Forgotten Landscapes: Discursive Traces and Topographical Memories in the United States

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Andrew Newman, “Indigeneity and Early American Literature”

Suggested readings (29 pages total):


matrimony, and could go in and out whenever he pleased, without dreading the tyranny of Dame Van Winkle. Whenever her name was mentioned, however, he shook his head, shrugged his shoulders, and cast up his eyes; which might pass either for an expression of resignation to his fate, or joy at his deliverance.

He used to tell his story to every stranger that arrived at Mr. Doolittle’s hotel. He was observed, at first, to vary on some points every time he told it, which was, doubtless, owing to his having so recently awaked. It at last settled down precisely to the tale I have related, and not a man, woman, or child in the neighborhood, but knew it by heart. Some always pretended to doubt the reality of it, and insisted that Rip had been out of his head, and that this was one point on which he always remained flighty. The old Dutch inhabitants, however, almost universally gave it full credit. Even to this day they never hear a thunderstorm of a summer afternoon about the Kaatskill, but they say Hendrick Hudson and his crew are at their game of nine-pins; and it is a common wish of all hen-pecked husbands in the neighborhood, when life hangs heavy on their hands, that they might have a quieting draught out of Rip Van Winkle’s flagon.

NOTE.

The foregoing Tale, one would suspect, had been suggested to Mr. Knickerbocker by a little German superstition about the Emperor Frederick der Rothbart, and the Kyffhauser mountain: the subjoined note, however, which he had appended to the tale, shows that it is an absolute fact, narrated with his usual fidelity:

“The story of Rip Van Winkle may seem incredible to many, but nevertheless I give it my full belief, for I know the vicinity of our old Dutch settlements to have been very subject to marvellous events and appearances. Indeed, I have heard many stranger stories than this, in the villages along the Hudson; all of which were too well authenticated to admit of a doubt. I have even talked with Rip Van Winkle myself, who, when last I saw him, was a very venerable old man, and so perfectly rational and consistent on every other point, that I think no conscientious person could refuse to take this into the bargain; nay, I have seen a certificate on the subject taken before a country justice and signed with a cross, in the justice’s own handwriting. The story, therefore, is beyond the possibility of doubt.

D. K.”

POSTSCRIPT.
The following are travelling notes from a memorandum-book of Mr. Knickerbocker:

The Kaatsberg, or Catskill Mountains, have always been a region full of fable. The Indians considered them the abode of spirits, who influenced the weather, spreading sunshine or clouds over the landscape, and sending good or bad hunting seasons. They were ruled by an old squaw spirit, said to be their mother. She dwelt on the highest peak of the Catskills, and had charge of the doors of day and night to open and shut them at the proper hour. She hung up the new moons in the skies, and cut up the old ones into stars. In times of drought, if properly propitiated, she would spin light summer clouds out of cobwebs and morning dew, and send them off from the crest of the mountain, flake after flake, like flakes of carded cotton, to float in the air; until, dissolved by the heat of the sun, they would fall in gentle showers, causing the grass to spring, the fruits to ripen, and the corn to grow an inch an hour. If displeased, however, she would brew up clouds black as ink, sitting in the midst of them like a bottle-bellied spider in the midst of its web; and when these clouds broke, wo betide the valleys!

In old times, say the Indian traditions, there was a kind of Manitou or Spirit, who kept about the wildest recesses of the Catskill Mountains, and took a mischievous pleasure in wreaking all kinds of evils and vexations upon the red men. Sometimes he would assume the form of a bear, a panther, or a deer, lead the bewildered hunter a weary chase through tangled forests and among ragged rocks; and then spring off with a loud ho! ho! leaving him aghast on the brink of a beetling precipice or raging torrent.

The favorite abode of this Manitou is still shown. It is a great rock or cliff on the loneliest part of the mountains, and, from the flowering vines which clamber about it, and the wild flowers which abound in its neighborhood, is known by the name of Garden Rock. Near the foot of it is a small lake, the haunt of the solitary bittern, with water-snakes basking in the sun on the leaves of the pond-lilies which lie on the surface. This place was held in great awe by the Indians, insomuch that the boldest hunter would not pursue his game within its precincts. Once upon a time, however, a hunter who had lost his way, penetrated to the garden rock, where he beheld a number of gourds placed in the crotches of trees. One of these he seized and made off with it, but in the hurry of his retreat he let it fall among the rocks, when a great stream gushed forth, which washed him away and swept him down precipices, where he was dashed to pieces, and the stream made its way to the Hudson, and continues to flow to the present day; being the identical stream known by the name of the Kaaterskill.
nity to articulate our connection to a past that is moving ever through our present. Now that would be relevant.

Keyword: Colonialism

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In this essay, I will explore how the keyword colonialism functions in the context of early American studies and American studies as a whole. Such an exploration is warranted, I believe, not only because empires, their sequels, and their consequences continue to impact most of the world’s peoples but also because there is no uniformity in the way scholars of American literature and culture conceive of our work in relationship to these larger global conditions. Perhaps it’s revealing that the related keyword postcolonialism, one of the most important innovations within the contemporary literary-critical lexicon, has experienced an uneven if not uneasy integration into American literary studies. Lawrence Buell’s notable effort to characterize “American Literary Emergence as a Postcolonial Phenomenon” in American Literary History (1992), an essay that discussed the writings of Whitman, Cooper, Emerson, and Melville as expressions of cultural independence against “cultural colonization by the mother country” of Great Britain, was criticized for failing to acknowledge the United States of America’s own pivotal role as an imperial power, a problem addressed subsequently by a range of scholars from Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease in their edited volume Cultures of United States Imperialism (1993) to David Kazanjian in The Colonizing Trick: National Culture and Imperial Citizenship in Early America (2003). Even with these bracing course corrections and with more moderating approaches like Malini Johar Schueller and Edward Watts’s Messy Beginnings: Postcoloniality and Early American Studies (2003) and Edward Watts’s recent essay “Settler Postcolonialism as a Reading Strategy” in Early American Literature (2010), different scholars invest terms like postcolonialism and colonialism with different inflections and meanings. These different investments have seemed most evident to me when I have listened in on conversations among those of us who call ourselves early Americanists and among those of us who identify ourselves as working in later fields or especially in ethnic studies. To understand the
genealogy of these differences, I’ve turned to archives of leading journals in the fields—American Quarterly, founded in 1949, and Early American Literature, which began publication as the Early American Literature Newsletter in 1966—to try to get a handle on what we actually mean when we say colonialism.

