

INSURGENT REMAINS:  
AFTERLIVES OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION, 1770-1820

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*for my mothers*

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## ABSTRACT

INSURGENT REMAINS: AFTERLIVES OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION,

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Emma Stapely

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*Insurgent Remains* disturbs the identification of the American Revolution with U.S. national beginnings by tracing it through its literary aftereffects in the period with which it is identified, 1770-1820. While the American Revolution is thought to have concluded with the Treaty of Paris (1783) and the “birth of the United States, *Insurgent Remains* reads texts produced in the decades following the peace for delineations of *ongoing* Revolutionary experiences characterized by loss and constraint that demand creative, collective responses without guarantee. In chapters organized around the re-use and re-circulation of “old” forms and formats—allegory, anthology, tragedy, and petition—I propose that the liminal affective states in the texts I examine are sites of insurgent potential in their own right whose politics are inscrutable when the Revolution is conceived as an oppositional conflict of sides whose descriptive vocabulary reduces to a binary formula (American/British, Loyalist/Patriot). Instead, they become legible as “remains”: pending works of grief, yearning, need, and love that offer vibrant possibilities for collective action and ethical commitment obscured by teleologies of national consolidation. Eschewing preconceived identitarian and partisan markers through which Revolutionary history has conventionally been organized, my approach stresses the roles of literary forms in mediating traumatic experiences of Revolutionary history that may otherwise elude representation. I argue that the itineraries along which

these forms travel open up new ways of thinking about the cultural politics of the period and the politics of revolution itself. This project thus seeks to enrich our understanding of the Revolutionary period by expanding the narrow field in which politics seem to operate, attending to modes of historical experience debarred from political consideration by traditional Revolutionary histories bound to binary narratives of conflict and progress.

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## INTRODUCTION

### **Unfixing Revolution: Notes on Turns and Returns**

Revolution is a mending word for war that is difficult to fix.

In the first place, the semantics of revolution encode multiple movements. The word “revolution” derives from the Latin, *revolvere* (*re* – back + *volver* – turn, roll), to turn or roll back. Its oldest sense in English pertains to the motion of celestial or heavenly bodies: the cycling or return of the stars and planets to positions in the sky. This sense of the word is cosmically integrated; it marks the passage of time with a passage in space. Uniting the heavens and the earth in a single motion, repeated but different each time, celestial revolutions spin the heavens around and around in familiar but ever-changing constellations with the earth below. The re-turns of the firmament announce the mundane continuance of change. Every year the Pleiades stretch out the season for sailing, and Sirius rises to bark at a newly old world. Celestial revolution thus counter-intuitively anticipates aging and renewal as temporal cycles that move backwards. Time turns, or rolls, back as it advances to begin again.

In the Anglophone long eighteenth century (1688-1815), revolution’s early pairings of advance with retreat and continuity with change were decoupled. In the so-called Glorious, or “Bloodless,” Revolution of 1688 in which Parliament ousted James II from the British throne, revolution operates as a close synonym for restoration: a return to a prior state of liberty enshrined in Magna Carta which had been degraded in the present. Freezing celestial revolution’s associations with the constancy of variation, this modified invocation of revolution fixes temporal movement to a point of reference in the past, sealing the strife of William and Mary’s succession with a “bloodless” banner of

peaceable transition. It was in this restorative sense, in any case, that Edmund Burke famously defended the Glorious Revolution in the feverish opening sections of *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1791): “The Revolution was made to preserve our *antient* constitution of government which is our only security and law for liberty. [ . . . ] The very idea of the fabrication of a new government is enough to fill us with disgust and horror. We wished at the period of the Revolution, and do now wish, to derive all we possess as *an inheritance from our forefathers.*”<sup>1</sup> For Burke, what is glorious about the Glorious Revolution is that it preserved the timeless transfer of legal property from fathers to sons. In his heavily whiggish account, this “revolution” might therefore be glossed as the successful return to the same, conservative in the classic sense that it returned to protect the “ancient” tradition of patriarchal property transfer from destruction.

