher truth": "In our fidelity to the higher truth, we need not disown our debt in our actual state of culture, in the twilights of experience, to these rude helpers" (140). According to Philipp Mehne, in his account of Emerson's engagement with works of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century natural scientists, "[s]cience had, from as early as the Scientific Revolution, been perceived as the act of 'reading' nature." Emerson viewed nature, accordingly, as a text to be read—a text authored by God: "There are, in the Christian sense of the metaphor, two books, Scripture and nature, identical insofar as they share the same author, God."[48] Given his doctrine of self-reliance, as characterized by the proclamation at the beginning of *Nature* (1836) that man should "enjoy an original relation to the universe" and not settle for what he calls "second-handedness,"[49] Emerson broadly considered works of natural science as coming between nature itself and the mind of his ideal scholar, whom he describes as "Man

[48] Philipp Mehne, "Reading Nature: Emerson, Cuvier, Lyell, Goethe and the Intricacies of a Much-Quoted Trope," *Comparative American Studies An International Journal* 6, no. 2 (June 2008): 108.

[49] Marian C. Madden and Edward H. Madden, "Emerson, Goethe, and Fuller: A Philosophical Triangle," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society,* 34, no. 3 (1998): 528.

Thinking." In the long run, Emerson thought, works of natural science would become little more than "cadaverous fact" and "cumbrous catalogs of particulars," all which could be forgotten once nature's laws were learned, while "Man Thinking" could be a perpetual source of knowledge.[50]

In Emerson's view, efforts to "faithfully" document the nature of the world were flawed not just on technical grounds but also on moral grounds. As Mehne puts it, "[a]t stake in Emerson's reading [of nature] is nothing less [than] the *conditio humana*, as nature, he thinks, must reveal the laws according to which all life is organized, not just from a zoological, but from a moral perspective."[51] In other words, because Emerson saw nature as a divine text, he also saw nature as *the* foundational source of moral understanding. Emerson gestures toward his feeling that "works of science" were non-moral (as opposed to amoral or immoral) at the beginning of "Thoughts on Modern Literature," where he ranks in order the types of "modern literature" that he considered most valuable, placing first "those [works] which express the moral element" and last "works of science":

> The highest class of books are those which express the moral element; the next, works of imagination; and the next, works of science;—all dealing in realities,—what ought to be, what is, and what appears.[52]

By placing "works of science" last in his list, Emerson implies that such works do not "express the moral element." He makes this conviction explicit in his critique of Goethe, describing him as a "resolute realist" who, as a consequence of his materialism, "had not a moral perception proportionate to his other powers" (152). Emerson illustrates Goethe's deficiencies in this regard

[50] Mehne, "Reading Nature," 114.

[51] Mehne, 114.

[52] Emerson, "Thoughts on Modern Literature," 137. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically by page.

with a version of his famous "transparent eye-ball," diagnosing Goethe as having a mind out of "order" with nature, such that even his "particular gifts" cannot "countervail" his "defect":

> [B]ecause nature is moral, that mind only can see, in which the same order entirely obtains. An interchangeable Truth, Beauty, and Goodness, each wholly interfused in the other, must make the humors of that eye, which would see causes reaching to their last effect and reproducing the world forever. The least inequality of mixture, the excess of one element over the other, in that degree diminishes the transparency of things, makes the world opaque to the observer, and destroys so far the value of his experience. No particular gifts can countervail this defect. (155)

According to Emerson, the lack of "transparency" in Goethe's vision is the essential defect that prevents him from being a poet—a creator "in the high sense":

> That Goethe had not a moral perception proportionate to his other powers, is not then merely a circumstance, as we might relate of a man that he had or had not the sense of tune or an eye for colors; but it is the cardinal fact of health or disease; since, lacking this, he failed in the high sense to be a creator, and with divine endowments drops by irreversible decree into the common history of genius. (156)

As the editor of *The Dial* at the time and an authority on Goethe, Fuller would likely have felt doubly compelled to respond to Emerson's views of Goethe. In a letter to him on the subject, she offered a few minor notes before outright rejecting his assessment of Goethe on the grounds that his critique is based solely on Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* novels, to the exclusion of any other of Goethe's works. Emerson admits in his essay to approaching his critique of Goethe according to his typical method, reducing a phenomenon to a single instance and claiming that one instance sufficiently represents the "spirit" of the whole:

> The spirit of his biography, of his poems, of his tales, is identical, and we may here set down by way of comment on his genius the impressions recently awakened in us by the story of Wilhelm Meister. (154)

But Fuller rejects this method and the conclusions derived from it, asserting from her position of authority that Goethe's "spirit" cannot be adequately gleaned from any one of his works: "As he never gave his soul in a glance, so he cannot be painted at a glance."[53]

Because Fuller considered *The Dial* to be an outlet for the views of all Transcendentalists, as discussed above, rather than simply a vehicle for the views of its editor, she did not withhold Emerson's essay from publication or even propose any substantive changes.[54] Instead, she reserved space for rebuttal in *The Dial*'s next issue, in the form of two forceful defenses of Goethe: the first, Theodore Parker's review essay titled "German Literature," and the second, a short essay of her own titled "Menzel's View of Goethe."[55] Although Fuller's essay on Goethe is directed at the German literary critic and historian Wolfgang Menzel, whose critiques of Goethe had recently been translated into English by the American transcendentalist and managing editor of *The Dial* George Ripley, it is difficult to imagine that her essay was not also in part a response to Emerson's "Thoughts on Modern Literature," given that the thrust of her critique constitutes a direct challenge to a theory of judgement based on "absolute standards" that Emerson articulates in that essay.

Emerson's elevation of "the poet" over "the writer," both in "Thoughts on Modern Literature" and at greater length in *Representative Men* (1850), derived from his notion that literature ought to be judged according to "absolute standards." He introduces this concept at the very opening of "Thoughts on Modern Literature," where he makes an effort to reduce literature

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[53] Margaret Fuller, *The Letters of Margaret Fuller*, ed. Robert N. Hudspeth, vol. 2 (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1983), 152.

[54] Fuller suggested only a few changes to Emerson's phrasing, remarking, "I think when you look again you will think you have not said what you meant to say." Quoted in Higginson, *Margaret Fuller Ossoli*, 157–59.

[55] Theodore Parker, "German Literature," *The Dial* 1, no. 3 (January 1841): 315–39; Margaret Fuller, "Menzel's View of Goethe," *The Dial* 1, no. 3 (January 1841): 340–47.

to an essence, describing it as "made up of a few ideas and a few fables," constituting only "a heap of verbs and nouns enclosing an intuition or two."[56] In the long run, he suggests, all literature is "ephemeral," and any works that have persisted in the meantime have done so by virtue of exemplifying those "few" transcendent ideas, fables, or intuitions that coalesce around "truth and beauty": "These in proportion to the truth and beauty they involve, remain; the rest perish. They proceed out of the silent living mind to be heard again by the living mind" (140). From this concept of literature comes Emerson's notion of criticism according to "absolute standards":

> We must learn to judge books by absolute standards. […] No man can be a good critic of any book, who does not read in it a wisdom which transcends the instructions of any book. (140)

The depth of Emerson's reservations about Goethe are reflected in the fact he praises his work only after suspending these "absolute" criteria:

> [I]n the court and law to which we ordinarily speak, and *without adverting to absolute standards*, we claim for him the praise of truth, of fidelity to his intellectual nature. (154, emphasis added)

In her critique of Menzel, Fuller argues for an alternative principle of judging a person's work according to *relative* standards—or, as she puts it, "by the light of his own law." In doing so she echoes a critique of Menzel in Theodore Parker's essay "German Literature" in the same issue of *The Dial*:

> Mr. Menzel sets up a false standard, by which to judge literary productions. Philosophy, ethics, art, and literature, should be *judged of by their own laws*. We would not censure the Laocoön, because it did not teach us agriculture, nor the Iliad, because it was not republican enough for our taste. Each of these works is to be *judged by its own principles*. Now, we object to our friend, that he judges literary works by the political complexion of

[56] Emerson, "Thoughts on Modern Literature," 140. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically by page.

their author.[57]

Fuller draws on her familiarity with Goethe's work to add that Goethe himself proposed this principle of criticism, further justifying its implementation in assessing the merits of his work:

> Now Goethe has given us both his own standard, and the way to apply it. "To appreciate any man, learn first what object he proposed to himself; next, what degree of earnestness he showed with regard to attaining that object."[58]

The critique that Fuller ultimately levels at Menzel operates as an effective, if somewhat veiled, critique of Emerson:

> He judges of Goethe as a Philistine, inasmuch as he does not enter into Canaan, and read the prophet by the light of his own law, but looks at him from without, and tries him by a rule beneath which he never lived.[59]

Fuller's principle of judging works according to their "own standard," although taken from Goethe, was not reserved for Goethe's work alone, or even just for works of art and literature. This is illustrated in Fuller's first essay for *The Dial*, her "Short Essay on Critics," mentioned briefly above. In this essay, addressing writers interested in submitting reviews to the new journal, Fuller describes three types of critic, the "subjective," the "apprehensive," and the "comprehensive," each characterized according to the nature and degree of its engagement with the object of its critique and, therefore, its capacity to give its readers access to new knowledge, but more importantly, to "new thought" about that object.[60] Because Fuller regarded *The Dial* not just as a journal for criticism of art and literature but as a "vehicle for the transmission of knowledge" (9), she refers to objects of critique in the most general way possible, as "foreign

[57] Parker, "German Literature," 332 (emphasis added).

[58] Fuller, "Menzel's View of Goethe," 344.

[59] Fuller, 340.

[60] Fuller, "A Short Essay on Critics," 10. Subsequent references will be cited by page number.

existence" (6), in the sense of a phenomenon ("existence") external ("foreign") to the observer. By virtue of this generality, Fuller is later able to adapt the principles of criticism that she introduces in "A Short Essay on Critics" to the aims of *Summer on the Lakes*, in support of her interest in accounting not just for created works, like art and literature, but for all worldly phenomena, with more or less reference to, or interference from, her own subjectivity.

Fuller considered the output of each type of critic she identifies as valuable, but she differentiates that value in accordance with the degree to which the critical account offers more than an account of the critic's own experience or impressions. By Fuller's definition, "subjective" critics are those most occupied with describing their own experience and therefore those whose critiques are least consequential. Subjective critics, Fuller says, are those who "state their impressions as they rise" without appeal to or concern for anything outside of themselves and their own response: they "never dream of going out of themselves to seek the motive, to trace the law of another nature," aside from their own (5). Statements by subjective critics might be referred to colloquially as "criticism," but Fuller insists that they are "in fact, mere records of impressions"; as criticism, she insists, such "records" have an "absolute, essential value [of] nothing," since they do more to "characterize the critic" than to characterize the object of critique itself (6). Fuller did not think that such impressions were entirely without value, she simply stipulates that they are only valuable to those interested in the experience of the particular critic who issues them. Fuller attests to this elsewhere in the same issue, prefacing an essay of her own titled "A Record of Impressions Produced by the Exhibition of Mr. Allston's Pictures in the Summer 1839." She begins this essay by qualifying it as the work of a subjective critic and nothing more:

> This is a record of impressions. It does not aspire to the dignity of criticism. The writer is conscious of an eye and taste, not sufficiently exercised by study of the best works of art,

> to take the measure of one who has a claim to be surveyed from the same platform. But … believing that comparison and discussion of the impressions of individuals is the best means to ascertain the sum of the whole, and raise the standard of taste, I venture to offer what, if not true in itself, is at least true to the mind of one observer, and may lead others to reveal more valuable experiences.[61]

Fuller is careful to specify here that the sum of the whole cannot be ascertained through the impressions of one individual, but rather through "discussion of the impressions of individuals."[62] As we will see in the next section, Fuller adopts this principle to an increasing degree in *Summer on the Lakes*, as she cedes more and more space, as the book progresses, to impressions of others in lieu of her own.

By comparison to "subjective" critics, what Fuller calls "apprehensive" critics—"apprehensive" in the sense of "apprehending"—try to differentiate between their experience of an object and the nature of that object itself, attempting to "go out of themselves and enter fully into a foreign existence": "They breathe its life; they live in its law; they tell what it meant, and why it so expressed its meaning."[63] Fuller finds apprehensive critics, as a result, to be in a better position to communicate knowledge of an object, or as she puts it, to "reproduce the work of which they speak, and make it better known to us in so far as two statements are better than one" (6). This aim is best accomplished, however, by what Fuller calls "comprehensive" critics. Comprehensive critics are "also apprehensive," in the sense that they make an effort to "go out of themselves," to "enter into the nature of another being and judge his work by its own law," but they take the additional step of looking outside the object of critique itself, to consider it in relation not just to the laws it has set up for itself—its "design"—but also to the laws of the

[61] Margaret Fuller, "A Record of Impressions Produced by the Exhibition of Mr. Allston's Pictures in the Summer 1839," *The Dial* 1, no. 1 (July 1840): 73.

[62] Fuller, 73.

[63] Fuller, "A Short Essay on Critics," 6. Subsequent references will be cited by page number.

milieu in which it purports to operate (6–7). As Fuller puts it, once comprehensive critics have "ascertained [an object's] design and the degree of [its] success in fulfilling it," they "know how to put that aim in its place, and how to estimate its relations" (7).

By promoting "comprehensive" criticism in *The Dial*, Fuller aims to give readers access to new knowledge and, even more, to "new thought" about complex phenomena—not just art and literature, but, as she puts it, any "foreign existence." Fuller expresses regret at finding many journals and reviews to be little more than "guide-books and expurgatory indexes" (9), with the primary purpose being to tell readers "what books are not worth reading, or what must be thought of them when read" (8). Insisting that the "golden age [of journals] cannot be quite past," Fuller wants journals to be "redeemed from their abuses" and "turned to their true uses" (9). In particular, she sees journals as having significant potential as an educational tool, closely echoing the words of Charles Brockden Brown: "[Journals] afford too convenient a vehicle for the transmission of knowledge; they are too natural a feature of our time to have done all their work yet" (9). More than offering "expurgatory indexes" and "stores of information," a journal comprising "comprehensive" criticism would facilitate readers' learning through the same progressive mode in which she was taught. Fuller describes the contents of her ideal journal and its intended effects, premised on her notion that nature, art, and literature are not stable, self-identical, and finally knowable, but as "ever various, ever new," and therefore worth communicating to the reader not just as vividly but also as regularly as possible:

> But nature is ever various, ever new, and so should be her daughters, art and literature. We do not want merely a polite response to what we thought before, but by the freshness of thought in other minds to have new thought awakened in our own. *We do not want stores of information only, but to be roused to digest these into knowledge*. Able and experienced men write for us, and would we know what they think, as they think it would not be for us but for themselves. We would live with them, rather than be taught by them how to live; we would catch the contagion of their mental activity, rather than have them direct us how to regulate our own. In books, in reviews, in the senate, in the pulpit, we

> wish to meet thinking men, not schoolmasters or pleaders. We wish that they should do full justice to their own view, but also that they should be frank with us, and, if now our superiors, treat us as if we might some time rise to be their equals. (10, emphasis added)

The vision for *The Dial* that Fuller offers, as a "vehicle for the transmission of knowledge," is counter-Emersonian in several ways. First, it is founded on ideas of nature and literature that directly oppose Emerson's. Where Emerson conceives of nature as a universal, unified whole (a "web of God") and works of literature as ephemeral manifestations of transcendent values ("a few ideas and a few fables"), Fuller contends that nature and literature are "ever various, ever new," and therefore worthy of "new thought" and "mental activity" on an ongoing basis. Accordingly, Fuller conceives of the development and proliferation of "new thought" and "mental activity" as best accomplished not by one's becoming an Emersonian "Man Thinking," but by the complete obverse, by "meet[ing] thinking men"—as one can do in the pages of a journal. Where Emerson claims that one is better off communing directly with a phenomenon, rather than settling for the "second-handedness" of others' writings—the "rude helpers" that "can have no permanent value"—Fuller contends, in contrast, that one might benefit just as well—if not more—from reading the words of a "comprehensive" critic, and, importantly, doing so as a "comprehensive" reader—as one who "live[s] with them, rather than be[ing] taught by them how to live" and "catch[es] the contagion of their mental activity, rather than hav[ing] them direct us how to regulate our own" (10). Where Emerson dismisses the potential of writing to communicate the nature of complex phenomena like nature and art—"to make words pass for things"—Fuller conceives that even "dull words" can accomplish such a feat. However, as she stipulates in the prefatory poems of *Summer on the Lakes*, this is only possible when those "dull words" are the product of a "comprehensive" critic *and* read by a "comprehensive" reader—by "those to whom a hint suffices."

The final section of this chapter shows Fuller adapting her principles of criticism to suit the aims of *Summer on the Lakes*, in order to produce a text in which readers might "meet thinking men" of the West. By producing such a text, she attempts to both affirm the value of and facilitate access to knowledge of the West in two senses, both knowledge *about* the West and knowledge *from* the West. In addition to facilitating the "transmission of knowledge" in general, extending the stated goal of *The Dial*, she also aims to challenge the dominance over the knowledge economy that was maintained by what she calls "the mere literati"—a group of which she considered herself a part. To do so, she situates her work not only in relation to the phenomena of the West but also in relation to other accounts of those phenomena, beginning at Niagara Falls.