Prior the founding of the American Quarterly in 1949, the word colonialism was already in usage within the nascent discipline of American studies, as a neutral descriptor for Anglo-America’s cultural dependency on Great Britain, for example, in Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Herbert Agar’s influential and often-quoted 1935 essay “Culture versus Colonialism in America.” (In this essay, I will refer to this definition or usage of colonialism as colonialism.) At the same historical moment, we also find the word colonialism in popular usage in places like the NAACP’s magazine The Crisis (founded by W. E. B. DuBois in 1910) to denote an international system of economic and political exploitation of one sovereign people by another. (I will refer to this definition or usage of colonialism as colonialism.) In the pages of American Quarterly, the word colonialism is used first in 1950 in the sense of colonialism and continues to be used primarily in this sense through the 1950s. In 1957, we find the first usage of colonialism, in an article comparing Euro-American, Native American, and African American music traditions by musicologist Charles Seeger, Jr., father of legendary folk musician Pete Seeger. Note that this second sense of colonialism is introduced into American studies discourse in connection with a scholarly project that investigates culture in connection with race and class. In this same vein of academic inquiry, Frantz Fanon, an iconic figure in anticolonial thought, is first cited in the pages of American Quarterly in 1968 in connection with the 1966 Watts Riots in a review (Margolies) of Eldridge Cleaver’s Soul on Ice (1968) and Harold Cruse’s The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual (1967). In 1974, we also find colonialism characterized in the pages of American Quarterly as a continuing (rather than an exclusively historical) system of domination by an international scholar working on a hemispheric Americanist project (Kelly). Colonialism is used in connection with the writings of Albert Memmi and Frantz Fanon in a review (King) of three books by historian Eugene Genovese, continuing and advancing the pattern of usage initiated by Charles Seeger in 1957 (and earlier in popular sources like The Crisis) drawing together ethnic studies, Marxist methodology, and anticolonial critique. By the early 1980s, the
term *colonialism* is used almost exclusively in the pages of *American Quarterly* in the sense of colonialism\(^b\), as an ideology to be critiqued.

Early American studies as we now experience it had one of its significant inaugural moments at the Modern Language Association convention in Chicago in December 1965, when thirty-seven scholars of American writing, thought, and experience before 1800 assembled to constitute the field. By a vote of the same body, the *Early American Literature Newsletter*—as noted earlier, the forerunner of today’s *Early American Literature*—first appeared in the winter of 1966. Although none of the documents surviving from the inaugural meetings of these early Americanists record the rationale for naming the field “early American” rather than the more conventional term “colonial American,” one cannot help but wonder if the decision was influenced by some awareness of global anticolonial and decolonization movements in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. At the very least, it seems worthy of note that early American studies came into being around the same time as the works of Frantz Fanon (who died in Bethesda, Maryland, in 1961, while undergoing treatment for leukemia) were first being printed in English in the United States. The term *colonialism* (used in the sense of colonialism\(^b\)) first appeared in the pages of *Early American Literature* in 1974, in an essay on the Declaration of Independence (Gittelman 249). Not until 1995 did early Americanists writing in the journal use the term *colonialism* not as benign descriptor of a historic relationship between Great Britain and the United States but in the critical sense of colonialism\(^b\). But even here, we find that colonialism\(^b\) enters the early Americanist lexicon not through the venue of ethnic studies, Marxist thought, and anticolonial critique, as was the case for *American Quarterly*, but from the rather different pathway of postcolonial theory. Thomas Krise, who was the first to use the term *colonialism* in a sense redolent of colonialism\(^b\) in 1995, did so through citations of theorist Homi Bhabha and postcolonial literature scholar Peter Hulme. That same year, Ralph Bauer used the term *colonialism* in a definition of postcolonial literature by way of the Canadian and Australian postcolonial literature scholars Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin, as writing by those “whose subjectivity has been constituted in part by European colonialism,” including writings that express “resistance” to colonialism and writings by Euro-American Creoles who “ceased to identify themselves merely as Europeans during the colonial and Revolutionary periods” (“Colonial Discourse” 222n2). Here we see that when
the term in the sense of colonialism was first used by early Americanists, even in the contexts of hemispheric and comparative racial projects such as Bauer’s, it was used in a manner that maintained the older associations of colonialism. As a way of completing the comparison between usage of the term colonialism in these two journals, it’s worth noting that Frantz Fanon, first cited in American Quarterly in 1968, appeared for the first and only time in the pages of Early American Literature in 2003 (Newman).

To summarize, in American studies as reflected in the pages of American Quarterly, we see the usage of the term colonialism shift first in the late 1950s and early 1960s and then decisively in the 1970s and 1980s from colonialism to colonialism, to name an ideology of domination that continues to be enacted through the logic of race. The shift happens through the growing influence of multiculturalist and Marxist methodologies. In early American studies, the shift in usage takes place at least thirty years later, in the mid-1990s, thanks to the influence of academic postcolonial theory, but among early Americanists the critique of colonialism associated with the sense of colonialism is modified by the continuing usage of the term among early Americanists as a neutral descriptor of the cultural relationship between Europeans and Euro-American whites. American studies comes to its current usage of colonialism in part through a popular tradition of third world Marxism; early American studies comes to its current usage of colonialism through a particular strand of postcolonial theory focused as much on the experience of settler-colonial societies as on the experience of the colonized.

The thirty-five-year gap in usage of the term in the sense of colonialism in the pages of American Quarterly and Early American Literature and the different pathways through which the term entered their critical lexicons continue to shape the way early Americanists relate to our colleagues working in other departments of the larger field of American studies. For most contemporary practitioners of American studies, the term colonialism has a conscious if unannotated linkage to the political struggles of Third World peoples, including people of color and indigenous peoples in the United States; for early American studies scholars, the use of the term colonialism tends to be more propositional and theoretical. Consequently, many American studies scholars may be more likely to think of colonialism not as a historical artifact but as an ongoing power formation repro-
duced in part through the logics of nation, class, gender, and sexuality, but especially race. For these scholars, colonialism, then, is understood as a history Americans still inhabit, rather than as an object of study. In my experience, this difference in usage and understanding manifests powerfully in the realm of scholarly affiliation, performance, and affect. Imagine adjacent meeting rooms at the American Studies Association, one scheduled for a session on contemporary American indigenous political life and one for a session on early American writing; the word colonialism will be used in different tones and with different investments in these rooms, in ways that shape the spillover interactions and conversations that happen (or do not happen) between conference attendees in the hallways, social events, and business meetings. Mary Louise Pratt has an especially perceptive take on the phenomenon I am trying to describe: “Intensity of affect is a conspicuous feature of anticolonial argumentation. Indeed, it is a feature from which postcolonial writing distances itself, prescribing a more impassive posture to accompany its emphasis on ambivalence, ambiguity, and complicity” (451). This marked difference in affect symptomizes the divergences in lived and intellectual history that stand behind the contemporary usage of the term colonialism in early American studies and American studies in general. When scholars working in later fields of American studies and especially in ethnic studies use the term colonialism, they often do so within a matrix of affiliation, citation, and attribution that leads back to the work of anticolonial thinkers like W. E. B. DuBois and Frantz Fanon; many conceive of their own work as part of this longer and broader global project to critique and unsettle empire. While early Americanists may also sympathize with anticolonial projects, we tend to use the term colonialism within matrices of citation and attribution that trace back to theorists of the postcolonial, and we tend to conceive of our work as contributing primarily to conversations among contemporary scholars. Finally, it is my observation that the “intensity of affect” Pratt links to anticolonial thought is not an element of the culture of the field formerly known as colonial American literature.
Settler Postcolonialism as a Reading Strategy