In the case of the American Revolution that is the focus of this project, the direction and tenor of revolutionary movement is quite different again. The American Revolution was the first time “revolution” was used in English to indicate a political event which resulted in a drastic alteration in government: “overthrow of an established government or social order by those previously subject to it; forcible substitution of a new form of government. In early use also: rebellion” (OED). In U.S. America, revolution moves dramatically forward; it is an “overthrow” which leaps into the future towards the “new.” Perhaps drawing on an etymological strand of “revolution” that pertains to the movement of chance—“alteration, change; upheaval; reversal of fortune” (OED)—the American Revolution appears as a radical progression that leaves the past behind. However, classical and medieval understandings of chance and fortune cast them

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<sup>1</sup> Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* [1791], ed. L.G. Mitchell (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993), 31.

as highly capricious energies, as likely to bring windfall as they are to blow us off our feet. The American Revolution evokes revolution, by contrast, as a kind of linear advance into adjustment, denotatively guaranteed to end with “a new form of government.” As invoked in the U.S. American case, “revolution” thus mends the violence preserved in its definition as a “forcible substitution” with a teleological prescription for institutional novelty. Here, revolution is a cycle fixed to the future, a war against “established order” amended in Founding: a birth.

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*Insurgent Remains* builds on critiques of American exceptionalism in American Studies that have demanded a reckoning with the colonial and imperial contours of narratives of U.S. American “uniqueness” which celebrate the promise of the U.S.’s democratic institutions, the genius of its Founding, and the specialness of its destiny as the first among nations. An outgrowth of, and contribution to, this critique, this project contends that U.S. exceptionalism relies for its coherence upon a set of *temporal* as well as territorial exclusions that are held in place by the identification of the so-called American Revolution with the “birth” of the U.S. nation-state. *Insurgent Remains* responds to major scholarly interventions of the last few decades that have argued for the realignment of Early American Studies away from its conventional emphases on U.S. national frameworks.<sup>2</sup> A traditionally land-locked field whose orthodox scholarly narratives chart a linear progression of American cultural history from seventeenth-

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<sup>2</sup> I have been especially influenced by critiques of exceptionalism led by Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease that have linked it to U.S. imperialism. See Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2005); Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease, eds., *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham: Duke UP, 1994), especially Kaplan, “Left Alone with America,” 3-21; John Carlos Rowe, *Literary Culture and U.S. Imperialism: From the Revolution to World War II* (Oxford: OUP, 2000).

century New England to the Civil War, Early American Studies has seen an astonishing number of “turns” over the last few decades aimed at recalibrating its organizing spatial and teleological logics.<sup>3</sup> Transnational and hemispheric approaches have demanded more searching engagements with histories of empire, colonialism, and slavery that move within, across, and beyond the borders of what is now considered as U.S. America.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, transatlantic frameworks once dominated by Anglo-U.S. comparativisms have given way to circum-atlantic and oceanic turns whose scholars have persuasively argued that the material and metaphoric contours of fluid transit—circulation, flow, wave,