A Comprehensive Critic's Summer on the Lakes

Fuller began her summer on the lakes where many tours like hers began, at Niagara Falls. In a relatively brief opening chapter, ostensibly an account of her eight-day stay at the falls, she introduces and begins to address some of the problems associated with the task of the scholar as she conceived it, of "mak[ing] words pass for things" in the interest of making them "better known" to her reader. By considering this matter in relation to Niagara Falls—one of the "things" in question—Fuller comes to recognize the task she sets up for herself as a complex problem of translation, involving not just words and things, but the scholar herself, who observes the things in the world and selects the words she writes, and the reader, who receives them. Fuller's recognition of the task of the scholar as a complex matrix of understanding and transmission arises from two key questions that she reflects on during her stay in the vicinity of

Niagara Falls: first, what kind of "thing" is Niagara Falls, and second, what function can her writing perform in between any thing in the world and a reader?

That Fuller understood these questions to be closely linked is suggested by her claim that she, "like others," felt she had "little to say" upon first encountering with the falls:

> I, like others, have little to say where the spectacle is, for once, great enough to fill the whole life, and supersede thought, giving us only its own presence. "It is good to be here," is the best as the simplest expression that occurs to the mind. (*SL* 3)

Because of Niagara Falls' immensity and distinctiveness, Fuller initially finds herself unable to say anything about it or its nature. All she can do, like the subjective critic, is record her impressions in its presence, as simple or as "little" as they might be. In this case, all she can manage is, "It is good to be here." After observing the falls over the course of several days, however, from various perspectives and in different light, and at the same time reflecting on the nature of her task, Fuller comes to a new understanding of both the falls and her task, an understanding that greatly influences her approach to producing her "record of the West" in *Summer on the Lakes*.

Fuller initially finds herself regarding Niagara Falls as a "spectacle" that "[gives] only its own presence"—a thing that "supersede[s] thought" and is therefore necessarily separate from and resistant to translation into any form other than itself, whether pictures or "dull words" (*SL* 3). By reflecting on her experiences at the falls, however, she comes to recognize that the falls are not separate from words and pictures but rather, at least for her, intricately bound up in them, given that she cannot help but see the falls in relation to the many representations of them that she had read and seen prior to her arrival. Fuller initially describes this condition, and by extension the falls themselves, as a source of great disappointment:

> When I first came I felt nothing but a quiet satisfaction. I found that drawings, the panorama, &c. had given me a clear notion of the position and proportions of all objects here; I knew where to look for everything, and everything looked as I thought it would.

> … For the magnificence, the sublimity of [the falls] I was prepared by descriptions and by paintings. When I arrived in sight of them I merely felt, "ah, yes, here is the fall, just as I have seen it in picture." (*SL* 4)

In vivid language, Fuller describes the powerful emotional response that she had expected she would have when seeing the falls for the first time, based on the responses she had read others having, only to report that she found her thoughts and feelings not with the falls in front of her but only with what she had "read and heard" about them:

> I expected to be overwhelmed, to retire trembling from this giddy eminence, and gaze with unlimited wonder and awe upon the immense mass rolling on and on, but, somehow or other, I thought only of comparing the effect on my mind with what I had read and heard. (*SL* 11–12)

On failing to receive the expected impressions—"magnificence" and "sublimity"—Fuller admits that she was, for a moment, inclined to falsify her account, to proclaim her satisfaction with her experience and to "give my approbation to the one object in the world that would not disappoint" (*SL* 5).

Rather than offering a false report, though, Fuller instead incorporates her experience of disappointment into her account and, more significantly, into her understanding of how observers and external phenomena relate. She articulates this understanding with the principle: "all great expression, which on a superficial survey, seems so easy as well as so simple, furnishes, after a while, to the faithful observer its own standard by which to appreciate it" (*SL* 5). To substantiate this claim, Fuller reports that "after a while" of viewing Niagara Falls as a "faithful observer," her experience grew less and less disappointing as she felt herself becoming drawn not just closer to but "*into*" the falls:

> Daily these proportions widened and towered more and more upon my sight, and I got, at last, a proper foreground for these sublime distances. Before coming away, I think I really saw the full wonder of the scene. After awhile it so drew me into itself as to inspire an undefined dread, such as I never knew before, such as may be felt when death is about to usher us into a new existence. (*SL* 5)

Since the falls did not change during Fuller's eight days there—they are, as she puts it, a "perpetual creation" (*SL* 3) and "somewhat eternal, if not infinite" (*SL* 4), and they certainly did not "widen[]" or "tower[] more and more"—the marked shift in her ability "to appreciate" them is a result, instead, of a change in her critical mode. Where she had initially been able only to state her own impressions, like a subjective critic—"It is good to be here"—she eventually finds herself, like both an "apprehensive" and a "comprehensive" critic, "enter[ing] into a foreign existence" ("After awhile it so drew me into itself") and judging the falls by "its own standard." To describe her relation to the falls, Fuller does not invoke the same terms she presents in her "Short Essay on Critics" (subjective, apprehensive, comprehensive critics) but introduces the concept of the "faithful observer," analogous to both the apprehensive and comprehensive critics as it is characterized by an impulse to judge any phenomenon by "its own standard."

That Fuller thought about the "faithful observer," and herself in this case, as a kind of critic nonetheless is suggested by her referring to Niagara Falls as a "great expression." The word "expression" appears throughout *Summer on the Lakes* as an apparent catch-all term for any outward form, or "foreign existence," and as a counterpart to the concept of the internal "impression." By using the term "expression" to describe phenomena, Fuller effectively narrows the distance between the world and communication, between "things" and "words," given that it is suitable for describing features of people and nature ("In his stature, *expression*, and heavy coloring" [*SL* 94]; "her eye had a highly spiritual *expression*" [*SL* 152]; "the natural *expression* of the country" [*SL* 47]; "it seemed not necessary to have any better heaven, or fuller *expression* of love and freedom than in the mood of nature here" [*SL* 45]) as well as instances of verbal communication, both in speech and print ("Ballads, hymns, love-lyrics, have often no claim differing from those of common prose speech, to the title of poems, except a greater keenness

and terseness of *expression*" [*SL* 155]; "She made no reply to the *expressions* of sorrow from her companions" [*SL* 87]; "'Get you gone, you Indian dog,' was the felt, if not the breathed, *expression* towards the hapless owners of the soil" [*SL* 183]; "Noble the thought, no less in its frank *expression*"[*SL* 129]).

By regarding Niagara Falls as an "expression," Fuller becomes less troubled by seeing it only in relation to what she had "read and heard" about it. She imagines that a direct and original relationship with external phenomena is possible in theory, but only to what she calls "first discoverers," as she puts it: "Happy were the first discoverers of Niagara, those who could come unawares upon this view and upon that, whose feelings were entirely their own" (*SL* 13). Fuller even reports being a "first discoverer" herself of some phenomena in the vicinity of Niagara Falls, if not of the main falls themselves. The first are the rapids below the falls, which she says "enchanted me far beyond what I expected; they are so swift that they cease to seem so; you can think only of their beauty" (*SL* 7). She later describes experiencing these rapids in terms others reserve for the main falls, attributing her "feeling most moved in the wrong place" (*SL* 12) to the fact that she had not been "prepared by descriptions and by paintings" (*SL* 11):

> At last, slowly and thoughtfully I walked down to the bridge leading to Goat Island, and when I stood upon this frail support, and saw a quarter of a mile of tumbling, rushing rapids, and heard their everlasting roar, my emotions overpowered me, a choaking [sic] sensation rose to my throat, a thrill rushed through my veins, "my blood ran rippling to my finger's ends." This was the climax of the effect which the falls produced upon me—neither the American nor the British fall moved me as did these rapids. (*SL* 11)

The second "discovery" Fuller reports is a "little waterfall" down river from Niagara Falls, which she says she has "discovered for myself" (*SL* 7). In contrast to Niagara Falls, which had seemed stable and permanent—"eternal, if not infinite"—by both its "presence" and its representation in a variety of media, Fuller was inclined to think that this anonymous "fountain" might have disappeared at any moment: "[I] thought it for some time an accidental beauty which

it would not do to leave, lest I might never see it again. After I found it permanent, I returned many times, to watch the play of the crest" (*SL* 7). She recalls reading of a similar thought in an account written by the early American portrait painter John Greenwood (1727-1792), though in regard to the main falls rather than its miniature counterpart: "Once I was moved by Mr. Greenwood's remark, that he could not realize this marvel [Niagara Falls] till, opening his eyes the next morning after he had seen it, his doubt as to the possibility of its being still there, taught him what he had experienced" (*SL* 10). Fuller reports that her experience was "exactly the opposite" of Greenwood's when first viewing Niagara Falls, indicating that she never doubted its permanence and had therefore effectively discovered it even before she had arrived.

Fuller recognizes that it is possible to be in the position of a "first discoverer," and that it affords certain distinct experiences, but she does not think that it is necessarily superior to an apparently secondary position. On the contrary, she recognizes that there is distinct value to be gained from observing and thinking about a phenomenon in a secondary relation. Fuller arrives at this understanding as a result of three different critical procedures she undertakes: first, shown above, comparing Niagara Falls and her responses to it to what she had "read and heard"; second, viewing the falls from different vantages; and third, observing other observers in relation to the falls. As result of each, Fuller comes to see Niagara Falls not as a self-identical, stable phenomenon, as she imagined she saw when she first approached it, holding a "clear notion of the position and proportions of all objects," believing she "knew where to look for everything, and everything looked as [she] thought it would" (*SL* 4). Instead, she sees the falls, like nature, as "ever various, ever new." This is not a function of any characteristics of the falls, either its immensity or even its constant motion. After all, as Fuller notes, the falls seems to embody a paradox in regard to the latter, seeming to be at once in motion and unmoving, "mutability and

unchangeableness … united" (*SL* 13). Rather, the nature of the falls, she finds, is a function of the nature of the observer—the falls are "ever various, ever new" because the observer is "ever various, ever new."

Fuller illustrates this in a few ways. In one paragraph, for example, she describes observing Niagara Falls from four different positions: from the British side (present-day Canada), from a boat, from a road near the falls, and from Table Rock, right beside it. Each position results in a different impression: "magical effects," "melodramatic" effects, "delight," and loss of all powers of observation and consciousness, respectively:

> As picture, the Falls can only be seen from the British side. There they are seen in their veils, and at sufficient distance to appreciate the magical effects of these, and the light and shade. From the boat, as you cross, the effects and contrasts are more melodramatic. On the road back from the whirlpool, we saw them as a reduced picture with delight. But what I liked best was to sit on Table Rock, close to the great fall. There all power of observing details, all separate consciousness, was quite lost. (*SL* 6)

If Fuller recognizes that Niagara Falls does not change as the physical or mental state of the observer changes, she does not say so. In fact, quite the opposite. When she describes coming across another vantage—at night under a "splendid moon"—that she had not previously encountered either in person or in print, she declares, "[e]verything was changed":

> the misty apparition had taken off its many-colored crown which it had worn by day, and a bow of silvery white spanned its summit. The moonlight gave a poetical indefiniteness to the distant parts of the waters, and while the rapids were glancing in her beams, the river below the falls was black as night, save where the reflection of the sky gave it the appearance of the shield of blued steel. (*SL* 12)

None of these views alone conveys what Fuller calls "the full wonder of the scene" (*SL* 5). But neither is that "full wonder" conveyed by the sum of all views together. When Fuller reports that she had supplanted her initial "superficial survey" of the falls by viewing them over the course of several days, as a "faithful observer," she can offer only a qualified statement about what she has seen and experienced: "*I think I really saw* the full wonder of the scene" (5, emphasis added). If

the falls itself, in its "full wonder," is something one can only "think" one "really saw," perhaps the "first discoverers" are only "[h]appy" because they have been furnished no concept, by comparison, of what else is possible.

Recognizing that her impression of the falls was affected far more by what she had "read and heard" about the falls than by the falls themselves, Fuller does not concern herself with trying to facilitate for her reader anything like a primary relationship to the falls, by attempting to reproduce the falls by some means (either in "dull words" or pictures) or to represent her own experience of the falls. Doing either could only, at best, add more views of the falls to those she had already compiled, or, at worst, serve the same function that descriptions and paintings had served for her, furnishing a concept of the falls as stable and self-identical, already discovered and therefore undiscoverable in any further degree. Instead of situating her work in direct relation to the falls, then, she situates it in relation to what is ultimately more effecting, what she refers to as "things written about" the falls (*SL* 10).

The difference between the former and the latter she describes in *The Dial* in terms of the poet and the critic, respectively. Where the poet is a creator, maker, and inventor, the critic, she says, is "his needed friend": "Next to invention is the power of interpreting invention; next to beauty the power of appreciating beauty. And of making others appreciate it."[64] In a dialogue staged between two so named figures, Fuller's "Poet" objects to the work of her "Critic" in terms similar to those in which Emerson objects to the work of Goethe, based on the view that the latter does not create anything new:

> The birds draw back into their nests, the sunset hues into their clouds, when you are seen in the distance with your tablets all ready to write them into prose. … [Your] perpetual analysis, comparison, and classification never add one atom to the sum of existence. …

[64] Fuller, "A Short Essay on Critics," 7.

you are but an excrescence produced by my life.[65]

In response, Fuller's "Critic" does not dispute the charge of failing to write worldly things "into prose" or to "add one atom to the sum of existence," but simply clarifies that such tasks, the tasks of the poet, are not his tasks (494). If he fails to perform the function of the poet, it is because he does not aim to do so. The function he does aspire to serve is not even to amplify the work of the poet, to make it "heard," but rather to make the minds of others "[know] what the ear heard":

> I am the rock which gives you back the echo. I am the tuning-key, which harmonizes your instrument, the regulator to your watch. Who would speak, if no ear heard? Nay, if no mind knew what the ear heard? … I claim my place in the order of nature. The word descended and became flesh for two purposes, to organize itself, and to take cognizance of its organization. When the first Poet worked alone, he paused between the cantos to proclaim, 'It is very good.' Dividing himself among men, he made some to create, and others to proclaim the merits of what is created. … I must examine, compare, sift, and winnow; what can bear this ordeal remains to me as pure gold. … Consider that a part implies the whole, as the everlasting No the everlasting Yes, and permit to exist the shadow of your light, the register of your inspiration. (494)

Without the critic, Fuller argues, to "examine, compare, sift, and winnow" expressions created by creators, the work of the poet may very well be seen, heard, and sensed, and yet still remain unknown—not because of the nature of the creator or even of the expression, but because of the manner in which the hearer and potential knower had been "prepared" to hear and know (496).

That the critic could have a function not just in relation to works of art but also to works of nature—*i.e.* the works of God, whom Fuller calls "the first Poet" (495) and "the Being who was architect of this and of all" (*SL* 13)—becomes clear to Fuller at Niagara Falls by virtue of her observing others observing the falls, from which she concludes, "I think all who come here must *in some sort* see thee" (*SL* 8, emphasis added). If the "sort" in which one sees the falls is not determined by the falls themselves or by the position(s) from which they are seen, but by

[65] Margaret Fuller, "A Dialogue," *The Dial* 1, no. 4 (April 1841): 494.

something prior, like certain "descriptions and pictures" of the falls by which the seer has been "prepared," the critic can function as an effective guide to the falls—and other phenomena in the world—by serving as a guide to descriptions and pictures of them. There are two figures of particular importance to the development of Fuller's understanding in this regard, one who exhibits a distinct and surprising primary relation to the falls, a "sort" of seeing that Fuller cannot herself relate to but which she cannot deny for having witnessed it, and another, a "guide to the falls," who embodies a secondary relation and reveals its potential function and value despite, and as a result of, Fuller's initial impulse to dismiss it.

The first figure, described only as "a man," Fuller saw while sitting next to the falls at a point called "Table Rock," the vantage that she claimed to have "liked best" for its distinctly powerful effect on her ("There all power of observing details, all separate consciousness, was quite lost" [*SL* 6]). Upon seeing this man and his actions, which amount to the obverse of her own from the same point, Fuller is confronted with the fact that her response, of losing "power of observing details" and "separate consciousness," is not universal or necessary, but only one "sort" in which the falls might be seen:

> Once, just as I had seated myself there [at Table Rock], a man came to take his first look. He walked close up to the fall, and, after looking at it a moment, with an air as if thinking how he could best appropriate it to his own use, he spat into it. (*SL* 6)

Fuller is careful to specify that what she witnessed was this man's "first look" at the falls, implying that his relation to the falls was not arrived at after growing accustomed to its other effects but his primary and original response. She also resists expressing judgement of his relation to the falls, in any terms at all, negative or positive. Instead, she draws a correlation between what she has seen in his action and what two prominent authors have reported seeing and subsequently declared as characteristic of the present age and of America respectively:

> This trait seemed wholly worthy of an age whose love of *utility* is such that the Prince

> Puckler Muskau suggests the probability of men coming to put the bodies of their dead parents in the fields to fertilize them, and of a country such as Dickens has described. (*SL* 6)

The first author, Prince Hermann, Fürst von Pückler-Muskau, was a German nobleman, landscape gardener, and travel writer who argued that the present age was characterized by its "love of *utility*," which Fuller herself saw expressed in both the spitting man's action and his "air as if thinking how he could best appropriate [the falls] to his own use," after which he apparently concludes that he could "best appropriate" it, at the moment, as a spittoon (*SL* 6). In his somewhat misleadingly-titled book *Hints on Landscape Gardening* [*Andeutungen über Landschaftsgärtnerei*] Pückler-Muskau describes similarly utilitarian actions—including the grisly image that Fuller refers to, of human bodies being used as fertilizer—which he argues are in store for any society premised on principles of capitalism. The second author is Charles Dickens, whose travelogue, *American Notes for General Circulation* (1842), presents an unflattering portrait of America and Americans as he saw them during his travels, characterized, respectively, by the underdevelopment of the kind of institutions Dickens was accustomed to finding in England and, more simply, coarse and unmannerly behavior.