In *Maoriland: New Zealand Literature, 1872–1914*, Jane Stafford and Mark Williams examine the undervalued beginnings of New Zealand’s national literature, spanning the beginning of the Commonwealth in 1900, detaching, as most postcolonialists do, political self-determination from literary nationalism. This period is defended as enacting a difficult transition wherein settler writers struggled to reconcile their dependence on British literary modes, models, and markets with the need for local subjects and narratives reflecting the complexities of New Zealand life—especially with regard to race—for which British writing provided no imitable forms or models. The authors explore Maoriland writers to frame literary nationalism among settler populations as a tenuous balance between the “settler” as colonized and colonizing, following the ideas of Helen Tiffin, Stephen Slemon, Alan Lawson, and others.

They trace how William Satchell’s *The Greenstone Door* (1914) rewrites colonial history as a complex collision of Maori tribes, European ethnicities, and intercultural groups cohabiting the land. For confronting the local version of “the white man’s burden,” Maorilanders were dismissed as too British during an era of post-ANZACS jingoism and racism through the mid-twentieth century.¹ Later, with the rise of Saidian postcolonialism, they were viewed as racist and patriarchal, dismissed now as imperialist embarrassments. Stafford and Williams end with a comment on the cultural politics of both perspectives: “in seeking to expunge the embarrassments of their colonial past, they continue to invent a history for themselves rather than encounter an actual one” (275). From both perspectives, scholars constructed purified narratives: settlement as either glorious or satanic, white hat or black armband. Maoriland writers were pilloried by both for querying the space between. In the end, New Zealand’s early literary history is more complex and vitalized, its lasting conflicts given a more distinct genealogy.

For the same reason, we might apply similar reading strategies to American literature from the Revolution to the “Renaissance” of the 1830s. The
older narrative famously skipped from Edwards to Emerson: the struggles of early republic writers to find a national voice while acceding the inevitability of British tradition dismissed as simply reactionary, and not creative, their art merely a component of their politics (contra New Critical metrics). Early republic writers at best foregrounded Irving’s Sketch-Book in 1818. Even then, early national texts were read as harbingers: Brockden Brown as foregrounding Hawthorne or Poe; Freneau, Bryant; or Bartram, Thoreau. Then, starting around 1990, this erasure was redoubled through the lens of Saidian postcolonialism: David Kazanjian, Andrew Doolen, Malini Johar Schueller, John Carlos Rowe, Timothy Marr, Amy Kaplan (twice), and others use that version of postcolonialism to brand even the earliest US culture as unilaterally imperialist. Russ Castronovo’s “‘On Imperialism, see. . .’: Ghosts of the Present in Cultures of United States Imperialism” documents how footnoting Kaplan and Pease’s Cultures of US Imperialism (1993) taps into a narrative of monolithic imperial and racial nationalism in US literature, policy, and culture.

Summarizing this perspective, Michael Warner concisely rephrases the common result of applying colonial discourse theory to the US: “National culture began with a moment of sweeping amnesia about colonialism. Americans learned to think of themselves as living in an immemorial nation, rather than in a colonial interaction of cultures” (63). This version of nationalism imagines the nation as inevitable, the colonial pasts reconstructed to foreordain a nation purged of the paradoxes of contact, conquest, and colonization. As an “immemorial nation,” then, the US transitioned to empire, immediately embarking on paths of internal and external empire building, its literature aiding and abetting the subsequent excesses. These readings have unpacked and explained important aspects of early American culture, clearly moving the field forward in important ways. The texts they address are implicated in the racist and imperialist aspects of nation building.

However, both methods of erasure (traditional and poststructuralist) overlook important elements in the early republic and so risk re-erasing its texts as embarrassments. Ironically, the application of another branch of postcolonial studies—settler theory—should continue to revitalize our study of the decades in question and preserve it in our national literary histories more generally. For instance, the amnesia Warner observes set in only after ideas of romantic nationalism—in which all nations are im-
memorial—emerged after 1820, on the heels of European Romanticism and Sir Walter Scott. Early republic literary nationalism was functional and republican, matching the founding generation’s enlightenment-influenced civic nationalism, as Leonard Tennenhouse and others have argued, starting with Terence Martin fifty years ago. Moreover, many texts are poorly suited to the accusation of empire-building amnesia. Susanna Rowson’s *Reuben and Rachel* (1798) and Washington Irving’s *History of New York* (1809) openly engage the messy “colonial interaction of cultures” Warner claims as unilaterally erased. Furthermore, among the Saidians, generic or formal concerns are subsumed by a more immediate commitment to a narrative of uninterrupted continuity between British and Anglo-American rhetorics of empire building and racial colonization.