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<sup>3</sup> For the “spatial turn,” see Martin Bruckner, *The Geographic Revolution in Early America: Maps, Literacy & National Identity* (Chapel Hill: Omohundro/UNCP, 2006) and *Early American Cartographies*, ed. Martin Brückner (Chapel Hill: Omohundro/UNCP, 2011); Wai Chee Dimock, *Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep Time* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2006) and “Planet and America, Set and Subset” in *Shades of the Planet: American Literature as World Literature*, eds. Wai Chee Dimock and Lawrence Buell (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2007), 1-16; Paul Giles, *The Global Remapping of American Literature* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2011); Hsuan Hsu, *Geography and the Production of Space in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010); and Susan Schulten, *Mapping the Nation: History and Cartography in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago P, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> For influential transnational and hemispheric work in Early/American Studies, see Monique Allewaert, *Ariel’s Ecology: Plantations, Personhood, and Colonialism in the American Tropics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013); Ralph Bauer, *The Cultural Geography of Colonial American Literatures: Empire, Travel, Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009) and “Early American Literature and American Literary History at the ‘Hemispheric Turn’,” *Early American Literature* 45.2 (2010): 250-65; Anna Brickhouse, *Transamerican Literary Relations and the Nineteenth-Century Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004); Raúl Coronado, *A World Not to Come: A History of Latino Writing and Print Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2013); Shelley Fisher Fishkin, “Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn in American Studies,” *American Quarterly* 57.1 (2005): 17-57; Winifred Fluck, Donald Pease, and John Carlos Rowe, eds., *Re-Framing the Transnational Turn in American Studies* (Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 2011); Sean Goudie, *Creole America: The West Indies and the Formation of Literature and Culture in the New Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); Kirsten Gruez Silva, *Ambassadors of Culture: The Transamerican Origins of Latino Writing* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2002); Christopher P. Iannini, *Fatal Revolutions: Natural History, West Indian Slavery, and the Routes of American Literature* (Chapel Hill: Omohundro/UNC Press, 2012); David Kazanjian, *The Colonizing Trick: National Culture and Imperial Citizenship in Early America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2003); Caroline F. Levander and Robert S. Levine, eds., *Hemispheric American Studies* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2007); Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham: Duke UP, 2015); Gretchen Murphy, *Hemispheric Imaginings: The Monroe Doctrine and Narratives of U.S. Empire* (Durham: Duke UP, 2005); Susan Scott Parrish, “The ‘Hemispheric Turn’ in Colonial American Studies,” *Early American Literature* 40.3 (2005): 545-53; Carolyn Porter, “What We Know that We Don’t Know: Remapping American Literary Studies,” *American Literary History* 6.3 (1994): 467-526; Claudia Sadowski-Smith and Claire F. Fox, “Theorizing the Hemisphere: Inter-America at the Intersection of American, Canadian, and Latin American Studies,” *Comparative American Studies* 4.1 (2004): 5-38; and José David Saldívar, *Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

current, and tide—resist the territorial entrenchment of U.S. nationalist history and the linear historicism that tends to accompany it.<sup>5</sup>

*Insurgent Remains* begins from the premise that while the spatial turns have transformed the territorial and linguistic scope of Early American scholarship, the American Revolution has remained largely intact as a definitive marker that separates colonial from U.S. national time. Many of the scholars I cite above have been deeply concerned with temporality. After all, the vision of U.S. America's progressive promise has been elaborated through the twinned claims of contiguity and continuity at least since the publication of Alexis de Tocqueville's classic exceptionalist touchstone, *Democracy in America* (1835).<sup>6</sup> In American Studies, scholars identified with the “temporal turn”

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<sup>5</sup> For transatlantic, circum-atlantic, and oceanic interventions, see Ian Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History* (Durham: Duke UP, 2005); Hester Blum, *The View from the Masthead: Maritime Imagination and Antebellum American Sea Narratives* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2008) and “The Prospect of Oceanic Studies,” *PMLA* 125.3 (2010): 670-77; W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997); Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, *New World Drama: The Performative Commons in the Atlantic World, 1649-1849* (Durham: Duke UP, 2014); Paul Giles, *Transatlantic Insurrections: British Culture and the Formation of American Literature 1730-1860* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001) and “The Deterritorialization of American Literature” in *Shades of the Planet: American Literature as World Literature*, ed. Wai Chee Dimock and Lawrence Buell (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2007), 39-61; Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993); Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: The Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon, 2000); Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987); Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia UP, 1996); Geoffrey Sanborn, *Whipscars and Tattoos: The Last of the Mohicans, Moby Dick, and the Maori* (Oxford: OUP, 2011); Jace Weaver, *The Red Atlantic: American Indigenes and the Making of the Modern World, 1000-1927* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2014). For an example of an older paradigm in Anglo-U.S. comparativism, see Robert Weisbuch, *Atlantic Double-Cross: American Literature and British Influence in the Age of Emerson* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1989).