Finding that the spitting man's action embodies what Pückler-Muskau and Dickens describe, instead of denying the truth of their accounts, which seem to have been confirmed before her eyes, Fuller instead intervenes in the capacity of a critic, expressing her hope that their accounts will not be regarded "on the historic page" as necessary and universal, as representative of what she calls "truly the age or truly the America": "but these will not, I hope, be seen on the historic page to be truly the age or truly the America. A little leaven is leavening the whole mass for other bread" (*SL* 6). Using the metaphor of leaven, Fuller notes the outsized influence that some accounts can have, coming to stand for the whole despite constituting only a part. (In this regard, she again challenges the structure of Emerson's conception of science, wherein a part of

nature *does* adequately stand for the whole.[66]) Fuller intervenes, however, not by denying or suppressing this man's action, but by appropriating it to her own use, demonstrating the writer's power to frame an event as either representative or atypical. In Dickens' book, for example, the same description might purport to verify the nature of America and Americans themselves despite only actually verifying Dickens' prior thoughts about America and Americans—what he himself was "prepared" to see. In Fuller's book, the description does not illustrate America or Americans—or else, it contributes no more or less to their representation than the man's spit contributes to the falls. Instead, it is used to illustrate the manner in which, and material from which, phenomena like "the age" and "the America" are composed "on the historic page"—and the imbalance between the poverty of a representation and its representative power that could persist absent the intervention of a critic (*SL* 6).

The second figure, a "guide to the falls," models for Fuller the critic's position in relation to the falls, allowing her not just to observe its potential function but to conceive of its possibility in the first place. At first Fuller regards the guide to the falls as useless and unnecessary, as she had initially felt herself upon seeing Niagara, as someone who must have "little to say" in the face of such a "spectacle": "There is also a 'guide to the falls,' who wears his title labeled on his hat; otherwise, indeed, one might as soon think of asking for a gentleman usher to point out the moon" (*SL* 9–10) She initially regards this "guide" as superfluous, as offering to perform a function that no one would ask for, or even "think of asking" for, if the possibility weren't announced by the label on his hat. Fuller's judgment, and dismissal, of this guide is based on her imagining that his function is only, literally, indexical: a person "to point out" the falls. Her view

[66] Elizabeth A. Dant, "Composing the World: Emerson and the Cabinet of Natural History," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 44, no. 1 (June 1989): 18–44.

changes when she considers not only that more productive forms of guidance are possible, but also, again, by conceiving of Niagara Falls as analogous to other types of "great expression" that warrant—and even ask for—guidance: "Yet why should we wonder at such [the existence of a guide to the falls], either, when we have Commentaries on Shakspeare [sic], and Harmonies of the Gospels?" (*SL* 9–10). If such great expressions as these are not so self-evident that they cannot be "better known" through Commentaries and Harmonies, "why should we wonder" about the existence of a similar function in relation to a "great expression" like Niagara Falls? Or, to put it another way, if one would not presume to receive "the full wonder" of a work of literature or a sacred text and also not hesitate to ask for a guide to them, why, Fuller asks, would one presume to receive the "full wonder" of Niagara Falls after only a brief encounter and not only hesitate to ask for a guide but not even "think of asking"?

Having rationalized, at least in theory, the work of the critic in relation to phenomena in the world, Fuller immediately begins reflecting on the work at hand, her own writing, by asking her reader to reflect on it as well: "And now you have the little all [sic] I have to write. Can it interest you?" (*SL* 10). Considering this question herself, and in doing so guiding her reader through her reflection on it, Fuller suggests that the degree of her writing's "interest" will most depend not on the character or quality of the writing or the nature of its subject but, rather, on the nature of its reader—the "you" whom she addresses. She draws a distinction in this regard between readers who have "enjoyed the full life of any scene, of any hour" and those who have not, the latter of whom she refers to as "the absent." To the former, she suggests, a written account will not transcend its own written-ness: "To one who has enjoyed the full life of any scene, of any hour, what thoughts can be recorded about it, seem like the commas and semicolons in the paragraph, mere stops." Regarding "the absent," all she commits to is that the

previous statement does not hold: "Yet I suppose it is not so to the absent" (*SL* 10). What Fuller does not say here, but what is implied by the tactics she employs in this and subsequent chapters, is that there is, in fact, no one who has "enjoyed the full life of any scene, of any hour," and that the absence of "the absent" is therefore not a physical condition, a matter of proximity or distance, but an epistemological condition, one that cannot be overcome, only managed—for example, by a work like hers, that dramatizes and reveals the complications involved in what might otherwise be taken for granted: not just seeing or knowing a place, but being present there at all.

Fuller responds in another way to the question of whether or not her writing can be of interest to any "you," in what seems to be an offhand rationalization of her writing's potential to be interesting: "At least, I have read things written about Niagara, music, and the like, that interested *me*" (*SL* 10, emphasis in original). Fuller seems to reason that if she has been interested in others' "things written about" Niagara Falls "and the like," then some readers might be interested in *her* "things written about" Niagara Falls "and the like." But the Niagara chapter, and the rest of *Summer on the Lakes*, is not composed of "things written about" things. Rather, it maintains its stance at least one step removed from things in the world, by being composed, like the very sentence above, of things written about things written about things. This stance developed at least in part out of Fuller's inability to take for granted, and unwillingness to even momentarily assume, the stability and singularity of what is there to be "written about"—a condition that is also revealed in this sentence above, in the list of "like" phenomena that she offers: "Niagara, music, and the like." This list could be taken to be "about" Niagara, given that it reveals something of Fuller's conception of the falls by virtue of the association it makes between the falls and music—that she conceives the falls as an "expression" that, like music,

resists translation into verbal and visual forms. But the list could just as well be taken as "about" music, or "the like," whatever that might entail. What this sentence is most about is "things written about" things. In the same way, *Summer on the Lakes* is not "about" the country—which might have a place on the above list with Niagara and music and the like, as an equally unstable "object" on which to focus a project. Rather, it is about things written about the country. To put it another way, Fuller's book is not itself a work of geography—literally, earth-writing—so much as it is about works of—the work of—geography. By maintaining a secondary, critical relation to that work, Fuller both avoids and undermines the perception that any writing communicates, or could communicate, as she puts it, "truly the America" (*SL* 6).

Fuller's critical stance is most clearly apparent in her discussions of printed works, as in the section immediately prior to her account of venturing into the Illinois prairie for the first time. Fuller reports that while waiting in Chicago for her tour on the prairie to begin, she read "all the books [she] could find about the new region" (*SL* 30), including George Catlin's *North American Indians* (1841), Charles Augustus Murray's *Travels in North America* (1839), Henry Rowe Schoolcraft's *Algic Researches* (1839), and Washington Irving's *Tour on the Prairies* (1835). Because she read these books before traveling into "the new region," and because they cover many regions that Fuller would never see for herself, her discussion is less a collection of individual judgments on each book's relation to the objects it purports to represent than a general statement on the present state of the enterprise that they all participate in, namely, communicating the nature of the country. In other words, Fuller does not perform the task of a book review as she defines it elsewhere, with the aim of telling readers "what books are not worth reading, or what must be thought of them when read," but instead performs something

more like a literature review, identifying the difficulties entailed and the potentialities yet to be attained in a particular field of inquiry.[67]

What is most remarkable about Fuller's work here is that it is her commentary that brings that field of inquiry into existence as a discourse. The works that she discusses do not identify their relation to each other or even their participation in a common enterprise of communicating the nature of the country. Each work acts, so far as it is conscious, alone, toward its own individual aims. It is Fuller who identifies and announces their commonality by labeling them as works "about the new region." In doing so, like the "guide to the falls," she creates a discourse that one might not otherwise even "think of asking" for. Her discussion of each book reveals, additionally, that while the outlines of a discourse might be discernible to one looking for them, its substance was still very much in process of being formed, one "inadequate" book at a time (*SL* 33).

Regarding Catlin's book, for example, Fuller reports that she was "assured by those familiar with the regions he describes, that he is not to be depended on for the accuracy of his facts" (*SL* 30). Fuller herself judges, additionally, that Catlin "sometimes yields to the temptation of making out a story" (*SL* 31). Rather than dismiss his book on the grounds of these apparent flaws, however, Fuller presents it as a positive, if provisional, contribution to knowledge of "the regions he describes." According to her sources, she says, Catlin's account is "true to the spirit of the scene" and "a far better view can be got from him than from any source at present existing, of the Indian tribes of the far west, and of the country where their inheritance lay." If Catlin's book is "not to be depended on" for its substance ("his facts"), it is nonetheless valuable as an index to gaps in the body of knowledge "at present existing" (*SL* 31).

[67] Fuller, "A Short Essay on Critics," 8.

Among the gaps Fuller came to recognize from her reading was the gap between what is spoken and what is written. Rather than a matter of the losses entailed in the process of transcription from sound to print—losses that would become most evident only with advent of sound recording—what Fuller identifies is the loss that occurs when, like Catlin, a writer "yields to the temptation of making out a story," or, to put it another way, pursues one kind of value in lieu of another. Fuller critiques Schoolcraft's *Algic Researches* in this regard for reshaping certain "fine materials"—"mythological or hunting stories of the Indians"—into forms amenable to a genteel readership, by giving them "the style of annuals and souvenirs" (*SL* 31–32). Though she still considers Schoolcraft to have written a "valuable book," she insists that it has failed to achieve the full potential of the material on which it was based:

> Schoolcraft's Algic Researches is a valuable book, though a worse use could hardly have been made of such fine material. Had the mythological or hunting stories of the Indians been written down exactly as they were received from the lips of the narrators, the collection could not have been surpassed in interest, both for the wild charm they carry with them, and the light they throw on a peculiar modification of life and mind. As it is, though the incidents have an air of originality and pertinence to the occasion, that gives us confidence that they have not been altered, the phraseology in which they were expressed has been entirely set aside, and the flimsy graces, common to the style of annuals and souvenirs, substituted for the Spartan brevity and sinewy grasp of Indian speech. (*SL* 31–32)

For Fuller, Schoolcraft's book, like Catlin's, is valuable not as a manifestation of "fine materials" but as an index to them, or even simply as a notice that such materials are "there" in "the new region" that she, or anyone else, might not have thought to look for: "We can just guess what might have been there, as we can detect the fine proportions of the Brave whom the bad taste of some white patron has arranged in frock-coat, hat, and pantaloons" (*SL* 32). As she declares at the beginning of this section of reviews, it was only after reading "all the books [she] could find about the new region" that the region, as she puts it, "began to become real to me" (*SL* 30). She does not say what the region was to her prior to reading, nor that what she read was

commensurate with reality, only that her reading about the region was the beginning of its becoming real to her. It is after these reviews that she begins the process of making the prairie begin to become real for her own readers, mindful of, and in response to, the very kinds of inadequacies she had identified in the writings of others.

Rather than begin with the prairie itself—which she might have included on her list with "Niagara, music, and the like"—Fuller takes what might appear to be a more manageable, more focused approach, introducing first the yellow "prairie flowers" that she first saw not in the prairies themselves but in nearby Chicago, just prior to the start of her three-week trek into Western Illinois. This introduction progresses through three stages, increasing in complexity. First, she presents her own impression in a simple, unadorned line: "In Chicago I first saw the beautiful prairie flowers" (*SL* 33). She then offers a slightly heightened description, borrowing a metaphor from William Cullen Bryant's poem "The Prairies": "They were there in their glory the first ten days we were there—'the golden and the flame-like flowers.'" Finally, she reports what she has learned from someone she describes only as "an Indian girl," that the flower has both a name and medicinal properties:

> The flame-like flower I was taught afterwards, by an Indian girl, to call "Wickapee;" and she told me, too, that its splendors had a useful side, for it was used by the Indians as a remedy for an illness to which they were subject. (*SL* 33)

By including these two dimensions of the flower, Fuller reveals not only the relative poverty of the preceding descriptions—hers and Bryant's—but also, by extension, the poverty of the two faculties upon which those descriptions were based: visual perception and poetic imagination. She undermines the power of these faculties further by describing how both had led her to make utterly false assumptions about "the beauty of the prairies":

> Beside these brilliant flowers, which hemmed and gilt the grass in a sunny afternoon's drive near the blue lake, between the low oakwood and the narrow beach, stimulated, whether sensuously by the optic nerve, unused to so much gold and crimson with such

> tender green, or symbolically through some meaning dimly seen in the flowers, I enjoyed a sort of fairyland exultation never felt before, and the first drive amid the flowers gave me anticipation of the beauty of the prairies. (*SL* 33–34)

Whether "stimulated" by the scene through the mechanics of the eye ("sensuously by the optic nerve") like Newton or Goethe or through some more mystical transfer of meaning between the observed and the observer ("symbolically through some meaning dimly seen") like Swedenborg or Emerson, Fuller found herself transported to a "fairyland exultation" that was ultimately deflated by her first view of the prairie itself, which, she reports, "seemed to speak to the very desolation of dullness":

> After sweeping over the vast monotony of the lakes to come to this monotony of land, with all around a limitless horizon,—to walk, and walk, and run, but never climb, oh! it was too dreary for any but a Hollander to bear. (*SL* 34)

Much like her experience at Niagara Falls, Fuller reports that the distinctive virtues of the prairies became impressed upon her only once she had ceased to view them in relation to what she had "read and heard" (Bryant's "The Prairies") and in accordance with certain prescribed ways of seeing, through the "optic nerve" or "symbolically":

> But after I had rode out, and seen the flowers and seen the sun set with that calmness seen only in the prairies, and the cattle winding slowly home to their homes in the "island groves"—peacefullest of sights—I began to love because I began to know the scene, and shrank no longer from "the encircling vastness." (*SL* 34–35)

Although Fuller describes the prairies here using terms borrowed, again, from Bryant's poem—"island groves," "the encircling vastness"—she does so not to reassert or endorse Bryant's depiction but to challenge it. Where Bryant uses the phrase "the encircling vastness" to align the prairies, as a distinct feature of the American continent, with the European Romantic aesthetic category of "the sublime," Fuller uses the same phrase to undo this alignment, declaring that once she "began to know the scene," she "shrank no longer from 'the encircling vastness.'" The prairies still constituted for Fuller an "encircling vastness"—nothing had changed about their

physicality—but when she came to "know the scene," she found that they were not—or not only—something to shrink from. Fuller identifies the prairies as distinctive—a "new form of life"—and insists that they must therefore come to be looked at and known as such, rather than (only) relation to, and in terms of, an external standard: "It is always thus with the new form of life; we must learn to look at it by its own standard" (*SL* 35).

As she does at Niagara Falls, Fuller describes how she "learn[ed] to look" at the prairie "by its own standard," revealing that she initially responded by judging the prairie in negative terms, comparing it to what it was not: "At first, no doubt my accustomed eye kept saying, if the mind did not, What! No distant mountains? what, no valleys?" (*SL* 35). Even after reflecting on her initial response, however, she still offers a description of the prairie that is largely in negative terms: "But after a while … there was nothing but this lovely, still reception on the earth; no towering mountains, no deep tree-shadows, nothing but plain earth and water bathed in light." This description no longer conveys any negative judgement of the prairie, however. In this regard, it aligns with the notion of "comprehensive" criticism that Fuller describes in her "Short Essay on Critic," where she contends that a statement of what an object *is not* can do more to communicate what an object *is* than a statement that attempts to "reproduce" it ("apprehensive" criticism) or a statement that simply says what that object "is to us" ("subjective" criticism): "There are persons who maintain, that there is no legitimate criticism, except the reproductive; that we have only to say what the work is or is to us, never what it is not. … We do not seek to degrade but to classify an object by stating what it is not."[68]

Fuller invokes Bryant's "The Prairies" in this context not to reject his classification of the prairies, as a source of sublime aesthetic experience—an experience that she reports having

[68] Fuller, "A Short Essay on Critics," 8

herself—but rather to present it as only one classification among many, including, after a while, its opposite. Fuller indicates the inversion of her own sublime response by describing the prairies not in terms of fear and shrinking but in terms of love and attraction: "I began to love because I began to know the scene"; "this lovely, still reception on the earth"; "all the attractions I thus found out by degrees" (*SL* 34–35). Importantly, Fuller attributes this inversion to her learning and attaining knowledge in relation to the prairie itself ("we must learn to look"; "I began to love because I began to know the scene"), suggesting that she considered aesthetic response and the acquisition of knowledge not just as opposed, but as mutually exclusive. Fuller develops this thought further in the chapter that follows, her account of traveling through Western Illinois, in which she both exhibits and reflects on the difficulty she had in parlaying theoretical understanding into practice.

Upon concluding her account of traveling on the Illinois prairies, Fuller draws attention to what she regards as its failures. In particular, she recognizes that she had not looked, or learned to look, at the country by its own standard. Rather, she had allowed, or failed to prevent, what she called in the previous chapter her "accustomed eye" from guiding her observations in accordance with external standards—in this case, standards of "picturesque beauty":

> Now that I am about to leave Illinois, feelings of regret and admiration come over me, as in parting with a friend whom we have not had the good sense to prize and study, while hours of association, never perhaps to return, were granted. I have fixed my attention almost exclusively on the picturesque beauty of this region; it was so new, so inspiring. But I ought to have been more interested in the housekeeping of this magnificent state, in the education she is giving her children, in their prospects. (*SL* 104)

In her reflection, Fuller identifies what gets lost as a result of her observing and describing only the country's "picturesque beauty," namely, knowledge—her own and by extension her readers'—of aspects of the country that she feels she ought to have "had the good sense to prize and study," such as its domestic and social conditions. Fuller critiques her own book, then, for

the same failings that she found in those books she had read before traveling into the country herself. Like those books, Fuller finds that her work is less a record of the country than an index to its "resources abundant," which someone whose attention was "fixed" in a manner different from her own might "retrieve" as she had not. (*SL* 104)

As Fuller came to recognize the limits of her own capacities, perceptual and otherwise, and, by extension, the limits of her book, rather than try to redress or excuse any resulting shortcomings—such as gaps in knowledge that she could identify but not close—she began instead to draw attention to them, in the same way she drew attention to those shortcomings she found in the works of others. In this way, she models, especially in her final chapter, a truly comprehensive criticism, that takes account even of itself.