Not every early republican text was imperially engaged and many, in fact, opposed the new nation’s expansionist ambitions, articulated alternative nationalisms, and took very seriously the linkage of cultural nationalism to a formal, aesthetic, or linguistic quest for a distinct and democratically inflected literary print culture. If the US is not an “immemorial” nation based in idealized democratic principles, is the only other option a racist, sexist, and elitist empire whose literature is merely propaganda? Both traditionalist and Saidian studies read from one side or the other of the colonial/colonizer, European/American binary without considering the model of the double-minded settler identity theorized by Alan Lawson, Helen and Chris Tiffin, Stephen Slemon, Anne Coombes, and others used so well by Williams and Stafford in New Zealand. This conversation, in fact, began a while ago in journals devoted to postcolonial studies. In 1996, Peter Hulme insisted that “‘postcolonial’ should not be used as a merit badge, the adjective implies nothing about a postcolonial nation’s behavior” and concludes, “I am in favor of more and more analyses of the different forms of imperialism and colonialism, of more and more analyses of different local situations” (122–23). More recently, Gesa Mackenthun suggested, “postcolonial theory should not simply be discarded as it offers a set of analytical terms and interpretive tools for studying specific colonial and neo-colonial constellations between the Early Republic and today” (42). Just as colonial discourse theory has opened the imperial aspects of certain texts, other methodologies might similarly expand our reading in other ways. The question is no longer, “can postcolonial studies be applied to the US?” but rather “which of its other aspects might be most useful?”
First, almost all postcolonial literatures base themselves intertextually: as empire is constructed through the control of language, narrative, and textual authority, responses from the colonized internalize, confront, or incorporate those received rhetorical practices. Kazanjian, Doolen, Schueler, and Kaplan and Pease explore how white writers mimicked rhetorical strategies of subordination and colonization inherited from the British. On the other side, the fields most open to post colonial insights, of course, are those of excluded populations. The most effective readings available to date stress intertextuality: Mackenthun singles out Laura Donaldson and Bernd Peyer who study how early American Indian writers began as responding readers of the textualities of racial hegemony. As such, it is easy to see how the “colonizer and colonized” binary applies to certain subjects and then might be projected to later eras: early American literature has both colonized writers (Phillis Wheatly, William Apess, John Marrant, Black Hawk) and colonizing writers (as benign as Timothy Dwight or as violent as Robert Montgomery Bird). From this, we can project uses of this kind of postcolonial studies into later eras as the same asymmetries and intertextual preoccupations inform both later outsider and later empire-building texts. Shared, however, each defines its subjective perspective primarily as a reading position from which writing begins.

Yet while the scholarly reconstruction of the binary of empire and resistance is one thing, conceptualizing the simultaneity of settler identity is another. In fact, some early Americanists have been drifting toward the taxonomy of settler theory. For example, Jared Gardner’s reading of Brown’s Edgar Huntly (1799) builds with, “To be an American is to be almost always an Indian, almost a European” (453), unwittingly echoing Alan Lawson’s description of the “settler subject . . . is colonized at the same time it is colonizing” (157). Scholars who address settlers transnationally—Terry Goldie, Martin Green, Robert Dixon, James Belich, and others—address American writers like Brown and Cooper, unencumbered by the myth of exceptionalism that has too often compelled American scholars to exclude their own nation’s texts from discussions of Anglophone literatures more generally.

Hulme’s most important reason for “including America” is still, however, seeking fuller explanation and exploration: “If such a label can make Charles Brockden Brown more interesting to read, then that is something else to be said in favor of the term ‘postcolonial’” (122). Brown’s white-
ness and maleness—and Cooper’s and Irving’s—are the problems. Tennenhouse has noted: “Indeed, the literary evidence indicates that the newly liberated colonists became if anything even more intent on keeping the homeland as much like the old one in terms of its language, literature, and a number of cultural practices” (2). However, the writers he reads—the canon, formulated at an imperial moment a century ago—reflects the still-nervous “immemorial nation’s” need for literary gravitas: as it embarked on a European model of overseas empire, it needed a coherent cultural base to expand; hence the ossification of the canon around white and male New England authors especially responsive to trends in European thought, a development Lawrence Buell has deemed “postcolonial” in itself.

Yet any reader of Joel Barlow’s Vision of Columbus (1787), William Jenks’s Memoir of the Northern Kingdom (1808), Alonso de Calves’s (John Trumbull’s?) New Travels to the Westward (1788), James Kirke Paulding’s Koningsmarke (1823), or James Strange McHenry’s Spectre of the Forest (1823) knows that even male post-Revolutionary writers often imagined wildly revisionist local/colonial historiographies that stressed multiracialism and moral indeterminacy, and delighted in the heterogeneity of the past—asking early republican readers to remember that “colonial interaction of cultures,” when considering the new nation’s origin and, in turn, future. However, there were not many of those readers, and there still are not; and there need to be. Therefore, what John McLeod says of revisiting “lost” British texts I would second: “Many literary texts can be re-read to discover the hitherto hidden history of resistance to colonialism that they also articulate, often inadvertently. . . . In re-reading a classic text readers can put that text to work, rather than either placing it on a pedestal or tossing it to one side as a consequence of whether or not it is deemed free from ideological taint” (157–58). Brought to the US, McLeod compels us to transcend the binaries that characterize both traditional and Saidian paradigms, to exhume the archive to find not only new texts to read but also more supple ways of reading them.

Again the postcolonially inflected model is the recovery of texts by members of marginalized populations, whose “ideological taintedness” is always forgiven and whose intertextual preoccupation is always foregrounded: do we not teach David Walker as both a Pan-Africanist and an American Jeremiah? Is Mercy Otis Warren not both a patriotic historian and an equity feminist? By living such double lives, these texts articulated contradictory
impulses, and reading for those contradictions enlivens them. However, there is so much more in the archive. In my graduate courses, I require “Lost and Found” missions. Students are assigned to locate and report on a “lost text” not republished since 1850, as so many scholars have done in recent decades. They must answer: should this be recovered? The texts we “find”—minority or not—often self-consciously comment on the role of literature in the construction and articulation of the cultural contradictions in which they find themselves enmeshed. In fact, those authors often identify the specific texts to which they are responding, placing themselves between the contradictory impulses of British tradition and American distinctiveness.

To read with an eye toward the explicit acknowledgment of this in-betweenness, ceding the impossibility of purity and the inevitability of mimicry and complicity informs the study of settler literatures. Settler writing responds both to the external burden of the imperial archive and to internal declarations of detachment from that tradition—resisting both colonial cringing and jingoistic self-enunciation—to reflect on how parallel patterns of continued colonization or implicit imperialism might be disguised as nationalism. The “work” of this literary ambivalence would be the engendering of sympathy for those marginalized in or by the creation of the nation, the development of a skepticism concerning the culture whose apparatus both articulated and imposed that marginality; then, I would suggest, such writers—even white and male—might also be called settlers, and not just colonials loyal to old empires, or colonizers loyal to a new one. As Diana Brydon notes, “To unpack the legacy of our settler colony heritage will be to ‘unsettle’ or reverse that earlier gesture of appropriation” (7). In fact, settler writing unsettles itself by confronting the textual foundations upon which nationalist identity was constructed in the former colonies.

That is what I was writing about in Writing and Postcolonialism: the authors studied there (Brackenridge, Tyler, Brown, and Irving, for example) explored the indeterminacy of the authorial voice—challenging both the mimicry of the British voice and the notion that mimicry could be avoided. Rather than revisiting them, let us turn to John Neal. Most of us know him primarily as a reader, through his 1824–25 Blackwood’s Magazine American Writers series, rather than through his hard-to-find fiction. Moreover, his insistence that American authors begin as subordinated
readers makes explicit the text-centered preoccupation more implicit elsewhere. In the Blackwood series and in his other critical writings, Neal reads like a settler by insisting on recognizing the mutually constitutive relationships between how we read and write: if we read and write like colonials or colonizers, that is what we become. He criticizes Americans both for their continued colonial cringe and for their colonization of the nation’s own mistreated populations. The similarity of his comments to those of its most prominent theorists establishes a case study for rereading early US literature as a settler literature.