<sup>6</sup> Tocqueville famously elaborates a chronological story about America beginning with the Puritans that runs alongside a geographic one that emphasizes U.S. America's self-containment in reasonable proximity to Europe. “Thus the position of the Americans is entirely exceptional, and there is reason to believe that no other democratic people will ever enjoy anything like it. Their wholly Puritanical origin, their markedly commercial habits; the very country they inhabit, which seems to discourage study of science, literature, and the arts; the proximity of Europe, which allows them to not to study these things without lapsing into barbarism; and a thousand more specific causes [...] have concentrated the American mind in a singular way upon purely practical objects. [...] Let us cease, then, to view all democratic nations under the guise

such as Wai Chee Dimock and Dana Luciano have pushed for greater attention modes and forms of temporal experience that disrupt, traverse, or thicken what Benedict Anderson (drawing on Benjamin) famously describes as the “homogeneous, empty time” of the nation-state.<sup>7</sup> However, the temporal turn has so far been elaborated chiefly by scholars grounded in nineteenth-century American culture. This project works in an earlier moment, 1770-1820, to unfix the manner in which the Revolution is thought to hold U.S. America together as a historical object in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as well as in our own time. One of the temporal problems to which this project responds, then, is that of the periodizations which govern the split between *Early American Studies* and *American Studies*. Whereas *American Studies* typically historicizes itself in the nineteenth century, its “Early” counterpart finds its historical coordinates on a chronology that takes the Revolution as its pivotal instance.

In *Early American Studies*, the Revolution produces the United States as context and referent, and it continues to exert enormous torque even in a field that is ever less disposed to accept the nation as a natural or inevitable unit of analysis. As Michelle Burnham and Sandra Gustafson have also noted, the Revolution continues in *Early American Studies* to demarcate the moment after which it is permissible to invoke U.S.

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of the American people and try at last to see them as they really are.” Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Library of America, 2004), 517-518.

<sup>7</sup> For the temporal turn, see Thomas M. Allen, *A Republic in Time: Temporality and Social Imagination in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Wai-Chee Dimock, “Deep Time: American Literature and World History,” *American Literary History* 13.4 (2001): 755-775; Dana Luciano, *Arranging Grief: Sacred Time and the Body in Nineteenth-century America* (New York: NYU Press, 2007); Michael O’Malley, *Keeping Watch: A History of American Time* (New York: Viking/Penguin, 1990); Lloyd Pratt, *Archives of American Time: Literature and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); Mark M. Smith, *Mastered by the Clock: Time, Slavery, and Freedom in the American South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997). See also Benedict Anderson, *Imaginary Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* [1983] (London: Verso, 2006), 24-25; Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, Ed. Hannah Arendt, Trans. Harry Zohn. (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 261.

national culture as an environment in which reading and writing can be said to occur. Gustafson writes that the chronological construction of “the early period in American literary history” as it is imagined in “anthologies, professional organizations, and scholarly periodicals [ . . . ] makes nation formation the signal event that separates earlier from later literature.”<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Burnham observes that the year 1776 alone has “an almost gravitational pull in dominant narratives of American history and literature, often yanking efforts at alternative narratives and perspectives back into more familiar temporal and spatial terms the closer one gets to the revolutionary moment.”<sup>9</sup>

For an example of the kind of gravitational pull Gustafson and Burnham describe, one might look to the publication of new Early American literary anthologies over the past few decades such as those edited by Michael Warner and Myra Jehlen (1997), Susan Castillo and Ivy Schweitzer (2001), and Carla Mulford (2002).<sup>10</sup> These all represent important challenges to the older orthodoxies of the field that follow a teleological arc from the Puritans to Whitman, but in every instance the geographic diversity of the early sections funnels into concluding units which herald the coming of the Revolution and the United States. For instance, Castillo and Schweitzer’s *The Literatures of Colonial America* concludes with a unit called “Contested Visions: Revolution and Nation,” while Mulford’s penultimate unit in *Early American Writings* (“Confederation and the Formation of a British Atlantic”) tracks from Jefferson to Banneker, and is followed by a

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<sup>8</sup> Sandra Gustafson, “What’s in a Date? Temporalities of Early American Literature,” *Theories and Methodologies: “Early American Literature,” PMLA* 128.4 (2013): 963 [961-67].

<sup>9</sup> Michelle Burnham, “Early America and the Revolutionary Pacific,” *Theories and Methodologies: “Early American Literature,” PMLA* 128.4 (2013): 953-4 [953-960].