The final chapter of *Summer on the Lakes* does not draw Fuller's journey to a close by narrating a homecoming, as a work of travel writing might be expected to do. Instead, it withholds closure by detailing its omissions. This is the chapter in which Fuller calls attention to the fact, discussed above, that she has "omitted that indispensable part of a travelling journal, the account of what we found to eat" (*SL* 246) But she omits much else besides. She describes, for example, the pain she feels for having to omit extracts from books she had read—though she encourages her reader to seek out the books for themselves in a library:

> I wished to extract here [Alexander] Henry's account of [making sugar] … but have already occupied too much room with extracts. … I am no less aggrieved to omit [Jonathan] Carver's account of the devotion of a Winnebago prince at the Falls of St. Anthony … I wish I had a thread long enough to string on it all these beads that take my fancy, but, as I have not, I can only refer the reader to the books themselves, which may be found in the library of Harvard College, if not elsewhere. (*SL* 241)

More consequential is her omission of stories that she had heard during her travels, which could not be sought out elsewhere, such as an Illinois farmer's "account of his life at home, of his late adventures among the Indians," which she omitted, she claims, because she "want[ed] talent to

write it down" (*SL* 248). Similarly, she tells of "many sportsman stories told … by those from Illinois and Wisconsin," but claims, again, "I do not retain any of these well enough, nor any that I heard earlier, to write them down" (*SL* 248).

Of all the omissions that Fuller identifies in this chapter, the most consequential is not due to her failure to retain or her want of talent. She describes being taken by a boat captain one morning on an "exploring expedition" to "the remains of an old English fort on Point St. Joseph's" (*SL* 239–40). Although the captain, she says, "had been on this trip hundreds of times," he "had never seen this spot, and never would, but for this fog, and his desire to entertain me." She portrays him, then, as "a striking instance how men, for the sake of getting a living, forget to live": "In Chicago, how many men, who never found time to see the prairies or learn anything unconnected with the business of the day, or about the country they were living in!" Fuller takes this captain, quite simply, as a representation of misaligned priorities, or disordered "development," which he and others might will into alignment: "We want a more equal, more thorough, more harmonious development, and there is nothing to hinder from it the men of this country, except their own supineness, or sordid views" (*SL* 240).

This is a particularly striking claim for Fuller to make in light of what she reports is the captain's viewpoint on his own "development," which he identifies not as a consequence of something internal—his "supineness" or "sordid views"—but of something external, namely, a lack of inducement: "He lamented, too, that there had been no call which induced him to develop his powers of expression, so that he might communicate what he had seen, for the enjoyment or instruction of others" (*SL* 240). By suggesting that this captain, along with other "active men, the truly living, who could tell what life was," could simply begin to "tell what life was," if not for their own laziness or materialism, Fuller seems to ignore what this captain was evidently

sensitive to, namely, the difficulty, if not impossibility, of thinking a vocation—literally, a "call"—into existence. Fuller seems to have forgotten, or at least failed to make a connection to, the inducement she had received at Niagara at the start of her summer, from a label on the hat of the "guide to the falls," which announced to her a vocation that, as she put it, one would not "soon think of asking for," and which she would go on to answer by developing her powers of expression, in the interest of communicating what she had seen, heard, and read, to the absent.

CHAPTER THREE

"We will talk over what we have learned in our geographies": Emily Dickinson's Geographical Discourse

> [A]bsolutely nothing in Nature has ever yet been described,—not a bird, nor a berry of the woods, nor a drop of water, nor a spicula of ice, nor summer, nor winter, nor sun, nor star. […] Literary amateurs go the tour of the globe to renew their stock of materials, when they do not yet know a bird or a bee or a blossom beside their homestead-door.
>
> – Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "My Out-Door Study"

On February 7, 1850, an anonymous Valentine letter, of the kind popularly exchanged between New England adolescents in the middle of the nineteenth century, was printed in the "Editor's Corner" of Amherst College's student literary journal, *The Indicator*.[1] After an opening litany of playful Latinate nonsense—"Magnum bonum, 'harum scarum,' zounds et zounds, et war alarum," and so on—the writer announces her desire to arrange an "interview" with her addressee, specifying that what she is interested in is not a romantic dalliance but a kind of intellectual alliance—an exchange of talk and ideas between equals: "And not to *see* merely, but a chat, sir, a tete-a-tete, a confab, a mingling of opposite minds is what I propose to have." To make clear the kind of arrangement she has in mind, the writer lists three archetypal coequal confederations—one scriptural, one classical, and one modern: "I feel sir that we shall agree. We will be David and Jonathan, or Damon and Pythias, or what is better than either, the United States of America" (233). The substance of their "confab," she explains, will be the discourses they have in common as engaged and well-schooled young New Englanders: "We will talk over what we have learned in our geographies, and listened to from the pulpit, the press and the Sabbath School" (223). But the ultimate purpose of meeting, she goes on to say, will be more

[1] "Editor's Corner," *The Indicator* 2, no. 7 (February 1850): 220–24. Accessed in Amherst College Digital Collections, Amherst College Library. <https://acdc.amherst.edu/view/asc:1160236/>. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically by page number.

than simply reviewing their collective reading, listening, and learning. In a rapturous conclusion, she proclaims that their "confab" will serve as nothing less than a foundation for total societal renewal—a waking of the world from "ignorance and error," and even, if necessary, a complete reconstitution of society from the ground up:

> But the world is sleeping in ignorance and error, sir, and we must be crowing cocks, and singing larks, and a rising sun to awake her; or else we'll pull society up to the roots, and plant it in a different place. We'll build Alms-houses, and transcendental State prisons, and scaffolds – we'll blow out the sun, and the moon, and encourage invention. Alpha shall kiss Omega – we will ride up the hill of glory – Hallelujah, all hail! (224)

Exaggeration and heightened rhetoric were not uncommon in nineteenth-century Valentine letters, though they typically served to ironize proclamations of love and friendship rather than embellish calls for learned dialogue and radical social change.[2] The editor of *The Indicator*, attempting to account for this letter's idiosyncrasy, calls it a "frenzy built edifice" and suggests that its author "must have some spell, by which she quickens the imagination, and causes the high blood 'run frolic through the veins'" (223). He admits, however, that the letter has nonetheless achieved some measure of its aim, conceding that he "should like to know and talk with" its author. All the letter's grandiloquence notwithstanding, he considers it "a very ingenious affair"—not merely a mindless outpouring of language, but an expression of feeling and thought deeply held, and evidence of a certain "primary essence, which the author had known, and felt":

> If it is not *true*, it is at any rate philosophical. It displays clearly an inductive faith; a kind of analytic spirit, identifying each independent truth, and fixing it as a primary essence, which the author had known, and felt. There is no desiccation of humor, no magnetic sleep of intellect, no spasmodic movement of thought. (224)

[2] Leigh Eric Schmidt, "The Fashioning of a Modern Holiday: St. Valentine's Day, 1840-1870," *Winterthur Portfolio* 28, no. 4 (1993): 209–45.

He senses, however, that this Valentine reveals only "half" of its author thought and feeling, but finds this unsurprising, as it would be "impossible" to form "such subtle ideas" into words:

> The author, however, has not (it is plain to see) told the half of her feelings. It were impossible! To work out such subtle ideas into form by means of words, is like the effort to "forge silver flowers with the large forehammer of the blacksmith." Q.E.D. (224)

He does not acknowledge, or perhaps recognize, that the Valentine does not conceive of its own sufficiency, that it is only an expression of desire for future action, and a more sufficient and effective "invention," rooted in dissatisfaction with the status quo.

Beyond this editor's intuition, there is reason to consider what he calls this letter's "primary essence"—its longing for intellectual intimacy, its interest in dispelling "ignorance and error," and its desire to "encourage invention" toward the accomplishment of those ends—not as so much rhetorical nonsense,[3] but rather as an expression of sincere interests deeply held by its author, a nineteen-year-old Emily Dickinson. At the time that this letter appeared in *The Indicator*, in early 1850, Dickinson had recently found herself in a condition of intellectual isolation, lacking opportunities for the kind of "tete-a-tete" her Valentine letter imagines. Her formal schooling had come to a sudden end a year earlier, at the close of 1848, when her father withdrew her from Mount Holyoke Female Seminary citing concerns about her health. In the year after, while living at home with her parents in Amherst, Massachusetts, Dickinson managed to continue her education, albeit informally, by virtue of happening into the intellectual

[3] In remains the authoritative edition of Dickinson's letters, this Valentine letter is described as "typical of the nonsense ED could evoke for such occasions." *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas H Johnson and Theodora Ward (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1958), 93. For more charitable readings of this Valentine, see Betsy Erkkila, "Dickinson and the Art of Politics," in *A Historical Guide to Emily Dickinson*, ed. Vivian R. Pollak, Historical Guides to American Authors (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 144–45, David S. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 431–32, and Michael West, *Transcendental Wordplay: America's Romantic Punsters and the Search for the Language of Nature* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000), 346–47.

companionship of one Benjamin F. Newton, an apprentice in her father's law office nearly a decade her senior. She would later recall Newton's formative influence on her intellectual development during that year, describing him as "my tutor" and "a gentle, yet grave Preceptor" who taught her "what to read, what authors to admire, what was most grand or beautiful in nature, and that sublimer lesson, a faith in things unseen, and in a life again, nobler, and much more blessed" (L153).[4] By the end of 1849, however, Newton had left Amherst to continue his law studies at Worcester. Shortly thereafter, Dickinson's two siblings, Austin and Lavinia ("Vinnie"), left home to start the new term at their own respective schools, and she found that even the last of her childhood friends had departed from Amherst: Jane Humphrey, who had spent the previous few years working as a "preceptress" at the Amherst Academy, Dickinson's own primary school, left suddenly at the start of 1850 to teach in the nearby, but evidently still too-distant, town of Warren. In several letters from this time, Dickinson describes her feelings of loneliness and abandonment in the wake of so many departures. In a letter to Jane Humphrey sent at the end of January 1850, just weeks prior to her Valentine letter appearing in *The Indicator*, Dickinson characterizes the simultaneous departures of Jane and Vinnie as deaths:

> Vinnie you know is away – and that I'm alone is too plain for me to tell you – I am *alone* – *all* alone … When I knew Vinnie must go I clung to you as the dearer than ever friend – but when the grave opened up – and swallowed you both – I murmured – and thought I had a right to – I hav'nt changed my mind yet – either. … Oh ugly time – and space – and boarding-school contemptible that tries to keep us apart." (L30)

A few days later, she began a letter to another friend, Abiah Root, also formerly of Amherst, with the solemn statement, "The folks have all gone away" (L31).

[4] Unless otherwise noted, Dickinson's letters are quoted from *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson and Theodora Ward, 3 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958). References are cited parenthetically as L, followed by the letter number.

Letters of this kind served as a forum for the expression of deep personal feeling—declarations of longing for far-away friends and accompanying appeals for sympathy. But the conventions of letter-writing in Dickinson's milieu, both formal and practical, dictated that such letters could not serve as a channel for *all* that a writer might wish to express.[5] Friendly letters were private only in the sense that they were not public, and their audience could very well include the family and friends of both the writer and the addressee. The fact that Dickinson complains about these conventions in each of her letters to friends at this time, suggesting that she felt even more than usual the constraints they imposed on her ability to communicate fully and openly. To Jane Humphrey, for example, she regrets that her sister's recent letters from boarding school could not reveal "anything at all," as her parents were sure to read whatever their daughter sent home, whether directly addressed to them or not: "[Vinnie] knew that her letters to me would be *family* affairs – and she cant tell me anything at all – she dont dare to – and I'd rather she would'nt either" (L30). To Emily Fowler, she reports that she had even felt unable to write letters at all, out of fear that her expressions of loneliness would be ridiculed, not by Emily herself, but by an unintended audience—a certain "Kate":

> I cannot wait to be with you – Oh ugly time, and space, and uglier snow-storm than all! Were you happy in Northampton? I was very lonely without you, and wanted to write you a letter *many* times, but Kate was there too, and I was afraid you would both laugh. I should be stronger if I could see you oftener – I am very puny alone. (L32)

Even when Dickinson does determine it safe to write to Emily Fowler, however, she only discloses the *fact* of her loneliness, withholding discussion of any causes or potential remedies.

[5] On conventions and practices of letter-writing in nineteenth-century America, see William Merrill Decker, *Epistolary Practices: Letter Writing in America Before Telecommunications* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998) and Elizabeth Hewitt, *Correspondence and American Literature, 1770-1865* (Cambridge, U.K. ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004). On Dickinson's negotiation of contemporary letter-writing conventions, see Alexandra Socarides, *Dickinson Unbound: Paper, Process, Poetics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 68–70.

In her letter to Abiah Root, Dickinson indicates that there is slightly more to her present circumstances than loneliness, but she does so only by announcing her withholding:

> If you were here I would tell you something – *several* somethings which have happed since you went away, but time, and space, as usual, oppose themselves, and I put my treasures away till 'we *two* meet again.' (L31)

Any discussion of certain recent events—"something – *several* somethings which have happed"—must wait until they can meet face-to-face, once "time, and space, as usual" no longer intervene.

Only in her letter to Jane Humphrey does Dickinson disclose, while still withholding a great deal, that the source of her present loneliness and dissatisfaction is the nature of the life and work that has fallen to her since her return from Mount Holyoke the previous year and, much more recently, since Vinnie's departure for her own boarding school. Dickinson writes that she has found herself particularly encumbered by domestic work, to the exclusion of the kind of work that she would prefer to do, what she calls "my writing":

> Vinnie away – and my two hands but *two* – not four, or five as they ought to be – and so *many* wants – and me so *very* handy – and my time of so *little* account – and my writing so *very* needless – and really I came to the conclusion that I should be a villain unparralleled [sic] if I took but an inch of time for so unholy a purpose as writing a friendly letter. (L30)

Dickinson goes on to express her disdain for more than the work itself, deriding also the kind of virtue that she feels she is expected to derive from that work and the conditions of privation it required:

> For what need had *I* of sympathy – or very much less of affection – or less than they all – of friends – mind the house – and the food […] an opportunity rare for cultivating meekness – and patience – and submission – and for turning my back to this very sinful, and wicked world. (L30)

While Dickinson is clear about the nature and source of her present dissatisfaction in this letter, she still offers little sense of what kind of "opportunity" she would prefer to pursue—the phrase

"my writing" reveals little about her aspirations—or what virtues she would prefer to be "cultivating." All she allows is that she harbors desires and inclinations that others are likely to regard as "wrong," "evil," and "wicked," straying from the "path of duty," in some manner oriented toward the world beyond the home—the "very sinful, and wicked world" from which she has been forced to recede. In the unsecure setting of a friendly letter, she carefully elides any details of the precise objects of her desires and inclinations, mentioning only that she "incline[s] to other things," that there is a "place … more amiable" where she would like to go, and that she feels herself drawn to "do wrong," "be evil," and "sing songs" like certain bad angels:

> Somehow or other I incline to other things – and Satan covers them up with flowers, and I reach out to pick them. The path of duty looks very ugly indeed – and the place where *I* want to go more amiable – a great deal – it is so much easier to do wrong than right – so much pleasanter to be evil than good, I dont wonder that good angels weep – and bad ones sing songs. (L30)

Where the conventions of friendly correspondence compelled Dickinson to restrain her expression even in communication with her closest friends, the Valentine letter allowed her to indulge in a comparatively unrestrained effusiveness. Valentines were safeguarded not just by potential to write anonymously or pseudonymously but also, more generally, by the understanding that the sincerity of a Valentine's message could never be taken for granted. To this point, one contemporary observer described Valentines as "half-serious, half-comic love-making, and humbug amorous declarations, made on paper through the Post."[6] Dickinson herself describes the susceptibility of Valentines to dissembling exaggeration and irony in a letter to her cousin William Cowper Dickinson, in which she accuses him of writing a Valentine to her in reluctant fulfillment of an earlier promise. She characterizes his promise as "a stern tyrant … *compelling* you to do what you would not have done, without compulsion," and describes the

[6] Schmidt, "The Fashioning of a Modern Holiday: St. Valentine's Day, 1840-1870," 214.

resulting letter, as "[a] little condescending, & sarcastic" (L27). She then describes her *own* promise, in contrast, as a "pleasant monitor, a friend, and kind companion," though whether she says this with irony or not is difficult to determine. Q.E.D.