In the *Blackwood’s* series, Neal—responding to British critic Sydney Smith’s 1821 query, “In the four quarters of the globe, who reads an American book?” (qtd in Lease 41), and writing pseudonymously as British critic Carter Holmes—critiqued dozens of American authors, focusing on the same authors still at the center of the debate: Brown, Irving, and Cooper. To him, they too often imitate, respectively, Godwin, Goldsmith, and Scott, and, for Neal, this is the predominant characteristic of American writing: “With two exceptions, there is no American writer who would not pass just as readily for an English writer, as for an American” (29). As such, he reads American literature as expanding British culture with its colonizing tendencies intact. He expands in his twice-published “Unpublished Preface”:

> Our best writers are English writers, not American writers. They are English in everything they do, and in everything they say, as authors—in the moral and structure of their stories, in their dialogue, speech and pronunciation, yea in the very characters they draw. . . . Not so much as one true Indian, though you hardly take up a story on either side of the water now, without finding a red-man stowed away in it; and what sort of red-man? Why one that uniformly talks the best English the author is capable of—more than half the time out Ossianing Ossian. (xv)

Alan Lawson would view Neal’s frustration here as typical of the settler. By writing as Holmes, Neal “represents, but also mimics, the authentic imperial culture from which he . . . is separated . . . [to explore] always two kinds of authority and always two kinds of authenticity that the settler subject is always con/signed to desire and disavow” (“Postcolonial Theory” 156). Settler writers seek, at once, authority as legitimate authors by the standards adopted and imposed in Britain, and authority by giving voice to the imagined community of the decolonized nation.
Moreover, Neal conceded his authenticity was not indigenous, and held that American writers’ obliviousness was the worst when it came to this subject. At the moment of Removal, Neal would awaken American readers and writers to the paradox of the conventional narrative of the “red-man.” Neal’s settler ambivalence can be seen most directly through his careful placement of a story both within and against the established narrative of the Vanishing Indian: his short story “Otter-Bag” begins with a longish intertextual diatribe against how Indians had been represented. Calling out Edward Everett’s version of the “Vanishing Indian,” Neal imagines an ironic Indian response, “But we are savages, and the white people who are wiser than we are, have a law, by which, if a white man goes ashore upon a new part of the earth, and gives it a name, and buries a bottle, and hoists a flag over it, his tribe have what the savages who dwell in it, and have pursued their prey over it, age after age, have not, according to such a law” (4). The standard colonialist restatement of the European Right by Discovery is here depicted as both slavishly subordinate to British cant and thoughtlessly nationalist. However, in speaking for Indians, even sympathetically, Neal silences them. Moreover, Neal’s recognition of the racist assumptions of nationalist historiography was articulated in a follow-up Blackwood’s essay:

About five years ago, or thereabout, an article appeared in the North American Review, advising the writers of America, or such of them had pluck enough, to undertake a few straightforward stories, partly true, partly untrue, after the Scotch fashion, about the early history and exploits of the New England fathers, or pilgrims—the brave, devout, absurd, positive, original creatures, who are now looked upon, everywhere, as the “settlers” of a country, which they wasted, literally, with fire and sword; with uninterrupted cruel warfare, til nothing was left, not a single tribe, hardly a vestige, in truth, of a great people—of countless hordes, who covered that part of our earth; being the natural, and, perhaps, the original proprietors thereof. (190)

Neal’s critique moves between the textual and the historical without pause: the conventions of historical romance mimic the mechanics of conquest so easily, implicating both translatio imperii (colonial) and Manifest Destiny (colonizing) in the fact of racial extermination. Worse yet, literary imitativeness and the erasure of Indians share a trans-Revolutionary continuity
of British values and morals. For Neal, then, American literature required both a nonimitative character, language, and locale, and a political/cultural orientation that challenged the founding myths of British colonialism and the second-hand imperial myth of racial nationalism. His rejection of Puritan history was followed up in Rachel Dyer (1828), a novel rephrasing the 1690s witch trials. The Puritan past Neal depicts was “usable,” but only for a nation probing its racial, social, legal, and religious contradictions, not one announcing its “immemorial” legitimacy. Neal, more settler than colonial or colonizer, would rather the United States be the former than the latter.

To Neal, the development of any national literature would always be “process, not arrival” in the terms of Helen Tiffin (“Post-colonial Literatures” 95). As Holmes, Neal dwells longest on the novels of John Neal. While he valued his work above Cooper’s, he identified himself as a typical writer, flaws and all, and so insisted that, even in his own work, genuine American writing existed only in the subjunctive:

Why is there nothing of the sort, up to this hour; nothing, we should say, save a small part of two or three stories by Brown, by Irving, by Neal, and by Cooper? . . . Such would be our advantage to everyone who, like the author of this book, is afraid of being stared at, for his originality, or laughed at, for his awkwardness, if he go among the polite, in his true shape—a rude, coarse man. (200–02)

For Neal, the well-informed effort to articulate all that is best and worst about the new nation will eventually create a literature that might be called distinctively American. By grouping himself with both the partial successes and the mostly failures (so far), he implicates his own work in the openly contradictory literary politics of settler self-expression.

Looking back on nineteenth-century Canadian and Australian literatures, Lawson notes that settler writing is “both postimperial and postcolonial . . . it must speak of and against both its own oppressiveness and its own oppression. . . . The address of the settler is toward both the absent(ee) cultural authority of the imperium and the effaced, recessive cultural authority of the Indigene” (“Postcolonial Theory” 158–59). He elsewhere writes, “The customary project of Western thought has been to contain disorder and divergence, to see the resolution of dichotomy, polarity, and binary in harmony and unity, to synthesize and re-integrate. . . . [Settler] texts are under no such cultural imperative” (“A Cultural Paradigm” 70).
Now we might turn back to Neal’s own chaotic and disordered (and dis-ordering?) novels, or the weirdness of James Strange McHenry, Anna Snelling, and Nicholas Hentz or dozens of other early novelists, banished from the canon for their refusal to sanitize the frontier.