<sup>10</sup> Michael Warner and Myra Jehlen, eds., *The English Literatures of America: 1500-1800* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Susan Castillo and Ivy Schweitzer, eds., *The Literatures of Early America: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001); Carla Mulford, ed., *Early American Writings* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002).

unit on “Native Peoples from Eastern North America.” U.S. nationalist epistemologies of Revolution does not go unchallenged in either case, but the closing visions of both these anthologies are strongly grafted to the Atlantic seaboard of what is now the U.S., thus evincing what Lisa Voigt describes as “a progressive narrowing of the field from the Americas to the United States [which] corroborates the traditional narrative of U.S. exceptionalism.”<sup>11</sup> Like Voigt, I do not mean by these comments to condemn the efforts represented by these collections—I offer the temporal re-turns of this study alongside and in addition to the various spatial turns in the field, not as their proposed replacement. But these anthologies do, I think, highlight the force with which the measurement of “early” American time continues to be drawn in relation to U.S. Revolutionary history. This risks unintended annexations of expanded linguistic and geographic fields of inquiry into historical paradigms presided over by U.S. America, just as those same paradigms can impose interpretive protocols on objects of study that winnow the scope of their temporal and political engagements. Few are willing at this point to subscribe to the nationalism of the Revolution’s mythology, but the following chapters attempt to show that Early American Studies’ descriptive tools and chronological assumptions remain deeply structured by a vision of the Revolution as a Founding event that set a nationalist epistemic limit on the field: if only in the residual assertions borne in terms like “early American,” “early republic,” or “Revolution” itself, which announce the definitive conclusion of a movement in time that generates a definite historical entity with its own hermeneutic environments.

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<sup>11</sup> Lisa Voigt, “‘Por Andarmos Todos Casy Mesturados’: The Politics of Intermingling in Caminha’s *Carta* and Colonial Anthologies,” *Early American Literature* 40.3 (2005): 412 [407-439].

The epochal identification of the Revolution with U.S. national birth can make the Revolution itself appear as pure rupture, unavailable for scrutiny as a temporal and historical construction because it marks the division between worlds. The assumption that the Revolution inaugurates national time can thus obscure important continuities that travel or rearticulate across the colonial/national split—for instance, the continuity of settler-colonialism, which the American Revolution absorbs into its temporal design and governing narratives as the unrepresentable prehistory of its “birth” and succession. As I discuss in Chapter 2, however, the Revolutionary wars were deeply shaped by settler-colonial agendas and their constitutive entanglements with chattel slavery during the 1770s and for long afterwards. Native people are written into the Declaration of Independence as “merciless enemies,” and Indian country was wracked by more or less continuous warfare from the 1770s-90s. U.S. nationalist deployments of Revolutionary history fueled calls for the conquest of Native peoples and lands as early as 1781. In many ways the American Revolution never ended for Native people—least of all with the Treaty of Paris in 1783.

In addition to obscuring vectors of power that move across the colonial/national divide, then, the Revolution’s controlling temporal metaphors as a moment of birth can also allow for the evacuation of its violent content. After the Revolution, America was only a baby: an “infant” republic or “fledgling” nation. What is consolidated and compressed in such figurations is the knowledge of the Revolution as war that came and still comes at an incalculable cost to life as it overflows spatial and temporal boundaries alike. To the extent that it has been apprehended as a war, the Revolution has often been considered as a freedom struggle between “sides” (American/British, Patriot/Loyalist)

that is heavily identified with the colonial independence movement. Yet what is popularly known as the American Revolution was not one war, but many, with major theaters in the Caribbean, Canada, Indian country, and the coasts of Europe—as well as shocks and aftershocks that were felt in West Africa, Australia, and the Indian subcontinent.<sup>12</sup>

My effort in this project has been to historicize the Revolution in the time with which it is epochally identified, 1770-1820, in order to unfix its association with U.S. national beginnings and to disturb the long traditions of ideological seizure that hail it as a model for transformative political action. Focusing on the decades after its official conclusion, *Insurgent Remains* examines literary accounts of the Revolution that challenge its dominant associations with the achievement of national sovereignty and the triumph of liberal values. Lingering with the combustive 1780s-90s in particular, the following chapters read a range of texts—from Susanna Rowson’s *Charlotte Temple* (1791/94) to the petitions of self-liberated black refugees in 1790s Sierra Leone—for delineations of *ongoing* Revolutionary experience characterized by loss and constraint: grief, confusion, struggle, scarcity, or simply a lack of good or legible choices that demanded creative, collective responses without guarantee. The liminal, unfinished reckonings that interest me might be described in Michel Foucault’s terms as Revolutionary “counter-memories,” which Foucault defines as “transformation[s] of