As a practice, exchanging Valentine greetings in the first few weeks of February had only become popular in America in the 1840s, having been adapted from a long-standing folk observance of St. Valentine's Day in Britain.[7] For Dickinson and her peers, then, Valentines were a novel and at least somewhat socially-sanctioned means of communicating direct—if "humbug"—expressions of desire. During her first year away at Mount Holyoke, Dickinson was evidently ambivalent about participating in the practice. She reports in a letter to her brother Austin that sending Valentines had been forbidden that year by the headmistress of the school, but then describes playing a key role in facilitating the traditional exchange in secret: "those who were here last year […] were sufficiently cunning to write & give them into the care of Dickinson, during the vacation, so that about 150 of them were despatched [sic] on Valentine morn." She takes care to note, however, that she sent no letters for herself: "I have not written one nor do I now intend to." (L22) Two years later, however, she engaged her characteristic inventiveness in writing her own Valentines, taking advantage of their permissiveness in order to express her desires very clearly—and, it would turn out, publicly—describing in detail what she could not reveal in writing to her closest friends: describing the "other things" that she felt inclined toward, naming the "place" apart from the "path of duty" where she wanted to go to, and not just alluding to but even singing the kind of "songs" she felt compelled to sing.

[7] For an account of the Valentine tradition in Dickinson's milieu, see Vivian Pollak, "Emily Dickinson's Valentines," *American Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (1974): 60–78. For a more general account of the Valentine in America, see Schmidt, "The Fashioning of a Modern Holiday: St. Valentine's Day, 1840-1870."

In the Valentine letter discussed above, Dickinson details with unrestrained enthusiasm the kind of intellectual work that she felt compelled to do, building to an earth-turning crescendo. In another Valentine, which may have been written at the same time but was first published two years later, Dickinson further articulates her intellectual ambitions, this time in the form of a poem—one of the earliest known Dickinson poems, and one of the few that would be published during her lifetime. Like the Valentine letter that preceded it, Dickinson's Valentine poem, which begins with the line "Sic Transit Gloria Mundi" (Fr2), articulates a particular intellectual ambition oriented toward the world beyond the "society" and the "neighborhood" that she had come to resent—namely, the society of her parents and the neighborhood of their home in Amherst.[8] Unlike her Valentine letter, which outlines a plan of action that she hoped to undertake with the assistance of her addressee, Dickinson's Valentine poem charts the speaker's development of intellectual independence. Where the Valentine letter describes her interest in engaging with school books as the basis for subsequent action—"talk[ing] over what we have learned in our geographies," before going on to dispel "ignorance and error" (L34)—the Valentine poem describes her development of a critical attitude toward her school books, both in term of the knowledge they offer—particularly knowledge of the world—and their methods of offering it, leading to her interest in obtaining knowledge of the world for herself, first hand. By the end of the poem, she announces her intention to strike out on her own, independent of both her beloved and her school books, toward what she refers to as her country: "Good bye, Sir, I am going; / My country calleth me!"

[8] Dickinson's poems are quoted from *The Poems of Emily Dickinson (Variorum Edition)*, ed. Ralph W. Franklin (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1998). References are cited parenthetically as Fr, followed by the poem number.

The poem begins with the speaker quoting a medley of phrases from her primary school books, phrases that she suggests she has memorized to keep herself occupied—to "stay" her "enemy," longing—while "far from" her beloved:

> "Sic transit gloria mundi,"
> "How doth the busy bee,"
> "Dum vivimus vivamus,"
> I stay mine enemy! –
>
> Oh "veni, vidi, vici!"
> Oh caput cap-a-pie!
> And oh "memento mori"
> When I am far from thee!

Right away the speaker proves herself to have been a diligent student, showing that she has memorized the contents of her various schoolbooks by rote, as would have been expected of her. The poem gives no sense, however, of what the speaker comprehends of these phrases. Does she recognize that each is an exhortation against the kind of mechanical existence her rote recitations exemplify? Does she understand what is implied in the declaration that the glory of the world passes ("Sic transit gloria mundi")? Or by the emblem of the "busy bee"—a model of individual industry contributing to the collective good? Or the notion that one ought to live one's life while there is life to be lived ("Dum vivimus vivamus")—to go, see, and conquer ("veni, vidi, vici!"), since death comes for us all ("memento mori")? In a subsequent stanza the speaker suggests, to the contrary, that she is perfectly satisfied with the view of the world she has received from her schoolbooks. She exclaims "Hurrah" for "Peter Parley," the pseudonymous author of numerous popular primary school books, and for Daniel Boone, the larger-than-life hero of popular frontier adventure tales, and she extols the "landscape" and the "transcendental prospect" that she is able to view by climbing a stack of scientific texts she calls "the 'Hill of Science'":

> Hurrah for Peter Parley
> Hurrah for Daniel Boone
> Three cheers sir for the gentleman

Who first observed the moon —

[…]

I climb the "Hill of Science,"
I "view the landscape o'er;"
Such transcendental prospect,
I ne'er beheld before!

The speaker does not seem to register at this point the underlying truth of that last line, that she has still "ne'er beheld" the "landscape" or the "transcendental prospect" that she speaks of. Even after climbing the "Hill of Science," she remains acquainted only with the representations of the world offered therein.

The speaker comes to recognize the shortcomings of her schooling as the poem progresses, beginning in the next stanza, when she reports being called out of school into public service: "Unto the Legislature / My country bids me go." The nature of the "Legislature" that she has been called to join is suggested in the subsequent stanzas, where she reflects on what her school books had presented to her as settled law—Newton's discovery of gravity under an apple tree, the mechanics of the earth's rotation, Columbus's discovery of America:

During my education,
It was announced to me
That *gravitation, stumbling*
Fell from an *apple* tree!

The earth opon an axis
Was once supposed to turn,
By way of a *gymnastic*
In honor of the sun!

It *was* the brave Columbus,
A sailing o'er the tide,
Who notified the nations
Of where I would reside!

The speaker's critical reflection on her education and the laws "announced" to her there suggests that she has been called not to the U.S. Congress but to a "Legislature" where she might

contribute to the composition, revision, or even outright erasure of some higher laws. That the speaker anticipates a good deal of writing and perhaps erasing awaiting her in the "Legislature" is suggested by the statement, "I'll take my *india rubbers*, / In case the *wind* should blow," where "india rubbers" refers to both overshoes and erasers—both of which would prove helpful to her in countering the "*wind*" she expects she will encounter. In anticipation of the work ahead of her, the speaker concludes by renouncing the two devotions she had signaled at the outset of the poem, both her books and her beloved. By announcing, "Good bye, Sir, I am going; / My country calleth me," the speaker appears to heed at last the exhortations to action that she had earlier voiced, if not fully comprehended, in the poem's opening lines.

A "Mingling of Opposite Minds" in the Higginson Correspondence

The kind of life and work that Dickinson declares her interest in pursuing in her early Valentines—marked by intellectual collaboration, earnest contribution to the advancement of knowledge, and, perhaps most of all, ventures into the country—seems directly counter to the life and work that Dickinson is popularly understood to have sought for herself: a reclusive, solitary life, marked by decades of secretive work on an immense body of poetry that would be discovered only after her death. Elements of conventional conceptions of Dickinson's life are certainly true. She did live in seclusion for much of her life, choosing at some point in her late twenties not to venture beyond her family's property in Amherst, Massachusetts, but to remain at home and to see only family and select visitors. (As she puts it in one letter: "I do not cross my Father's ground to any house or Town." [L330]) And Dickinson certainly wrote a considerable number of poems—nearly two thousand—many of which were first discovered in a drawer in her room after she died. But even with these bare facts firmly in place, new understandings of

her life and work continue to reveal themselves, to the extent that it is possible to see that she did, in fact, contrive to bring about some measure of the life and work that she envisioned in her early Valentines. After moving on from expressing herself in the safeguarded context of the Valentine to writing more forthright, if still guarded, letters and poems, Dickinson found ways to not just voice her intellectual ambitions, but also earnestly pursue them. In the written correspondence that she kept up with dozens of family and friends, for example, Dickinson realized something of the "mingling" of minds that she had proposed in her Valentine letter.

Perhaps no correspondence of Dickinson's constitutes a "mingling of *opposite* minds," as she put it, more than the correspondence she pursued with Thomas Wentworth Higginson, a prominent writer, editor, and abolitionist, whose work Dickinson encountered most regularly in the *Atlantic Monthly*. It is commonly said that Dickinson first wrote to Higginson, in April 1862, to ask his opinion of her poetry and to solicit his advice on how she might prepare her work for publication.[9] Her first letter to him begins with a question to that specific effect: "Are you too deeply occupied to say if my Verse is alive?" (L260). But given the significant overlap between the subjects Higginson addressed in his regular *Atlantic Monthly* essays and the concerns Dickinson announced in her early Valentines, there is reason to think that even if she initiated their correspondence with questions about the quality of her poems, Dickinson's broader aim was to establish with Higginson the kind of "tete-a-tete" that she had imagined in her Valentine letter more than a decade earlier.

[9] See Midori Asahina, "'"Fascination" Is Absolute of Clime': Reading Dickinson's Correspondence with Higginson as Naturalist," *The Emily Dickinson Journal* 14, no. 2 (2005): 103–19; Ed Folsom, "Transcendental Poetics: Emerson, Higginson, and the Rise of Whitman and Dickinson," in *The Oxford Handbook of Transcendentalism*, ed. Joel Myerson, Sandra Harbert Petrulionis, and Laura Dassow Walls, Oxford Handbooks (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 263–90.

The narrative of the origins of Dickinson's correspondence with Higginson, which casts Higginson in the role of learned authority on poetry and publication and Dickinson in the role of earnest student, is a narrative first publicized and promoted, perhaps innocently, by Higginson himself. In October 1891, nearly thirty years after he had received his first letter from Dickinson, and five years after her death, Higginson recounted the origins of their decades-long correspondence in an essay in the *Atlantic Monthly*, published to coincide with the release of the first edition of *Poems by Emily Dickinson*, which he had helped to edit.[10] According to Higginson, Dickinson's first letter to him was a direct response to another essay he had published in the *Atlantic*, titled "Letter to a Young Contributor"—a open letter offering practical advice to young writers interested in submitting their work—poems, essays, stories—to a literary editor. Higginson reports that a few weeks after he had published that essay, in April 1862, an envelope arrived in his mailbox, in which he found several folded sheets and a smaller envelope containing a formal name card that read "Emily Dickinson." The first of the folded sheets was a letter beginning with question quoted above—"Are you too deeply occupied to say if my Verse is alive?" On the remaining sheets were four poems written in pencil. Over the next twenty-four years, Higginson and Dickinson exchanged hundreds of letters, in a correspondence that carried on largely as it began: as a series of requests from Dickinson for poetic advice from her "Preceptor," as she called him, which she often signed, accordingly, as "Your Scholar."

It has often been pointed out that despite her repeated pleas for Higginson to "teach" her, Dickinson did not meaningfully incorporate any of his suggestions about her poetry, which were largely conservative in nature, in the sense that they would have seen her straighten out her

[10] Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "Emily Dickinson's Letters," *The Atlantic Monthly*, October 1891, http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1891/10/emily-dickinson-apos-s-letters/6524/.

slanted rhymes and smooth over he called her "spasmodic" rhythms (L265). (As is well known, Higginson would later see to it that changes of this kind were imposed on the first print editions of her work.) The only advice from Higginson that she seems to have followed was the suggestion that she refrain from publishing. Nevertheless, in his retrospective account of their correspondence, Higginson casts himself just as Dickinson did: as "Preceptor" to her "Scholar." In the meantime, there has been little suggestion that the correspondence between Higginson and Dickinson arose from anything other than her interest in soliciting his advice on poetics and publication, in direct response to the invitation he offered in his "Letter to a Young Contributor." Faithful readers of the *Atlantic Monthly*, however, as Dickinson herself was, would not have known Higginson primarily as an authority on poetry and poetics. Prior to his publication of "Letter to a Young Contributor," he had published twenty-one essays in the *Atlantic*, addressed to a wide range of topics, including physical health, political activism, the U.S. education system, and the beauty of nature. For all their apparent variety, though, Higginson's *Atlantic* essays regularly discussed many of the specific concerns Dickinson raised in her Valentines, such as questions about the value of first-hand experience, the efficacy of school books and, most generally, proper methods for obtaining and communicating knowledge of the external world—all matters that were, as a subsequent section will discuss, defining issues for geographical discourse in mid-nineteenth century America.

Higginson addressed many of his early *Atlantic* essays to the promotion of physical exercise, under such titles as "Saints, and their Bodies," "Physical Courage," "Gymnastics," and "The Health of Our Girls," reflecting his view that physical health was foundational to the well-being not just of the individual but also of the nation: "Physical health is a necessary condition of all permanent success. To the American people it has a stupendous importance, because it is the

only attribute of power in which they are losing ground."[11] [9-10] In addressing this topic, Higginson had repeated occasion to observe the kinds of relationships that "the American people" sought out and maintained with the natural world, not only in terms of their physical activities but also in terms of their artistic and intellectual pursuits. In his first *Atlantic* essay, "Saints, and their Bodies" (March 1858), Higginson observes, for example, that knowledge of the natural world in America had not yet been well formalized—a circumstance that he attributes to Americans' reluctance to engage in what he calls "out-door study":

> The out-door study of natural history alone is a vast field, even yet very little entered upon. In how many American towns or villages are to be found *local collections* of natural objects, such as every large town in Europe affords, and without which the foundations of thorough knowledge cannot be laid? There are scarcely any.

In this instance, he conceives of the "remedy" as a matter of simple physical labor, such that nearly anyone could contribute to improving the "foundations of thorough knowledge" in America: "the most ignorant person may be a true benefactor to science by forming a cabinet, however scanty, of the animal and vegetable productions of his own township." In an essay published three years later, however, he suggests that the collection of knowledge in institutions—"Museums and Scientific Schools"—had little effect in establishing the "foundations of thorough knowledge" in America:

> It is surprising, in the midst of our Museums and Scientific Schools, how little we yet know of the common things around us. Our *savons* still confess their inability to discriminate with certainty the egg or tadpole of a frog from that of a toad." ("April Days," 241, April 1861)

As he would put it in an essay published the following year, "Progress is not in proportion to the amount of scientific knowledge on deposit in any country, but to the extent of its diffusion"

[11] Thomas Wentworth Higginson, *Out-Door Papers* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1879 [1863]), 9–10. Quotations from Higginson's *Atlantic* essays come from this collection prepared by the author. Citations will be given parenthetically as *ODP*, along with the title of the essay where necessary.

("The Health of Our Girls," *ODP* 221). Higginson attributed Americans' lack of knowledge of "the common things around us" not to shortcomings in higher institutions—"Museums and Scientific Schools," places with "scientific knowledge on deposit"—but rather, and more fundamentally, to the manner in which American children are trained—or not—in the observation of the world around them. American schools, he says, simply "feed" children the contents of school books rather than encouraging them to observe what is "before their eyes":

> It is no wonder that there is so little substantial enjoyment of Nature in the community, when we feed children on grammars and dictionaries only, and take no pains to train them to see that which is before their eyes. ("April Days," *ODP* 243)

Higginson's contention that the study of "grammars and dictionaries only" constitutes an incomplete education builds on earlier critiques of the American education system that he levied as part of his broad promotion of physical heath in America, arguing in several essays that American schools committed a serious error in prioritizing indoor over outdoor study:

> Our children commonly learn to spell much better than they ever learn to breathe, because much more attention is paid to the former department of culture. Indeed, the materials are better provided; spelling-books are abundant; but we scarcely allow them time, in the intervals of school, to seek fresh air out of doors, and we sedulously exclude it from our houses and school-rooms. ("Letter to a Dyspeptic," *ODP* 66)

Higginson viewed schools' neglect, and even discouragement, of outdoor study not just as ill-advised but even as deeply and lastingly harmful, as suggested by the title of a September 1859 essay dedicated to the subject, "The Murder of the Innocents" (*ODP* 79-194). He did not typically express his views with exaggeration and however, choosing instead to offer sound, measured statements—"Under the present educational systems, we need grammars and languages far less than a more thorough out-door experience" ("My Out-Door Study," *ODP* 254)—and practical illustrations of the individual overcoming the limits of the education system by seeking out direct acquaintance with the natural world:

> The best thoughts and purposes seemed ordained to come to human beings beneath the

> open sky … The little I have gained from colleges and libraries has certainly not worn so well as the little I learned in childhood of the habits of plant, bird, and insect. ("My Out-door Study," *ODP* 251-252)

The views on knowledge and education that Higginson lays out in his *Atlantic* essays—that "foundations of thorough knowledge" are essential to a society's well-being, and that such knowledge is best acquired from "thorough out-door experience," rather than from school books ("grammars and dictionaries only")—closely accord with what Dickinson articulated in her Valentines nearly a decade before, at first voicing her intention to "talk over what we have learned in our geographies, and listened to from the pulpit, the press and the Sabbath School," before declaring her intention to relinquish such formalized, secondhand education in favor of answering a call from "[her] country," in the interest of acquiring and producing knowledge on her own. Dickinson's letters to Higginson, however, indicate that her views had substantially changed in the intervening years, during which she did not venture out into the country as she had perhaps once imagined she would, finding it necessary, as a result, to sate her desire for knowledge largely, although not entirely, at second hand, through the very means that Higginson and her adolescent self regarded as insufficient: reading. Dickinson uses her correspondence with Higginson, at least in part, to assess her success both in acquiring knowledge of the world and, in her poems, communicating it.

That Dickinson was mindful of Higginson's views on knowledge, as espoused in his *Atlantic* essays, is suggested not just by her announcement in her second letter to him—"I read your Chapters in the Atlantic" (L261)—but, more specifically, by the effort she makes in her fourth letter to affirm the foundations of her knowledge in reading by referencing those "Chapters" specifically. After informing Higginson that she had no portrait to send him, offering a quick description of herself instead, she offers the following cryptic phrases: "You said 'Dark.' I know the Butterfly – and the Lizard - and the Orchis – Are not those <u>your</u> Countrymen?"