For example, the linkage of white sexual and racial violence in Snelling’s *Kabaosa* (1841) has vanished in light of Cooper’s relatively desexualized frontier. Aside from Snelling, other early white female authors reflected similar aspects of settler identity, demonstrating its broader presence in the republican public sphere. In her preface to *Hobomok* (1824), Lydia Maria Child placed her novel within the national literary context created by Cooper’s *The Spy* (1821) and *The Pioneers* (1823), but, like Neal, cites Scott as anticipating Cooper. After setting her novel’s composition intertextually, however, in the novel itself, Child introduces feminist and pro-Indian themes, not even objecting to miscegenation; yet in the end, the Indian vanishes and the squaw becomes a wife. *Hobomok* is a settler text, then, for these contradictions, for Child’s unwillingness to complete the revolutionary narrative; like the men, by “Holmes’s” standard, Child shows signs of something greater, but instead can only scratch the surface of settler difference before fleeing from its inevitable “awkwardness” or “originality.”

The self-conscious national representativeness of Herman Melville, Stephen Crane, John Dos Passos, Kurt Vonnegut, or even David Foster Wallace reflects lasting anxieties rooted in the unfixed and unfixable settler legacy in American literature. Of these, Dos Passos’s *USA Trilogy’s* vast intertextuality and formal experimentation deliberately reflect the diversity and divergence of its national scope. Its final confession—“All right we are two nations” (*The Big Money* 462)—harmonizes with Lawson’s idea of the settler obligation to challenge false monoliths. Moreover, as an explicit response to an implicit imperial unity, the statement intertextually rebuts the same hubris Neal had fought a century before. Later, Vonnegut’s and Wallace’s deliberate textual breakages echo Neal’s impulse that an American writer should never fear being “laughed at, for his awkwardness, if he go among the polite, in his true shape—a rude, coarse man.” Their sprawling texts, then, reflect the true shapeless form of their American subject.

Eighty years after Neal, another American writer would endeavor to explain American writing. Like Neal, Gertrude Stein embraced a national awkwardness, but knew it as inevitable:
I wonder if I at all convey to you what I mean by this thing, I will try to tell it in every way I can as I have in all the writing I have ever done. I am always trying to tell this thing that a space of time is a natural thing for an American to always have inside them as something in which they are continuously moving. (258)

In “The Gradual Making of the Making of the Americans,” Stein was seeking a language for defining something that would not stop moving long enough to be defined, and nothing ever truly matched the shifting notion of “American” she seems to have had in mind. Like Stein’s, Neal’s circumscriptive style spirals around a subject that refuses to be fixed. However, because the transatlantic literary establishment, as Lawson notes, as well as Stafford and Williams, demands absolutes, neither could find a language to define American difference, but each insists on continuing to try. By embracing such incompleteness and incoherence, Stein and Neal might then both be called settlers, each resisting any stable or stabilizing definition of their subject, and each not trusting the existing literary means for attempting such an endeavor.

In Newsweek in 2009, Paul Auster announced that American literature “began” with The Scarlet Letter (1850). Such backdating is not new: in Crumbling Idols (1894), Hamlin Garland announced it as 1860. Another talking point: when did the new nation stop being a set of former colonies and become an empire: 1848, 1865, or 1898? Each debate defeats itself; merely the fact that we still talk about it reveals a nation still both colonized and colonizer. Our literatures have always been nervous about their derivative status, and the US has always been a set of former colonies and an emergent empire. Always settlers, and never settled, and hence the vitality and necessity of these debates.

NOTES
1. ANZACS refers to the Australia and New Zealand Army Corps, formed during World War I. It has since become a focus of patriotic celebration in both countries.

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Castronovo, Russ. “‘On Imperialism, see . . .’: Ghosts of the Present in *Cultures of United States Imperialism.*” *American Literary History* 20.3 (Fall 2008): 427–38.


Globality and the Ends of the Nation-Form
A Response to Edward Watts

*American Literary History* and *Early American Literature* have orchestrated a unique textual space to produce dialogue and exposure between scholars in early American literary studies working in interdisciplinary topical areas that directly transact with the study of late modernity, such as postcolonial inquiry, and cultural studies scholars, such as myself, who are consciously bound to this earlier and constitutive instance of modernity and yet whose work is primarily on the cultural politics and “archives” of contemporary US late modernity. Edward Watts’s concise and lucid essay begins this dialogue. The essay, by positioning the US as a *settler social formation* akin to New Zealand, Australia, and other Anglo-English settlements, makes important and absolutely crucial arguments for global comparative thinking, for breaking with American exceptionalist orientations in our inquiries and methods, and for situating the literary theorization of textual forms as central to expanding the social and political possibilities that we as scholars, intellectuals, and teachers within the educational apparatus “train” as imaginable.

These opportunities are as rare as they are necessary. For it is only through interdisciplinary and cross-period conversations that we will be able to advance intellectually in our collective efforts to generate modes and areas of thought in the university and in literary studies that are adequate to the immense global *cultural heterogeneity* that frames at once our modern historical “beginnings,” for which early period studies of literature and the humanities more broadly operate ideally as ethical guardians, as well as our contemporary moment. In our moment, that global cultural heterogeneity is mediated in part by mid-twentieth-century decolonization and antiracist struggles that jointly transformed the contemporary US university. Ours is a moment in which the Western humanities of the Anglo-European tradition must address a more diversified professoriate and student body than that tradition has needed or been willing to claim as
constitutive. This is a consequence of the fact that since the twentieth century, this tradition lodged itself within the secular university as the protective enclosure and reproductive apparatus for that tradition.

Addressing first modern beginnings, it is precisely the issue of the production of racialized cultural difference out of geohistorical heterogeneity by the normative epistemological, interpretive, and political forms of modernity, namely disciplinary knowledges that reproduce the citizen-subject of the nation-state, that I would like to address in my response. I understand this to be a central concern of university-based postcolonial critique since its start in the late 1970s with the publication of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978). And to the degree that Watts gathers together a number of critical scholars of early American literature that he identifies as “Saidians”—David Kazanjian, Malini Johar Shueller, and Amy Kaplan, for example—who, in his estimation, share a single paradigm and critical position against which he seeks to differentiate, we might pause for a moment to recall the central insights of Said’s *Orientalism*, as relevant today with the US engaged in wars in Afghanistan and Iraq for the last seven years as it was in its original moment of reception.