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<sup>12</sup> I refer in the last instances to British involvement in free black settlements in Sierra Leone, an outgrowth of the crisis brought about by the large number of black veterans and refugees in Britain and its territories in the 1780s-90s, which I discuss in Chapter 4. Australia was impacted primarily because the transportation of convicts to America from Britain was cut off during the 1770s; Botany Bay was established as a penal colony in 1788. Finally, Britain’s preoccupation with its various rivals in the American Wars created an opportunity for Mysorean leader Hyder Ali to challenge East India Company authority in the Second Mysore War (1780-84).

history into a totally different form of time.”<sup>13</sup> Similarly, the “remains” of my title are meant to invoke loves and pains that are left over from, or left out by, the emergence of a dominant narrative, turning and re-turning Revolutionary historical experience into modalities of time, politics, and personhood that are not fully legible within traditional histories bound to binary narratives of conflict and progress. My term for counter-memory, “remains,” is meant to presence that which is common, unburied, and in excess of enclosure—pending works of grief, yearning, and need which I argue offer fuller and more vibrant possibilities for collective action and ethical commitment than those held out by the representative regime of U.S. national history and its governing liberal values.

By approaching Revolutionary backwards, from the vantage of its literary aftereffects—or what my title describes as its “afterlives”—I hope to highlight the anachronism of the “American Revolution” itself as a historical construction. While the association of Revolution with U.S. national origins is familiar now, “the American Revolution” is in fact a retrospective development, or back-formation. The term “revolution” was not applied to the Anglo-colonial contest on the North American continent as it was ongoing, which was described simply as the American War, or (depending on the velocities of passions involved) the American Rebellion. As I discuss in Chapter 1, the American War was widely understood in its time to be a revolt, rebellion, or a parricidal outburst of children against their parents; in a letter to the Oneida from 1775, for instance, Samson Occom expresses relief that his “Beloved Brethren” had kept their promise “not [to] meddle with the Family Contentions of the

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<sup>13</sup> Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” *The Foucault Reader*, Ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 93.

English.”<sup>14</sup> The earliest appellation of the American War as a “revolution” that I am aware of appears in John Adams’s *Twenty-Six Letters Upon Interesting Subjects Respecting the Revolution in America*, which was written in 1780, the last year of official conflict between the British and Continental armies, and published in 1786. Major historical treatments followed in the next decade: David Ramsay’s *History of the American Revolution* (1789) and Mercy Otis Warren’s *History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution* (1805). Taken together, these three titles imply the development of a consolidating narrative. Adams’s *Letters* promises an informal, anecdotal account; Ramsay writes a more official “history”; and Warren advertises a history complete with linear plot points: rise, progress, termination. Indeed, Warren’s title appears to be a riposte to Gibbon’s *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776); where Gibbon traces a historical trajectory that moves downward through decline and fall to ruin, Warren asserts that Revolution rises and advances until it reaches its “termination,” which reads here not as a death so much as a mission accomplished.

The “American Revolution” therefore happened, or began happening, at some point after 1780. Indeed, defined as a break with the past that establishes a new order, “revolution” is a necessarily anachronistic construction, as it is impossible to claim that one has fought this kind of revolution unless one wins. “Revolution” as it has come to mean in the American sense is thus the rebellion claimed as a victory by the rebels after the fact: a peculiar form of historical knowledge that depends for its meaning on its outcome, and which works in a U.S. nationalist register to legitimate the violent crimes of

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<sup>14</sup> Samson Occom to the Oneida Tribe[1775], *The Collected Writings of Samson Occom, Mohegan: Leadership and Literature in Eighteenth-Century Native America*, Ed. Joanna Brooks (Oxford: OUP, 2006), 111.