(L268). Dickinson is evidently alluding here to an offer of support that Higginson had made to her in a previous letter, presenting his "hand" to her "in the Dark." Most of Higginson's side of the correspondence is lost, but Dickinson repeats his offer back to him in her own previous letter, to indicate her acceptance: "The 'hand you stretch me in the Dark' I put in mine, and turn away" (L265). Although Dickinson has already accepted his "hand," she returns to the word "Dark" in order to contest any suggestion—innocent or not—that she is "in the Dark." By immediately claiming to know such particular elements of nature as the butterfly, the lizard, and the orchis (a particular genus of orchid), Dickinson might be attempting to establish some credibility with Higginson, who in previous letters had asked for details about her education, her books, and her companions, as if taking the measure of his potential scholar. Moreover, that each of the "Countrymen" Dickinson lists had a minor appearance in one of Higginson's recent *Atlantic* essays—the lizard and the orchis in "April Days" (April 1861), the butterfly in "My Out-Door Study" (September 1861)—might have indicated to Higginson, if he recognized the connection, not only her careful reading of his "Chapters" but also her contention that one can know, as she claims to, at second hand—an idea directly counter to what Higginson claims in those very essays.

At the same time that Dickinson insists that she and Higginson have comparable knowledge of the natural world, her underlining of the word "your" raises a distinction between them. The question "Are not those <u>your</u> Countrymen?" implies an affirmative answer, that the butterfly, the lizard, and the orchis are indeed Higginson's "Countrymen." But it leaves open the question of whether or not they are *her* "Countrymen" as well. Because Higginson and Dickinson lived in different parts of Massachusetts at the time, Worcester and Amherst respectively, in some senses they occupied simultaneously the same country and different

countries. When she substantiates her claim that she is not "in the Dark" on her claim to know the inhabitants of *his* country, it includes a tacit inquiry: what does he know, if anything, about *her* country?

The clearest and most persistent question that Dickinson raises in her correspondence with Higginson is the one she asks in the first sentence of her first letter, regarding whether or not her "Verse is alive." It would be a mistake, however, to presume too much about what Dickinson is asking here—to presume, for example, what kind of evaluation she is requesting him to make. By the same token, it would be a mistake to presume what Dickinson means when she calls herself Higginson's "scholar"—to presume what kind of expertise she hopes to acquire from her correspondence with him.

When Dickinson asks Higginson to "say if my Verse is alive" and to tell her if he thinks "it breathed," she is not requesting a general appraisal of her poems, of a kind that she might seek from anyone (L260). Rather, she is requesting an evaluation of her poems according to a specific standard of quality that Higginson himself had articulated in one of his recent *Atlantic* essays. While it is regularly claimed that Dickinson wrote to Higginson in response to his "Letter to a Young Contributor," which was published the same month that she sent her first letter to him, it is possible that this "Letter" simply gave her license to initiate a correspondence with a stranger, something she was not accustomed to doing. The substance of her first letter, and of much of the subsequent correspondence that sustains its opening inquiry, aligns much more closely with, and more substantially responds to, an essay that Higginson had published the previous September titled "My Out-door Study." In that essay, after repeating his regular injunction against "grammars and languages" in favor of "a more thorough out-door experience,"

Higginson describes "out-door experience" as contributing to a writer's ability to endow a work of literature with life:

> [F]or literary training, especially, the influence of natural beauty is simply priceless. Under the present educational systems, we need grammars and languages far less than a more thorough out-door experience. On this flowery bank, on this ripple-marked shore, are the true literary models. How many living authors have ever attained to writing a single page which could be for one moment compared, for the simplicity and grace of its structure, with this green spray of wild woodbine or yonder white wreath of blossoming clematis? A finely organized sentence should throb and palpitate like the most delicate vibrations of the summer air. We talk of literature as if it were a mere matter of rule and measurement, a series of processes long since brought to mechanical perfection : but it would be less incorrect to say that it all lies in the future; tried by the out-door standard, there is as yet no literature, but only glimpses and guideboards; no writer has yet succeeded in sustaining, through more than some single occasional sentence, that fresh and perfect charm. If by the training of a lifetime one could succeed in producing one continuous page of perfect cadence, it would be a life well spent, and such a literary artist would fall short of Nature's standard in quantity only, not in quality. ("My Out-door Study," *ODP* 254)

The poems that Dickinson included in her first letter to Higginson align with his description of literature in the passage above in a formal sense, as each is characteristically unconcerned with "rule and measurement," much less "mechanical perfection." But what Dickinson cannot judge for herself and therefore must ask Higginson to affirm—"The Mind is so near itself – it cannot see, distinctly – and I have none to ask" (L260)—is whether or not the poems live and breathe, or as Higginson puts it, "throb and palpitate."

Beyond describing a standard of literary quality that Dickinson hoped to attain, Higginson affirms in this essay the potential of someone in circumstances like hers to attain it—an aspiring poet in America highly attentive to what was "beside [her] homestead-door." He insists, for example, that Americans have a particularly favorable opportunity to describe Nature, given his view—affirmed by Thoreau—that "absolutely nothing" of American nature "has ever yet been described":

> On this continent, especially, people fancied that all must be tame and second-hand, everything long since duly analyzed and distributed and put up in appropriate quotations,

> and nothing left for us poor American children but a preoccupied universe. And yet Thoreau camps down by Walden Pond, and shows us that absolutely nothing in Nature has ever yet been described,—not a bird nor a berry of the woods, nor a drop of water, nor a spicula of ice, nor summer, nor winter, nor sun, nor star. ("My Out-door Study," *ODP* 257)

Moreover, he describes the futility of aspiring authors ("Literary amateurs") making a "tour of the globe" in search of "materials" even while they "do not yet know" what is "beside their home-stead door":

> [W]hat has been done by all the art and literature of the world towards describing one summer day? The most exhausting effort brings us no nearer to it than to the blue sky which is its dome; our words are shot up against it like arrows, and fall back helpless. Literary amateurs go the tour of the globe to renew their stock of materials, when they do not yet know a bird or a bee or a blossom beside their homestead-door. ("My Out-door Study," *ODP* 251)

Higginson's suggestion here that the production of "art and literature" is premised on knowledge of nature—that a writer should "*know* a bird or a bee or a blossom"—neatly aligns, both conceptually and formally, with Dickinson's claim to "know the Butterfly – and the Lizard – and the Orchis," and also correlates with his later characterization of poets as "consummate observers," capable of making observations "as valuable as those of the men of science":

> [P]oets have in all time been consummate observers, and that their observations have been as valuable as those of the men of science; and yet we look even to the poets for very casual and occasional glimpses of Nature only, not for any continuous reflection of her glory. ("My Out-door Study," *ODP* 259)

Given that Higginson's essays persistently correlate knowledge with the production of literature and literature with the production of knowledge, Dickinson's insistence on being identified as his "scholar" suggests that she is not simply interested in improving her knowledge of poetry and poetics —"mechanical perfection"—but is interested in understanding to what degree her poems function as the work of a scholar, in the sense of a vehicle for "observations as valuable as those of the men of science."

Although Dickinson reached out to Higginson for the specific kind of guidance that his essays suggest he is capable of offering, she repeatedly describes to him in her letters what she is looking for, always indicating that it is not the formal aspects of her writing that she wants him to assess—their degree of "mechanical perfection"—but their conceptual, communicative aspects—the degree to which they communicate her "Mind." In her fourth letter, after declaring, "I am happy to be your scholar," Dickinson compares Higginson's task to that of a surgeon, not "to commend – the Bone, but to set it, Sir," as "fracture within, is more critical" (L268). In the subsequent letter, she again describes his "charge," but this time in more direct terms, as if her previous letter has not stated it clearly enough: "You say I confess the little mistake, and omit the large – Because I can see Orthography – but the Ignorance out of sight – is my Preceptor's charge" (L271). Dickinson repeatedly emphasizes that she is capable of attending to those aspects of her poems that she can see, and only needs Higginson to assess what is "within" and "out of sight." By suggesting that only Higginson would be capable of identifying any "Ignorance" conveyed by her poems, she signals that her fundamental concern is knowing whether or not they convey its opposite: knowledge. After only five letters, however, the ideal "tete-a-tete" that Dickinson imagined having with the author of Higginson's *Atlantic* essays showed signs of breaking down, as suggested by her quoting back to Higginson, in disbelief, his admission of ignorance, presumably pertaining to her writing: "You say 'Beyond your knowledge.' You would not jest with me, because I believe you – but Preceptor – you cannot mean it?" (L271). Given that she had first written to Higginson because she had "none to ask," as she put it, she is disconcerted that she might have found yet another person who would struggle to understand her, and respond to her with the kind of incomprehension she had grown accustomed to encountering: "All men say 'What' to me, but I thought it a fashion."

Even if Higginson did not fully comprehend his role as Dickinson's "Preceptor" as she conceived it, she continued throughout their correspondence to send him poems and ask him to teach her. In November 1880, almost twenty years after she sent her first letter to him, Dickinson reminded Higginson of the original foundation of their acquaintance and asked him to advise her once again: "You were once so kind as to say you would advise me – Could I ask it now." She tells him that she has promised to send three poems—"three Hymns," she says—to a charity, "but without your approval could not give them" (L674). As before, she describes for him the kind of assessment she wants him to make: "if you felt it convenient to tell me if they were faithful, I should be very grateful." Based on her description of the poems as "Hymns," and the likelihood that she has been asked to contribute her writing to a Christian charity, when she asks Higginson to tell her if her poems "were faithful," she could very well be asking him, as Elizabeth Petrino suggests, if they are "sufficiently pious."[12] Only one of the poems that she sent for his consideration, however, directly pertains to Christian faith—a poem she titled "Christ's Birthday," which begins, "The Savior must have been / A docile Gentleman" (Fr1538). For the others—"Mine enemy is growing old" (Fr1539), which she calls "Cupid's Sermon," "My country need not change her gown" (Fr1540), which she calls "My Country's Wardrobe," and "A Route of Evanescence" (Fr1489), which she calls "A Humming-Bird"—the question of faithfulness can only readily be said to pertain to the last, "A Route of Evanescence." To what extent, she asks, does this poem convey the nature of its precise subject? When Dickinson sent the same poem to Helen Hunt Jackson the year before, along with an Oriole poem ("One of the ones that Midas touched" [Fr1488]), she indicated a similar criterion: "To the Oriole you

[12] Elizabeth A. Petrino, *Emily Dickinson and Her Contemporaries: Women's Verse in America, 1820-1885* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1998), 172–73.

suggested I add a Humming Bird and hope they are not untrue." In his retrospective essay, "Emily Dickinson's Letters," with which this section began, Higginson affirms the truth and faithfulness of this poem in the very terms that Dickinson perceived from his "Chapters in the Atlantic" that they shared, announcing with certainty the poem's achievement of what he had claimed in "My Out-door Study" had never yet been done:

> Nothing in literature, I am sure, so condenses into a few words that gorgeous atom of life and fire of which she here attempts the description.[13]

What Higginson did not realize, however, was that in affirming the achievement of Dickinson's poem—its unparalleled condensing into a few words "that gorgeous atom of life and fire," the hummingbird—he undercut the repeated assertions of his *Atlantic* essays, pertaining to the value of "out-door experience" to the acquisition of knowledge and, by extension, the production of literature. As he put it in "My Out-door Study":

> Art may either rest upon other Art, or it may rest directly upon the original foundation; the one is easier, the other more valuable. Direct dependence on Nature leads to deeper thought, and affords the promise of far fresher results. ("My Out-door Study," *ODP* 261)

Evidently unbeknownst to him, the fresh "results" that Dickinson achieved in "A Route of Evanescence" did not "rest directly upon the original foundation," that is, on her direct observation of an actual hummingbird, but rather on a description of a hummingbird that he himself had published shortly after their correspondence had begun, in the September 1862 essay "The Life of Birds" (*ODP* 295-315). The description in question, however, was not even his own, but a quotation from a letter written to him by a friend, the author Harriett Prescott Spofford. As quoted by Higginson in that essay, Spofford wrote: "when a Humming-Bird, a winged drop of gorgeous sheen and gloss, a living gem, poising on his wings, thrust his dark,

[13] Higginson, "Emily Dickinson's Letters."

slender, honey-seeking bill into the white blossoms of a little bush beside my window, I should have thought it no such bad thing to be a bird" (*ODP* 296-7). The poem that Higginson regarded as an unmatched description of nature, then, was not a description of a hummingbird but a distillation of a quotation of a description of a hummingbird—that is, a hummingbird twice, or more, removed.

Higginson did not publish his affirmation of Dickinson's hummingbird poem until five years after her death. But reading his assessment would only have confirmed for her what she had long since accepted: that there is no direct or necessary correlation between proximity and knowledge, and that in many cases the relationship between the two is inverted. She appeals to this logic in her very first letter to him, to account for her inability to assess her own writing: "the Mind is too near itself, to see distinctly" (L260). She applies the same logic to the matter of understanding the natural world in her 1877 poem "What mystery pervades a well!" (Fr1433), particularly in the final two stanzas:

> But nature is a stranger yet;
> The ones that cite her most
> Have never passed her haunted house,
> Nor simplified her ghost.
>
> To pity those that know her not
> Is helped by the regret
> That those who know her, know her less
> The nearer her they get.

At the same time that this poem affirms the manner in which Dickinson acquired much of her knowledge of the natural world—not directly, through "out-door experience," but indirectly, through reading—it also lends credence to her own efforts to communicate that knowledge. Just as Higginson suggests that the writings of "men of science" are not uniquely valuable, this poem suggests that the "ones that cite [nature] most" have neither a privileged relation to the knowable world nor a privileged method for communicating knowledge derived therefrom. Citing nature,

the poem says, is not sufficient to make it legible—to facilitate its shift from "stranger" to acquaintance.

When Dickinson asks Higginson to assess her writing, she is seeking to have her own method of communicating the nature of the world validated. When she describes her writing as "my Mind," and "the Mind," she does not imply that her poems are only expressions of her interiority, conceived as thoughts and emotions; they are also manifestations of knowledge of the world, derived directly or indirectly—in other words, the external internalized. Dickinson's concern with communicating the nature of the world dates back to her school days, as reflected in her Valentines' mentions of the "Hill of Science," frontier stories about Daniel Boone, Peter Parley's primers, and the prospect of talking over "what we learned in our geographies." It is important to recognize that for Dickinson, given the kinds of geography books she would have been taught from in mid-nineteenth-century America, what she and her peers would have "learned in [their] geographies" was not just knowledge of the world, but also methods of organizing and communicating such knowledge. Moreover, she would have learned that there were no clear, formal barriers to her contributing to the development of geography, either in the sense of disclosing facts about the world or conceiving of new methods for doing so.

Geographical Discourse in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America

The formal education in geography that Dickinson received was typical of her privileged upbringing in mid-nineteenth-century New England. At her primary school, Amherst Academy, she would have learned elements of world geography from a primer like *Peter Parley's Geography for Beginners*, with lessons focused on basics like names, locations, and distinctive features of places around the world. At her secondary school, Mount Holyoke Female Seminary,

she would have been taught from a more detailed "system of geography," such as Emma Hart Willard and William Channing Woodbridge's *Universal Geograph*y.[14] Beyond her formal schooling, Dickinson would have had access in her family's home library to a variety of geographical materials, including Jedidiah Morse's *American Universal Geography* (1812), Sidney E. Morse's *Cerographic Atlas of the United States* (1845), and Henry Schenck Tanner's *New Universal Atlas* (1846), as well as a numerous works of travel writing.[15] Each type of geographical text at Dickinson's disposal offered access to different, and differently presented, knowledge of the world: atlases offered bird's-eye views of natural and political divisions of the earth's surface at different scales (regional, national, continental, hemispheric); travel writing offered ground-level views of landscapes and cultural formations from the perspectives of individual observers; geographies offered a combination of the two, both the atlas's graphical view-from-above and travel writing's descriptive view-from-the-ground, in the interest of making available comprehensive knowledge of the earth and its inhabitants. It was by virtue of both their distinctive concern with accumulating comprehensive (or "universal," as their titles often declared) knowledge and their marked emphasis on the problem of devising increasingly effective methods for organizing and presenting that knowledge, that geography books were of

[14] A list of textbooks assigned at Mount Holyoke included "Woodbridge's Larger Geography," shorthand for the multi-volume geographies co-produced by Woodbridge and Willard since the 1820s. Cited in Richard Sewall, *The Life of Emily Dickinson* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1994), 362.