Based on what he argues is the tendency of “Saidian critics,” Watts implicitly suggests, and rightly so, that Said’s *Orientalism* grossly reduced the dynamism, multivocality, and instability of the Orientalist and tropicalist discourses that sought to constitute colonial social relations. As Lisa Lowe argued in her *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms* (1991), when critics reduce Orientalist conditions to a single binary of colonizer and colonized, in which the former univocally constitutes the latter, they inadvertently produce managing monoliths (or overly regulative categories) for assessing the dynamic historical process of imperial and colonial social formations under global constraints. Doing so grossly underestimates the complex determinations that organize, constrain, and transform colonial discourse. Though Watts argues against and in contradistinction to “Saidian” critics of early American literary history, Lowe’s insight is particularly acute in the works of Amy Kaplan and David Kazanjian. For is this not exactly what Kaplan means when she speaks of the “Anarchy of Empire,” of its instability and ambiguities in enunciative positions of dominant and residual, domestic and foreign, and settler colonized and colonizer, of the failures and breakdowns in ruling practices and discursive and formal logics, and of empire’s fundamental incoherency,
all of which generated an unstable literary and juridical gendered citizen-subject of early American modernity? And is this also, in a different way, not Kazanjian’s critical insight? In *The Colonizing Trick: National Culture and Imperial Citizenship in Early America* (2003), he claims that in the US settler social formation, the national citizen-subject, whether emergent revolutionary or hegemonic, is at once the agent of imperialist and racialist practices of division, development, and violence.

For Watts, so-called Saidian critiques of early American literatures from the 1780s to the 1830s argue that early American writers invented a romantic nationalism in which the US is figured as an always already existing “immemorial nation” anxiously repressing its settler colonial conditions. As such, these critiques, he argues, themselves repress from the current literary canon formation a whole corpus of (white) “American” writers within the literary archive who precisely ruminate on the “colonial interactions of cultures,” proving that these early American writers were in fact committed to grappling with and theorizing through formal experimentation and innovation. Yet Kazanjian argues against a theory of the emergent US national subject as once an oppressed “other” and colonial legatee to the British Empire who represses this antecedent cultural position, a national “memory” that cannot be admitted as that subject enacts imperial violence and appropriation.

Rather, Kazanjian argues for a reading practice attentive to the way in which the writing subject of Anglo-American north Atlantic societies of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is formed within distinct discursive structures and logics organizing North American settler social formations that sought to “resolve” the racial formations those very discursive structures constituted out of the transatlantic economy of bodies, capital, and goods. These were achieved by advocating for an ethically universal “national subject” for “each” racial grouping, however morally ambivalent, as the imagined dialectical sublation of the very racial differences it instituted in Anglo-American modernity. In this way, Kazanjian richly speculates that we can discover in eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Revolutionary and “post-independence” self-professed American writing on the “colonial interactions of cultures” an early instance of literary forms determined by and constitutive of the discursive logics of capitalist development and modernization theory that organized later US neocolonial foreign policy toward the decolonizing movements of the
mid twentieth century and that justified post–World War II US wars and covert operations in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. That is, contra Watt’s understanding of Said’s and his inheritors’ critical labors, these efforts are not restricted to the historicist critique of the ideological content of literature. They are also investigations into the materially produced discursive structures and formations of Anglo-European modernity and their determining force on geohistorically specific literary forms—forms that mediate subjects’ relations to global material social relations.

Secondly, then, I would like to suggest that Said’s *Orientalism* is a project not exhausted by the critiques of the text’s reductionist account of the Western attempt to manage the domain of aesthetic and political representation in the nonwestern worlds it sought to colonize or incorporate. Rather, these critiques re-enliven an awareness of the text’s crucial contribution, revealing for us what remains central to the project Said began in *Orientalism* and that is carried forward in the rewriting these critiques perform. At its core, *Orientalism* is a project that seeks to reveal how modern apparatuses of knowledge, especially humanistic knowledges of cultures, societies, languages, and aesthetical traditions, have both constituted and been determined by the political imperatives and economic interests organizing Western European and Anglo-American societies’ relations with the societies, peoples, and cultures designated as “the Orient.”

Extending Said’s insights beyond the study of Orientalism, critics, scholars, and intellectuals, then, have shown that the changing norms, categories, and terms that organize literary, cultural, and historical study in the humanities across the last century have been less the effect of a development of increasingly complex thought and forms of cultural interpretation—the progressive elimination of error, prejudice, or a narrow nationalism in modern historical, sociological, psychological, and aesthetical knowledges—than reifications and *displaced precipitates or symptoms* of the always transforming *material* circumstances and geohistorical conditions within which those knowledges emerge and for which they seek to offer a formal and abstract portrait and understanding.

These modern Western knowledges, then, have been productive of certain expressions of personhood, experience, historical process, materialism, and so forth, while foreclosing other historical, material, and epistemic organizations of subjectivity, historical process, and the so-called natural world. In this way, they have had the effect of restricting what is
politically and ethically possible, imaginable, and sustainable both in the realm of practice and in the realm of social representation. Moreover, to the degree that these knowledges have a universalizing scope they reproduce the relations of violence, uneven personhood, and nonequivalency for which they were originally *productive and symptomatic* as the prerequisite for their continued use and coherent and integrative functioning in our present political modernity. It is both of these senses that are expressed when critical postcolonialists speak of postcolonial criticism as an imminent innovation in a *materialist politics of knowledge*.

To be sure, literary and historical studies within the modern university, along with other disciplines, have functioned as what Louis Althusser has called Ideological Apparatuses for the State, socializing students as well as their teachers as representatives of knowledge into subjects of and for the modern liberal state. Yet the encounters by racialized subjects of those very apparatuses have also revealed the production of *repressive force relations* that have been central to these institutions, marking the limits of the subject produced by these apparatuses, the histories and cultural formations it can transact, the differences it can incorporate, and those that must remain heterogeneous to incorporation, assimilation, abstraction, and formalization (Spivak, *Outside*). If it is to remain a valuable term, we must treat postcolonial critique as only one of a variety of current interdisciplinary projects—comparative critical ethnic studies and feminist globalization and transnational cultural studies are others—that addresses the violences that our shared institutional conditions of knowing produce and reproduce, reconciling autonomous and disciplinary knowledge to the uneven global capitalist relations of collective accumulation from which our modernity develops. In gaining the means of “self-representation,” within the geopolitical order of the interstate system, the movements and subjects of mid-twentieth-century decolonization, like civil rights in the US, have discovered in these means of representation their very “own” names and historical identities as marking the repressed and repressive limits of social possibility within political modernity.³ It has been the canniness of these critiques to see in the archival terms “Indian,” “Negro,” “Mexican,” “Asian,” and so forth not a description of an empirically true “people” upon which negative or positive meanings, narratives, policies, and practices were attached—sometimes simultaneously as Watts points out—for which we might now restore a tradition and history. Rather they serve as limit fig-
ures, tropes, and textualized problems enunciated from within forms of knowledge that enabled the substantive violation of nonwhite peoples and their social imaginaries as coincident with the extension of “autonomous” and “universal” knowledge to all “members” of the globe.4

For scholars of color and postcolonial scholars working in the archive, these signifiers mark the true losses of history, not simply marginalization, subordination, or the personal experience of loss through a private death. They are rather signifiers of the permanent fragmentation of nonmodern and nonwestern subjectivities and of the profound dislocations that exist within the “time” and “space” of our contemporary modernity. And yet these fragments that do not “belong” and cannot be restored to wholeness by modern institutional knowledges are also the basis on which alternatives to political modernity and the epistemic structures and divisions of knowledge on which that modernity is founded can be developed.5 Our encounter with these inscriptions from the past are the moments when the literary historian must and can rethink the category of the autonomous literary text and intertext, of the poetical and aesthetical subject it promulgates, of the moral and ethical law and history it conserves and encodes, and of the shapes to political life and society it naturalizes, even when that aesthetical subject appears as a powerful critique of the brutality and instrumental rationality that subtend the ordered functioning of Western mass industrial societies.