usurpation whose memories are minimally preserved in the OED definition—“forcible substitution [...] in early use also: rebellion.” To some extent, of course, the belatedness of historical meaning-making is endemic to history itself. Michel de Certeau writes that “history” names the ambiguous relationship between events and the narration of events: “[. . .] ‘history’ connotes both a science and that which it studies—the explication which is *stated*, and the reality of *what has taken place* or what takes place.”<sup>15</sup> Heeding De Certeau’s qualification, what strikes me as distinctive about the case of the American Revolution may only be the extraordinary extent to which it wields power as a reality effect: the *degree* to which its belated narrativization as a development that inaugurates U.S. national time has come to bear the indefeasible organizing influence of an historical fact. The historiographic framework for the American Revolution—from its progressive design to its terms and taxonomies for what constitutes politics and subjectivity—demands the Revolution’s apprehension as a singular birth and not as a set of multifarious scrambles for historical meaning that arguably continue to this day, and which certainly roiled for decades after the Treaty of Paris was signed in 1783.

This project hopes to show that the fixing of Revolution to liberal narratives of U.S. national birth was for many decades an unfixed business, ragged all about the edges—even for some of the so-called Founders. John Adams’s writings provide especially rich examples, as Adams became in his later life veritably obsessed by the Revolution’s elusiveness as an object of historical inquiry. In an 1813 letter to Thomas McKean, he frets that the history of the Revolution will be lost due to the neglect of a public both disinterested in, and disgusted by, historical retrospection: “Can you account

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<sup>15</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia UP, 1988), 21.

for the apathy, the antipathy of this nation to their own history? Is there not a repugnance to the thought of looking back?”<sup>16</sup> Yet in his earlier *Letters Upon Interesting Subjects Respecting the Revolution in America* (1780/86), Adams had suggested that the problems of writing Revolutionary history were not ones of popular indifference but rather of epistemological indeterminacy. He writes:

To give a stranger an adequate idea of the rise and progress  
of the dispute between Great Britain and America would  
require much time and many volumes; it comprises the  
history of England and the United States of America for  
twenty years; that of France and Spain for five or six; and  
that of all the maritime powers of Europe for two or three.<sup>17</sup>

Adams imagines the writing of American Revolutionary history as a logistical nightmare of massive and unruly extension. However, the difficulties of producing a history of such encyclopedic proportions are not only—or not simply—practical, as Adams seems unable to decide in this passage where or when the Revolution occurred. In the same letter, he claims that the Revolution was already twenty years old by 1775, but the same cannot also be said of the “United States of America,” which may or may not have come into provisional legal being by fiat in 1776, by peace treaty in 1783, or by constitutional convention in 1787. Adams’s “adequate idea” of a decades-long Revolutionary history prior to 1775 thus veers towards the recognition that “the United States of America” is

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<sup>16</sup> To Thomas McKean, 31 August 1813. *The Political Writings of John Adams*. Ed. George W. Carey (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 2000), 682.

<sup>17</sup> *Twenty-Six Letters Upon Interesting Subjects Respecting the Revolution in America. Written in Holland in the Year MDCCCLXXX. By His Excellency John Adams, while he was Sole Minister Plenipotentiary from the United States of America, for Negotiating a Peace, and a Treaty of Commerce, with Great Britain [1786]* (New York: John Fenno, 1789), 5.

*not* the magisterial subject of what is supposed to be “its own” Revolutionary past. At best, the “history of the United States of America” appears as only one constituent of a composite historical subject whose temporal and territorial boundaries are uncertain. It is not even clear that the U.S. exists as a discrete historical entity in Adams’s formulation (as one among many), since he syntactically conjoins “the United States of America” with England in such a way that they appear to share only one history between them. And this already vexed sharing is shared in turn by a throng of international players, some of which are named (Spain, France) and some not. What does Adams mean by “all the maritime powers of Europe?” On what grounds does he envision those powers to have been involved in the Revolution, given that only one he does not name—the Dutch Republic—officially entered the list of combatants?