[15] Much of the original Dickinson family library is currently held at Harvard's Houghton Library, which hosts a digital finding aid at https://hollisarchives.lib.harvard.edu/repositories/24/resources/6412. For an overview of Dickinson's reading, see Jane Donahue Eberwein, "Dickinson's Local, Global, and Cosmic Perspectives," in *The Emily Dickinson Handbook*, ed. Gudrun Grabher, Roland Hagenbüchle, and Cristanne Miller (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004). See also Jack Capps, *Emily Dickinson's Reading* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1966); Cristanne Miller, *Reading in Time: Emily Dickinson in the Nineteenth Century* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012); and Barton Levi St. Armand, *Emily Dickinson and Her Culture: The Soul's Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

particular importance for Dickinson, not only as sources of knowledge about the world but also, and more consequentially, as models for the production and communication of that knowledge.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, many earth sciences, like geology and natural history, were becoming increasingly specialized and exclusionary, being conducted by professionals at academic institutions—notably at Amherst College, down the road from Dickinson's home, under the direction of Professor Edward Hitchcock. Geography, on the other hand, continued to be the work of non-specialists, operating outside of institutional frameworks. The authors of the most representative American geography books from this time lacked the kind of formal training in geography that would be offered in university departments later in the century. Their backgrounds and competencies were therefore many and various: Jedidiah Morse was a trained as a Congregational minister, Samuel Griswold Goodrich, the founder of the "Peter Parley" series, was a Boston book publisher, and Emma Hart Willard and William Channing Woodbridge were teachers and educational reformers. Since one could not become a geographer by affiliating with and progressing through a clear set of disciplinary channels—no such channels yet existed—one became a geographer simply by producing geography. In other words, geography in mid-nineteenth century America was a *discursive* rather than a *disciplinary* formation. Its boundaries were not yet clearly marked or maintained through the kind of deliberate exclusions that historians of knowledge describe as "boundary work."[16] Instead, geography was a collective product of whomever engaged with and contributed to the production and organization of geographical knowledge itself. As a result, those who might have been

[16] Shumway, Sylvan, and Messer-Davidow, *Knowledges*.

prevented from contributing to other disciplines could, of their own accord, meaningfully contribute to geographical discourse.[17]

Importantly, this possibility was clearly announced in works of geography themselves. For example, the first preface to Willard and Woodbridge's *Universal Geography* relates how the volume came into being as a result of William Channing Woodbridge learning that Emma Hart Willard had written for her own students' use an instructional book of geography that followed a method similar to his own:[18]

> The Author [Woodbridge] had commenced the publication of his first work, when he learned with surprise, that a similar classification of numbers and arrangement of subjects had been devised and used by *Mrs. Willard*, Principal of the Female Seminary at Troy, originated like his own, in the efforts to give instruction on the subject, some years before. Under these circumstances, it was thought advisable that both should unite in the publication of the system,—the Modern Geography being assigned to the Author, and the Ancient to Mrs. Willard.[19]

At the same time that Woodbridge's preface attests to the *ad hoc*, and even sometimes accidental, nature of geography's development up to that point, it also reveals that nineteenth-century geography books were distinguished from their eighteenth-century counterparts by an

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[17] Several studies have examined Dickinson's engagements with contemporary discourses and disciplines; see for example Jed Deppman, Marianne Noble, and Gary Lee Stonum, eds., *Emily Dickinson and Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Richard E. Brantley, *Emily Dickinson's Rich Conversation: Poetry, Philosophy, Science* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Robin Peel, *Emily Dickinson and the Hill of Science* (Madison [N.J.]: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2010); Nina Baym, "Emily Dickinson and Scientific Skepticism," in *American Women of Letters and the Nineteenth-Century Sciences: Styles of Affiliation* (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 133–51. Studies of Dickinson's engagement with geographical discourse have focused on her use of geographic terms; see Robin Peel, "Emily Dickinson and Geography," in *Emily Dickinson and the Hill of Science* (Madison [N.J.]: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2010), 188–235 and Rebecca Patterson, "Emily Dickinson's Geography," in *Emily Dickinson's Imagery* (Amherst: University of Amherst Press, 1979), 140–79.

[18] On the work of Willard and Woodbridge, both individually and together, see Susan Schulten, *Mapping the Nation: History and Cartography in Nineteenth-Century America*, Paperback ed (Chicago, Ill.: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2013); Daniel H. Calhoun, "Eyes for the Jacksonian World: Willard C. Woodbridge and Emma Willard," *Journal of the Early Republic* 4, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 1–26; and Nina Baym, "Women and the Republic: Emma Willard's Rhetoric of History," *American Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (March 1991): 1–23.

[19] William Channing Woodbridge and Emma Hart Willard, *Universal Geography*, Seventh Edition (Hartford: John Beach, 1836), ix.

increased emphasis on methodology. By mid-century, progress in geography had ceased to be conceived as a matter of accumulating geographical knowledge to the point of arriving at "perfection," as Jedidiah Morse described it, first in the preface to his 1789 *American Universal Geography* then again in the introductory essay to the 1812 edition, titled "Rise and Progress of Geography": "Geography was very imperfect in its beginning, and has advanced slowly toward its present degree of perfection."[20] Instead, progress in geography had come to be conceived in terms of improvement in methods of communicating geographical knowledge. As Woodbridge notes, what made collaboration with Willard "advisable" in the first place was not that each had accumulated a similar body of geographical knowledge for publication, but that each had devised a similar method of presenting geographical knowledge—as Woodbridge puts it, "a similar classification of numbers and arrangement of subjects."

That the substance of the geographical knowledge in question was of secondary consideration to the manner of its organization is indicated by Willard's statement, in her separate preface, that her being "assigned" to write the ancient geography sections, while Woodbridge was assigned to write the modern geography sections, was "merely an accidental consequence of [her] becoming a partner in the concern." As she describes it, prior to her collaboration with Woodbridge, she had no particular expertise in the subject of ancient geography: "The arrangement entered into between Mr. Woodbridge and myself, was predicated solely on my having compiled and taught a system of modern geography similar to his." In other words, what she brought to the subject of ancient geography was what she had brought to the subject of modern geography, and what had originally drawn the attention of Woodbridge—namely, her ability to devise not just effective but innovative methods for communicating

[20] Jedidiah Morse, *American Universal Geography*, Sixth Edition (Boston: Thomas & Andrews, 1812), 9.

knowledge. Willard describes her work in terms of applying her mind to the matter of surmounting the difficulties that attended the subject at hand:

> In applying my mind to the subject [of ancient geography], many ideas, new to me, occurred, as to the difference of the studies of modern and ancient geography, the difficulties attending to the latter, and the methods of surmounting them. In finding these methods, I have been guided by the general views just explained, concerning the proper objects of books for instruction.[21]

Throughout their individual prefaces, both Willard and Woodbridge put greater emphasis on their innovations in arranging and presenting geographical knowledge than on the quantity, quality, or "perfection" of the knowledge contained therein. Again, whereas Jedidiah Morse projected the accumulation of a perfect body of geographical knowledge in some future edition of his work—he ends his original preface with a note of thanks to prospective contributors, declaring that "every friendly communication … will tend to make it perfect"—Willard and Woodbridge fantasize about producing a perfect system of geography in the sense of devising an ideal method of presentation, even while conceding the impracticality of doing so and the necessity, therefore, of offering an "approximation":

> in order to form a *perfect* system of Geography, it would be necessary to present upon a map a complete sketch of a country, with its inhabitants, their institutions, employments, &c. An approximation has been attempted in the Atlas which accompanies this work.[22]

Setting aside abstract standards of perfection, whereby "a *perfect* system Geography" would be nothing less than a "complete sketch of a country," if not the world, Willard and Woodbridge established their work's value in terms of its methodological improvements over prior works of geography:

> Descriptive Geography has usually been left in the state which was common to every subject in the origin of knowledge—presenting a mass of insulated facts, scarcely

[21] Woodbridge and Willard, *Universal Geography*, xiii.

[22] Woodbridge and Willard, viii, emphasis in original.

> connected by any association but that of locality. In other subjects, facts have been carefully compared, arranged in distinct classes, and traced to general principles; and thus have been reduced to the beautiful order and simplicity of science. Why should the Geographer reverse this method, and scattered the dismembered portions of his subject to the four quarters of the globe?[23]

Even elementary-level geography books placed a marked emphasis on methodology. The preface to *Peter Parley's Geography for Beginners*, for example, begins by insisting that "[t]he present revised and improved edition will be found to be more methodical in its arrangement, to embrace more precise details, and to be more carefully illustrated by appropriate maps and engravings, than the former publication."[24] In a subsequent note to teachers, the volume proclaims that it is so composed as to "put it in the power of the teacher to render the work the means of communicating a large amount of geographical knowledge."[25] The widespread emphasis on the importance of methodology did not imply, however, any clear or developing consensus on what method was preferable over any other. Each text undertook to describe and defend its chosen method, whatever it might be. *Parley's Geography*, for example, presented the study of geography as comparable to travelling:

> Now, *geography* means *a description of the earth*, or, in other words, it describes the people, the canals, railroads, cities, mountains, volcanoes, and other interesting objects, which a traveller would see in visiting different parts of the world. In studying geography, we wish to get that knowledge which we should acquire by travelling throughout the various countries of the globe. (9-10)

In contrast, Willard and Woodbridge rejected the comparison of geography to travel—a comparison that was made not only in elementary primers but also in advanced texts like those of the pioneering Danish-French geographer Conrad Malte-Brun—arguing that such an approach

[23] Woodbridge and Willard, vii.

[24] Samuel Griswold Goodrich, *Peter Parley's Geography for Beginners* (New York: Huntington and Savage, 1847), 3.

[25] Goodrich, 4.

was "entertaining and instructive … for the parlor" but "ill adapted to the schoolroom … loaded as it is with a crowd of circumstances and epithets, which the pupil cannot retain, and from which he knows not how to select." Willard and Woodbridge suggest instead that the study of geography ought to resemble the study of human anatomy:

> In a work designed for students, it is far better to follow the plan adopted by the Anatomist, and present first the mountains and rivers, the climates, productions and inhabitants of the earth distinctly, in the same manner that the bones and arteries, the organs and functions of the human frame are exhibited, before a region of the body, or even an entire limb, is described. All these are indeed combined in nature; but the character and movements of the whole cannot be understood, without a previous examination of its parts.[26]

The pains that such authors took to defend their methods of conveying geographical knowledge announce not only the contested nature of geographical discourse in mid-nineteenth century America, but also the discourse's openness to contribution and innovation, in terms of both content and method, regardless of what seemingly "Dark" corner it might emerge from.

Dickinson's Geographic Poetics

In a reversal of her early dismissal of school books in her Valentines, Dickinson comes to emulate her geography books in several of her poems, in the interest of disclosing—or considering disclosing—the radical interiority of the two places she dedicated her thought to most intensely and enduringly: her home and Heaven. Dickinson makes direct reference to geography in only two poems, out of almost two thousand, but each reference reveals her broader concern with conceiving and communicating the nature of places whose natures are resist disclosure, for one reason or another. In the first set of poems discussed below, Dickinson borrows the figure of a volcano from her geography books in order to characterize not herself, as

[26] Woodbridge and Willard, *Universal Geography*, viii.

has so often been supposed, but her home and yard in Amherst. By invoking the figure of a volcano as it was presented in her geography books, Dickinson conveys not only the tumultuous nature of her home, but also the difficulty of rendering such a mutable and multiform place legible to those outside of it. More significant than her use of the volcano as a figure for a dynamic home environment, though, is her adoption of her geographies' general precepts regarding the value of developing and collating knowledge of all the world's places, including her own. Dickinson's volcano poems exhibit, first, her interest in producing an account of her place in the world, and second, her sense of her distinct poetics as a powerful means through which to accomplish geography's aims. Dickinson extends her geographic poetics in a second, more experimental set of poems, in which she tests the proposal that the simple instructional forms that geographical primers used to teach children about this world could also help her and her readers conceptualize the nature of heaven, even where the methods of science, philosophy, and theology could not.

Scholars have typically read instances of volcanoes in Dickinson's poems as figures for the poet herself. Perhaps most famously, Adrienne Rich, in her influential essay "Vesuvius at Home: The Power of Emily Dickinson," argues that Dickinson's volcanoes illustrate the explosive power of a woman living "under pressure of concealment," namely, in the repressive environment of a home in patriarchal Victorian New England.[27] Rich argues that under such conditions Dickinson "feels herself to be Vesuvius at home" to such an extent that she eventually "explodes into poetry." Elizabeth Petrino extends this reading by putting it into a literary-historical context, calling attention to other nineteenth-century American women writers who invoked volcanoes, as well as "extreme climates and distant locales," in order to "depict their

[27] Adrienne Rich, "Vesuvius at Home: The Power of Emily Dickinson," *Parnassus* 5, no. 1 (1976).

alienation in the home."[28] But Dickinson's volcano poems are not exclusively concerned with characterizing the poet herself. In the very poem from which Rich derives her essay's title, for example, a clear distinction is drawn between the speaker and the volcano, challenging the dominant understanding that Dickinson's volcanoes are a metonym for Dickinson herself: the poem's speaker reports climbing a "Lava step" up to a "Crater" to contemplate a "Volcano nearer here," the titular "Vesuvius at Home" (Fr1691). This "Volcano" is not a figure for a human subject but a description of a physical environment. Instead of performing a typical lyric function, communicating a person's interior, this poem performs a geographic function, communicating the world's exterior. In this and other poems, Dickinson borrows the figure of a volcano from her geography books—especially Willard and Woodbridge's *Universal Geography*—not just to characterize her home as volatile and unpredictable, but also to test out geography's distinct modes of communication.

Dickinson begins her "Vesuvius at Home" poem by explicitly aligning it with contemporary geographical discourse. In its opening lines, the poem calls attention to a gap in her geography book, which accounts for volcanoes all over the world but fails to note the existence of a certain "Volcano nearer here":

> Volcanoes be in Sicily
> And South America
> I judge from my Geography
> Volcano nearer here
> A Lava step at any time
> Am I inclined to climb
> A Crater I may contemplate
> Vesuvius at Home

[28] Petrino, *Emily Dickinson and Her Contemporaries: Women's Verse in America, 1820-1885*, 194–200.

In its second quatrain, this brief poem introduces an as-yet unknown "Volcano" by noting some of its features: its "Lava step" and its "Crater." The final line then locates the "Volcano" more precisely than simply "nearer here," referring to it as "Vesuvius at Home," a phrase that identifies the "Volcano" as a feature of a domestic space. The poem's account of climbing up a "Lava step" and peering down into a "Crater" even neatly maps onto the architecture of the Dickinson home itself, in which a central staircase winds up three stories such that leaning over the bannister on any floor would provide an overhead view of the home's first-floor entryway—a crater-like, quasi-public space for family and visitors, whom Dickinson, in her reclusive later years, might have hoped to avoid. By describing the "Home" and the "Volcano" in the context of geographical discourse ("my Geography"), the poem does not conflate the two. Rather, it simply identifies the location of the "Volcano" ("at Home"), and makes a claim for its inclusion, with the world's other volcanoes, in a general body of geographical knowledge.

Although the poem presents the "Volcano" as a feature of the "Home," it is nonetheless difficult to discern what precise characteristics the "Volcano" is intended to embody. If the poem means to portray a precarious place always on the verge of explosion, that idea is contradicted by the speaker's apparent freedom of movement, as indicated by the couplet "A Lava step at any time / Am I inclined to climb." Her autonomy in the midst of the volcano is stressed by that couplet's enjambment and inverted syntax. The first line, "A Lava step at any time," implies the danger and unpredictability of the volcano by suggesting that the speaker could "step" into its "Lava" at "any time." But her apparent vulnerability is overturned by the second line, "Am I inclined to climb," which gives the speaker agency and transforms the "Lava step" from a verb (the act of stepping into a surprise lava puddle) into a noun (a physical step that she can use to climb the "Volcano" whenever she is "inclined"). The poem therefore equivocates regarding the

degree, or even the existence, of the volcano's threat. In short, the poem does not presume anything about the volcano's interior. Rather, in the manner of a geography, it restrains its description, offering an account of the volcano's exterior only.

The poem's resistance to presuming the nature of the volcano's interior is most apparent in in its penultimate line: "A Crater I may contemplate." In this line, the poem resists disclosing—or, imagining—two interiors simultaneously: that of the speaker's mind and that of the volcanic "Crater." If lyric poems are thought to comprise a poet's contemplations, this particular instance only introduces the *possibility* of contemplation without offering the *substance* of any contemplation, even on a site as ripe for sublime reflection as a volcanic crater. The only instance in which the poem refers to any interior at all—either of the "Volcano," the "Home," or the lyric "I"—is in the word "inclined," which indicates the speaker's compulsion, her desire to climb the volcano. But this slight indication of the speaker's interiority is also dissembling: the word "inclined" is a pun that merges the speaker's internal mentality, her inclination, with the volcano's external physicality, its incline. The word "inclined" describes the speaker's physical posture when climbing as much as it describes her frame of mind—in both ways, she is "inclined to climb." The poem adopts the mode of geography in two ways, then: first, by forgoing assumptions about the nature of the physical world, and second, by de-emphasizing, or relinquishing altogether, any intimation of the speaker's particular interiority.

By indicating only the exterior of the "Volcano nearer here" and, additionally, by resisting the disclosure of any personal interiority, Dickinson follows the mode of description modeled by the kind of "Geography" she makes reference to, specifically, the volcano section of the Willard and Woodbridge *Universal Geography*. The first entries in the book's volcano section include all the basic terms in the poem, including definitions of "*lava*" and "*crater*,"

mentions of volcanoes located "near Sicily" and "at Terra del Fuego" [sic] in South America, and several woodcut, two of which depict Mount Vesuvius erupting, the first a view from a distance, the second a close-up, titled "Crater of the Volcano Vesuvius."[29] More than offering a compendium of key terms and simple illustrations, this geography characterizes volcanoes in a way that closely resonates with Dickinson's volcano poems, presenting them as a phenomenon that is internally dynamic yet outwardly inconspicuous. However, rather than exhaustively detailing the internal mechanics of active volcanoes, as a geology book would,[30] this geography describes volcanoes through broad comparison to other landforms. According to Willard and Woodbridge, the primary distinctive feature of volcanoes is their mutable physicality, which they describe as a consequence of their "internal fire." Otherwise, on the basis of outward appearance alone, volcanoes are presented as virtually indistinguishable from their innocuous counterpart, the mountain:

> Volcanoes have not the same *permanency of character* as other features of the globe. They are in fact, only mountains which are subject to the action of internal fire, and their number and character are liable to continual change from its effects.[31]

Such a description marks volcanoes as a distinctly difficult phenomenon to identify, given the disparity between their interiors and their exteriors. As a result, the geographical record of the world's volcanoes is undoubtedly incomplete, a fact that licenses Dickinson's account of the "Volcano" that she has identified. Her account is further justified by volcanoes' distinct potential to "burst forth"—to suddenly come into existence—especially in America, and perhaps even in Dickinson's seemingly tranquil Amherst:

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[29] Woodbridge and Willard, *Universal Geography*, 42–46.