Hence, Watts’s call to reorganize the early “American” literary canon under the rubric of “settler postcolonialism” so as to “recover” those self-professed American writers who both formally and thematically reveal the “American” as an inauthenticity whose contradictory originality is achieved only at the cost of accepting the subject’s historical violation and silencing of Native Americans (and Africans we might add) would at first appear to concur with the above critiques advanced by critical postcolonial and ethnic studies. Indeed, for Watts, building from American New Critics of the mid twentieth century but now with a good dose of Boothian criticism and literary history, we ought to read and recover those “American” writers who reveal the moral ambivalence and formal ambiguity of this textual history of settler inauthenticity, contradictory originality, and racialized violence that “is” the American person.

Yet in making the “aesthetic” or the literary text the autonomous realm in which material history culminates in the production of a univocal moral
subject of American modernity and a set of privileged literary forms for its
development, what Watts calls those “sprawling texts [that] reflect the true
shapeless form of their American subject,” he aestheticizes material history
and the discursive structures by which it is socially experienced. More im-
portantly, this aesthetic universality once again addresses racialized and
nonwestern students in the literature classroom as the American liberal
(now liberal-multicultural) citizen-subject. This time that subject’s foun-
dational moral ambiguity and contradictory ambivalence paradoxically
become the basis once again for reproducing a distinctly American capital-
list ideology of “choice,” based now on an aestheticized recognition of racial
violence, silencing, and erasure as the subject’s conditions of possibility.
Such a project institutes upon the racialized student the moral capacities
to will a different history of antiracist America (what Watts terms “alterna-
tive cultural nationalisms”), to discover and to enunciate his or her “Na-
tive Americanness,” or “Asianness,” but only to the degree that he or she
internalizes as his or her own “past” and “present” the episodic appearance
and development of the settler postcolonial subject within and as finally
coincident with the aesthetical portrait of American space—forcibly or-
ganizing, however unintended, how racialized students of the humanities
ought to comprehend, internalize, and engage the racial violences and real
losses of “other worlds” that saturate the production and reproduction of
American society in its literary and epistemic forms.

This brings me then to my third and final thought occasioned by Watts’s
provocative essay. It would appear to me that as the US is increasingly sus-
tained and reproduced through transnational social relations, neoliberal
deterritorialized sovereignties and corporations, global and regional mi-
gurations from Mexico, the Caribbean, Asia, Africa, and Latin America,
wars in the Middle East, a prison-industrial complex disproportionately
incarcerating blacks and Latino/as, and an increasingly rightless “undocu-
mented” population of twelve million within its borders, that our present is
a fundamentally heterogeneous time. As we think about the kind of inter-
disciplinarity that might link and address these times with early “Ameri-
can” literary studies, I would like to advocate not for an alternative canon,
settler postcolonial, multicultural, or otherwise, but rather for the culti-
vation of a broader geohistorical set of references and subjectivities that
might go under the name of “early American” and be retrieved through
literary studies. For surely if we are to understand our heterogeneous
present not as a disorientation and disablement of social transformation and of a shared horizon of moral and ethical deliberation, but as a resource for those efforts, then it is by seeing in our contemporary heterogeneity the means for desubjugating the historical past, conveying how our “beginnings” as contemporary subjects of American society and space are as heterogeneous both temporally and geographically as our transnational present. To discover the present or the “now” as a disjunctive and heterogeneous temporality is to connect us to distinct, incommensurate but linked geohistorical spaces of the past that intersect in and as the space of contemporary US society.

And this richer understanding of “now” can enable a different “early” American literary studies, one that pushes us to think of comparatively relating north Atlantic Anglo-American eastern seaboard writers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century with Californio writers living on the edge of the Spanish Empire, asking how each system of empire, British, American, and Spanish, mediated the relations between elite lettered classes and the indigenous subaltern communities they dominated. It can help us relate the continuities and disjunctions of Thomas Jefferson’s revolutionary nationalism with Simón Bolívar and José Martí’s essays on our “Americas” or José Rizal’s Filipino nationalism, asking in each case how the Lockean tradition organizing the US writing subject elaborated a racial economy of slavery, security, antimiscegenation, bureaucracy, and self-identity related to and yet distinct from the legal, bureaucratic, and discursive structures of slavery, property, national subjectivity, and race organizing these other differing colonial and national traditions. Finally, it is our richly disjunctive “now” that cultivates the desire to know the “American experience” of 1848 at once and as much through the archive of white working-class mass and popular culture produced in the technological milieu of the nineteenth-century penny presses as through the archive of late-twentieth-century corridos that circulated through the different technological milieu of cheap transistor radios and publicly released bandwidths in the late twentieth century among Mexican and Chicano/a workers who pick the fruits and vegetables of California’s central valley farms.

Out of the racialized, gendered, and sexual heterogeneity constitutive of our “now,” we retrieve other literary histories and, indeed, literacies of early “America,” multiple, incommensurate, and nonidentical global his-
tories and social relations that otherwise disappear into national historical oblivion when we seek from the literary discipline autonomous aesthetical formations and subjectivities of our materially differentiated global social relations of collective accumulation.

NOTES

1. On the rethinking of nation-based literary and cultural geographies and an appraisal of subaltern and gendered contradictions and antagonisms that emerge aghast liberal and revolutionary nationalist predicias of moral subjectivity in the era of US neocolonial modernization and development theory post–World War II, see María Josephina Saldaña-Portillo, The Revolutionary Imagination in the Americas and the Age of Development (2003).


7. For an example of such comparative work, see Kirsten Silva Gruesz, Ambassadors of Culture: The Transamerican Origins of Latino Writing (2002); and John D. Blanco, “Bastards of the Unfinished Revolution: Bolivar’s Ishmael and Rizal’s Martí at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century,” Radical History Review 89 (Spring 2004): 92–114.

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