[30] See in Edward Hitchcock's *Elementary Geology* (1842) the section on volcanoes, titled "Operation of Igneous Agencies in Producing Geological Changes."

[31] Woodbridge and Willard, *Universal Geography*, 42–43.

> Some *ancient volcanoes* have become extinct or dormant, and *new ones* have burst forth, within the memory of man. […] More than 200 *volcanoes* are *known* to exist in the world, one half of which are in America; but many of them have never been described, and have scarcely received a name in works of geography.[32]

By describing and giving a name—"Vesuvius at Home"—to the as-yet unknown "Volcano," Dickinson constructs her poem as a contribution to geographical knowledge in accordance with both the conception of volcanoes and the mode of description modeled by her geography book.

In a poem that reads like an extension of the "Vesuvius at Home" poem, Dickinson is confronted by another fundamental aspect of geographical discourse, and of discourse in general: the matter of communicating knowledge to an outside readership. Though she is able to adopt geography's descriptive aspects in writing alone, as the "Vesuvius at Home" poem demonstrates, in the poem that begins "On my volcano grows the Grass" (Fr1743) she recognizes that fulfilling geography's discursive aspects, by publicizing the nature of her world, could have singularly disruptive consequences. This poem registers a shift in Dickinson's regard for geography, from appreciation for its power as a mode of communicating the nature of a place to reservation about the prospect of fully discharging that power.

In its first stanza, the poem describes a "volcano" as something markedly inconspicuous, even undetectable, a description reminiscent of her geography book's account of a volcano:

> On my volcano grows the Grass
> A meditative spot
> An acre for a Bird to choose
> Would be the general Thought

Though this "volcano" is evident to the speaker, its true nature would not be obvious to any outside observer, since by most accounts ("the general Thought") the "acre" would look like any other. To the speaker, though, the volcano is not only apparent, but also normalized, as indicated

[32] Woodbridge and Willard, 43.

by the poem's inversion of the typical structure of metaphor: rather than comparing something common (a yard) to something uncommon (a volcano), the poem does the opposite, describing the "volcano" in terms of typical grass-covered lawn. From a position of privileged knowledge, then, the speaker begins to reveal the volcano's internal nature in the poem's second and final stanza:

> How red the Fire rocks below
> How insecure the sod
> Did I disclose
> Would populate with awe my solitude.

This stanza does, in one sense, "disclose" the "Fire rocks below," by noting their existence in its own text. But it also registers the potential for another kind of disclosure, a disclosure that would have the effect of fundamentally undoing the place it described—not by destroying it with "Fire rocks," but by undermining the "solitude" it offered through an influx of people in "awe" at the existence of a volcano hidden in their midst. With this poem, Dickinson recognizes the power of fully participating in geographical discourse, by pointing out the disruptive—if not destructive—consequences of disclosing the nature of her domain. Her final engagement with geographical discourse in this poem is her acknowledgement that she need not engage in it fully: the poem forestalls the disclosure it imagines by expressing it as a conditional statement, positing it as a possibility, rather than a certainty ("Did I disclose"). As a result, she demonstrates, if only to herself, her dominion over her own place in the world.

Given the disruptive consequences conceived in this poem's final line, it is understandable that Dickinson would have withheld knowledge of her "volcano." At the very least, it appears that she tightly controlled its disclosure, as the two poems examined here are extant only in the form of transcriptions made by Dickinson's sister-in-law Susan. These poems therefore show that Dickinson appreciated the power of geographical discourse to such an extent

that she was compelled to exercise discretion about fully implementing it, resisting the prospect of circulating the nature of her home as broadly as her geographies circulated the nature of the world outside it, or even as broadly as she circulated certain other poems.

As a point of comparison to the preceding poems, we can see how Dickinson goes through with disclosing the internal nature of her home in a letter she sent to a friend, Joseph Lyman. Though this letter also invokes a volcano—the volcanic island of Juan Fernandez—it does not depict the Dickinson home as a tempestuous place. Instead, it illustrates a quiet equilibrium between the home's inhabitants, each of whom is said to occupy his or her own geographic locale, despite living together in the same house. In this letter, Dickinson adopts the mantle of the geographer more fully than she does in her volcano poems, not only by preparing it specifically for circulation, but also by assembling it from perspectives other than her own. Producing a more equitable account, however, also entails revealing less about each domain, especially those of others, thereby demonstrating the advantages of depth and specificity that accompany the risks she associates with her geographic poems.

Dickinson begins the letter by relaying her father's account of his life in geographic terms, wherein the isle of Juan Fernandez serves as a representation of his remoteness:

> Father says in fugitive moments when he forgets the barrister and lapses into the man, says that his life has been passed in a wilderness or on an island – of late he says on an island. And so it is, for in the morning I hear his voice and methinks it comes from afar & has a sea tone & there is a hum of hoarseness about & a suggestion of remoteness as far as the isle of Juan Fernandez.[33]

Expanding on her father's account of his life, she conceives of the home as a space simultaneously containing both close intimacies (a father who "lapses into the man" in order to

[33] Richard Sewall, *The Lyman Letters: New Light on Emily Dickinson and Her Family* (Amherst: University of Amherst Press, 1965), 70–71.

make a personal confession) and extreme distances (his remoteness otherwise). As a result, she also recognizes that the same house can be experienced and understood in a radically different way by each person who inhabits it. This insight leads her to draw a conclusion about the relationship between physical spaces and the individual selves that occupy them, namely, that the two are not necessarily related:

> So I conclude that space & time are things of the body & have little or nothing to do with our selves. My Country is Truth. Vinnie lives much of the time in the State of Regret. I like Truth – it is a free Democracy.

Though Dickinson, Vinnie, and their father occupy the house together, in the same "space & time," she notes that each of their "selves" resides in its own distinct domain. She might have gone on to elaborate on the nature of "[her] Country" and its features, as she does in the "On my volcano" poem, but in this context, in a letter intended to circulate as a general report on the state of her home, she follows the example of a "universal" geography, understood as "a view of the present state of all empires, kingdoms, states, and republics in the known world," as Morse's *American Universal Geography* promises on its title page. That is, she endeavors to account for the several individual domains in the home, to the extent that she can know them in their "present state": an "island" for her father, a "State" for her sister Vinnie, and a "Country" for herself. Where this letter shows Dickinson producing and disclosing a more inclusive account of her world, though, it also demonstrates by comparison the distinct power of her geographic poems to reveal the nature of a place with precision and nuance.

"Heaven's 'Peter Parley'"

Having recognized its distinct and potentially disruptive power, Dickinson resists adopting a geographic poetics for the purposes of disclosing the nature of her own place in the

world. However, she readily applies that same powerful poetics toward the problem of conceiving and articulating the nature of heaven, a place—if it can be called that—of enduring interest to Dickinson throughout her life, as attested by the numerous poems she wrote on all aspects of the subject. Where she evidently finds geography about places in the world to be fraught with problems related to the necessary subjectivity of any representation—despite the claims of so-called "universal" geographies—such issues would not apply to a geography of a truly universal realm such as heaven. She therefore endeavors to conceive of a heavenly geography without any of the reluctance that one might expect would attend such a task.

Nina Baym has explored Dickinson's interest in the nature of heaven in the context of contemporary scientific inquiry, particularly the work of Amherst College faculty, especially the geologist Edward Hitchcock. By cataloging references to scientific discourse in Dickinson's poetry, Baym determines that "Dickinson's overriding intellectual poetic projects where science is concerned are to query the existence of 'heaven'."[34] Ultimately, Baym finds that Dickinson, by writing poetry, is able to "do theological work that scientists never pretend to do, and theologians only pretend to do," that is, to "write, with excruciating exactness, of how it feels to live in a world where the answers to the most important questions are by their nature unknowable."[35] According to this account, the value that Dickinson added to contemporary inquiries into the existence of heaven derives from the capacity of poetry to articulate feeling. However, because Baym's study, like many, does not consider geography to be within the purview of nineteenth-century science, it fails to recognize not only the significance of geography textbooks to Dickinson's attempts to articulate the nature of heaven, but also, more generally, the relation they

[34] Baym, "Emily Dickinson and Scientific Skepticism," 147.

[35] Baym, 151.

had to her conception of poetry as a mode of communicating both interiors (feelings) *and* exteriors.

On the one hand, geography books offered Dickinson a model for describing heaven as a place analogous to earth, as in the poems that begin "I went to Heaven – / 'Twas a small town" (Fr577) and "I know where Wells grow – Droughtless Wells" (Fr695). Such poems list attributes that might be conceived of as heavenly, if only by comparison to their earthly counterparts: "Lit with a Ruby," "Stiller than the fields / At the full dew," "Where Mosses go no more away." But geographies were also at the foundation of Dickinson's attempts to develop a more innovative approach to the problem of conceiving heaven. In a series of poems that explicitly invoke educational primers, like those in the "Peter Parley" series, Dickinson builds on geographies' methods of educating students about parts of the world beyond their own experience in order to propose that a similar approach, folded into her own poetic forms, might establish, or at least help facilitate a conception of, the nature of heaven.

In a poem she sent to her sister-in-law Susan, in April 1860 (Fr164), Dickinson proclaims that the beauty of an April day is so great that it is beyond her ability to express it. She imagines, however, that such a task would be little more than simple schoolwork for "Saints" in heaven:

> I cant tell you - but you can feel it
> Nor can you tell me
> Saints, with ravished slate and pencil
> Solve our April Day!

By invoking "slate and pencil," school supplies typical of nineteenth-century classrooms, Dickinson suggests that the work of solving (in the sense of explaining, according to her 1844 Webster) an "April Day" would be a rote, repetitive exercise for "Saints"—done with such regularity that their "slate and pencil" become "ravished." The poem elaborates on both components of this conceit in its final stanzas. The penultimate stanza reiterates that the speaker

and her interlocutor—the poem's "you" and "me"—are not equipped to express the day's beauty in language:

> Not for me – to prate about it!
> Not for you – to say
> To some fashionable Lady
> "Charming April Day"!

The final stanza goes on to elaborate on the schoolwork of the "Saints," suggesting that they acquired their descriptive skills by studying primers written by "Heaven's 'Peter Parley'," an imagined counterpart to earth's "Peter Parley":

> Rather – Heaven's "Peter Parley"!
> By which children slow
> To sublimer Recitation
> Are prepared to go!

Such a primer would, presumably, introduce its readers to features of heaven and prepare them to describe it in "sublimer Recitation." If such a primer were available to Dickinson, it could potentially solve her problem of describing earth's beauty by providing her more sufficient terms than simply "Charming April Day!" She might even confirm the descriptions of heaven that she had attempted in her other poems. Ultimately, though, this poem shows Dickinson proposing that the methods employed by many nineteenth-century schoolbooks—namely, "slow" methodical learning through rote memorization and recitation—could inculcate "sublimer" abilities, such as the ability to describe places otherwise indescribable, whether heaven-on-earth or heaven itself. Forgoing the methods of more advanced sciences, Dickinson proposes that the methods devised for facilitating children's understandings of "this World" might also be useful also for understanding the next.

Dickinson puts this proposed strategy into practice in another poem, which begins by questioning the act of speculating about the nature of heaven and ends by describing—or attempting to describe—in three carefully chosen terms, heaven's "Geography" (Fr476). The

poem begins “We pray – to Heaven — / We prate – of Heaven,” reusing the term “prate” from the “April Day” poem (“Not for me - to prate about it!”) to dismiss the notion of presuming to know enough to speak about heaven. (The term has a similar meaning to the more common “prattle,” meaning to talk idly or foolishly.) Its recurrence here suggests that Dickinson considered geography as a means of organizing what would otherwise be senseless chatter. To that end, the poem immediately elevates its critique in a series of questions regarding the applicability of earthly logic and physics to inquiries into the nature of heaven:

> We pray – to Heaven –
> We prate – of Heaven –
> Relate – when Neighbors die –
> At what o’clock to heaven – they fled –
> Who saw them – Wherefore fly?

The poem speculates that structures like time (“what o’clock”) and movement through space (“Wherefore fly?”) may not necessarily apply in heaven. The poem thereby raises doubt about the possibility of even formulating appropriate questions about a supernal realm from an earthly standpoint.

Yet, the poem proceeds in the next stanza to ask questions of that exact kind, using a three-term structure as the basis of its inquiry (“Is Heaven a Place – a Sky – a Tree?”) followed by a pronouncement on certain distinctions between earth and heaven:

> Is Heaven a Place – a Sky – a Tree?
> Location’s narrow way is for Ourselves –
> Unto the Dead
> There’s no Geography –
>
> But State – Endowal – Focus –
> Where – Omnipresence – fly?

The first line’s simple structure (A, B, C), simple terms (“Place,” “Sky,” “Tree”), and simple question would not be out of place in the catechism of a geographical primer like “Peter Parley’s.” The lines that follow continue the work of the first stanza, declaring that the concept of

location is not applicable to heaven. It then begins to claim that heaven has "no Geography" at all—it has neither a geography book nor space itself. However, that thought continues in the next line, where the qualifier "But" shifts the claim from negative to positive, from flatly denying heaven's "Geography" to attempting to describe it. That is, rather than declaring that there is "no Geography" at all in heaven, the poem asserts that there is "no Geography – / *But*"—that is, no geography *except*—"State – Endowal – Focus." With this three-termed description, Dickinson attempts to circumvent earthly structures in order to describe the unknown, unseen, unseeable, and potentially unknowable, by describing heaven's geography as a list of nouns ungoverned by the specifics of space and time invoked in the poem's first stanza: "State," a condition of being; "Endowal," a condition of having been given; and "Focus," a one-dimensional point. That is, she imagines that certain conditions persist in heaven, even if others—like space and time—do not. For Dickinson, then, the geographic primer offers a basic form in which to organize and communicate a concept that does not adhere to earthly structures that typical govern concepts of place, namely, space and time.

By answering the initial three-termed question about the nature of heaven—"Is Heaven a Place – a Sky – a Tree?"—with a three-termed response—"State – Endowal – Focus"—the poem takes the form of a catechism and fulfills the promise of the imagined heavenly primer, "Heaven's 'Peter Parley,'" in the "April Day" poem, moving from simple terms to "sublimer Recitation." That is, the poem guides its reader, step by step, over the seemingly insurmountably separation between earth and heaven—a separation manifested, we should note, by the break between stanzas—through a recitation of the very heavenly "Geography" it proposes: "State – Endowal – Focus." Then, rather than ending with its answer about heaven, the poem continues to follow a catechistic form by concluding with a question about the nature of God: "Where –

Omnipresence – fly?" Though up to this point the poem has guided the recitation, supplying both question and answer, it leaves this final question open, inviting the reader to participate more fully in the exercise it leads, perhaps expecting a three-termed response to this three-termed question.

The fundamental difficulty of this poem's lesson, the "sublimer Recitation" that it puts forward, is affirmed by the fact that its two-line final stanza—"But State – Endowal – Focus – / Where – Omnipresence – fly?"—was excluded from early print versions of the poem.[36] The stanza break that precedes these lines, also present in the manuscript, even encourages such a clean excision, following the grammatical end of the previous clause. The problem with removing these lines, however, is that it leaves the reader mouthing a claim—"Unto the Dead / There's no Geography"—that is fundamentally at odds with the conception of "Geography" that this chapter shows Dickinson harbored. Like authors of nineteenth-century geographies, Dickinson conceived of geography as a discourse in need of constant updating, of new additions, information, and representations, in order to keep pace with the ever evolving "present state" of the known world. Even if it were true, as this poem begins to suggest, that "There [*is*] no Geography" of heaven, in the present, that would only hold, following this concept of geography, until one was created. In keeping with this concept, Dickinson effects such a creation in the very next line. And, given her sense that the structures of space and time do not govern in heaven as they do on earth, that creation, that heavenly geography, would presumably endure without need of further emendation, as apposite in that moment as any. For her reader, then, Dickinson offers a truly universal geography of heaven.

[36] See Franklin's note to this poem, Dickinson, *The Poems of Emily Dickinson (Variorum Edition)*, 489.

Like the geographies that she emulated and borrowed from, Dickinson's geographic writings on her home and heaven are fundamentally poetic. Not in the sense that they have meter and rhyme, but in the sense that they are creative, that they endeavor to bring something—or in this case, some place—formerly unknown or unrecognized into existence, if only in the mind of a reader. In that case, what Dickinson wrote of heaven in an 1862 poem also applies to her understanding of her home, when rendered geographically: that it is "so far of the Mind," and therefore "Tis vast – as our Capacity" (Fr413). In writing her geographies of home and heaven, Dickinson aims to increase prospective readers' "Capacity" for understanding the two places that most occupied her mind, not just noting their existence or their location, but bringing them into concrete relation with the rest of the known world, a feat she accomplished by rendering them both in the terms and structures of the discourse that proclaimed most earnestly to document it. That same poem's closing line then also pertains to both the heaven that she imagined and the home that she endeavored to account for each time she wrote about it: "No further 'tis, than Here," where "Here" points to both the place that she occupied and the words on the page. In doing so, she puts a world directly before her readers, if not to invite them in, then at least to give them a sense of the place, however separated from it in time and distance they may be.

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