If Adams is vague about the number and nature of the subjects populating Revolutionary history, he seems likewise unable to fix that history’s precise chronological coordinates, which may include the histories of France and Spain for five or six years, and all of maritime Europe for two or three. Compounding these confusions is the question of how Adams calculates the duration of the Revolution. Back-dating twenty years from 1775 puts us in 1755, the second year of the French and Indian War. The year 1755 is an odd kind of origin, as it marks neither the officially recognized start nor end of a bloody imperial conflict; likewise, Adams’s chronology moves backwards from Lexington and Concord (1775) rather than from the Declaration of Independence (1776), more commonly commemorated as a point of national origin today. The Revolutionary history Adams adumbrates in the twenty-year span from 1755 to 1775 thus proceeds not from a recognizable “beginning” of things to their ostensible conclusion, but

from one scene of wounding to another, from a war *in medias res* to a battle of first blood. Revolutionary history seems to operate for Adams—very much against his apparent wishes—in the mode of what Foucault describes as “effective history”: “it will not permit itself to be transported by a voiceless obstinacy toward a millennial ending. It will uproot its traditional foundations and relentlessly disrupt its pretended continuity.”<sup>18</sup>

Though he generates several different explanations for the intractable epistemological problems of Revolutionary history over the course of his life, Adams is consistent on two points: first, that Revolutionary time defies incorporation into linear developmental chronologies; and second, that it evades or stalls textual apprehension. In 1780, the Revolution spills out of open wounds across decades and continents, and in 1816 it takes place “before the war commenced” in “the minds and hearts of the people”: a phrase which has since become a calling-card for U.S. interventionist imperialism.<sup>19</sup> In 1813 it seems to have escaped altogether because the people do not care enough for “looking back,” whereas in a letter to William Tudor dated June 5, 1817, Adams laments that “the history of the American Revolution can never be written” because of Samuel Adams’s scissors. Writes Adams:

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<sup>18</sup> Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” *The Foucault Reader*, Ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 88.

<sup>19</sup> “Hearts and Minds” was used during the Johnson administration to refer to the U.S.’s anticommunist attempts to win—or, rather, to coerce—South Vietnamese support for the U.S.’s defeat of the Viet Cong during the Vietnam War, particularly between 1965-68. It also reared its head more recently, in the U.S.’s ongoing (though undeclared) wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. For instance, chairman Christopher Shays invoked the phrase “hearts and minds” in the announcement and memoranda for Congressional hearings of the Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats, and International Relations on 15 June 2004. These examples suggest that “hearts and minds” has become an unwelcome staple of the U.S. government’s attempts to extort popular consent for its unilateral invasion and occupation of foreign territories. John Adams to Hezekiah Niles 13 February 1813, *The Political Writings of John Adams*. Ed. George W. Carey (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 2000), 701.

But, if I had time, eyes, and fingers at my command, where should I find documents and memorials? [ . . . ] For fifty years, his [Sam Adams's] pen, his tongue, his activity, were constantly exerted for his country without fee or reward.

During that time, he was an almost incessant writer. But where are his writings? Who can collect them? And, if collected, who will ever read them? The letters he wrote and received, where are they? I have seen him, at Mrs. Yard's in Philadelphia [ . . . ] cut up with his scissors whole bundles of letters into atoms that could never be reunited, and throw them out of the window, to be scattered by the winds. [ . . . ] in winter, he threw whole handfuls into the fire.<sup>20</sup>

Sam Adams's lost letters become the object of John Adams's thwarted desire for a Revolutionary archive; where he might have had “whole” bundles of history, he instead finds himself heir to atoms and ashes. Revolutionary history is “scattered to the winds,” sent up as smoke through Mrs. Yard’s chimney flue; it is not the property of the nation-state; it will not be fixed to the page. If Revolution promises historical knowledge for Adams, then the knowledge it evinces is “not made for understanding; it is made for cutting.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> John Adams to William Tudor 5 June 1817, *The Political Writings of John Adams*. Ed. George W. Carey (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 2000), 697.

<sup>21</sup> Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” *The Foucault Reader*, Ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 88.

Adams's frustrated conviction that Revolution eludes the historiographic operation suggests that it not only exceeds the grasp of the nation-state but defies conclusive narrativization altogether. The evanescence of the Revolution as Adams describes it is not simply liberatory, of course. Subsequent U.S. deployments of the phrase "hearts and minds" in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan highlight the dangers of the Revolution's mystification as a global or emotional event, which can and has been leveraged to support hegemonic U.S. professions to undisputed leadership of the free world. Yet Adams's stymied efforts to housetrain Revolutionary history suggests that the constitutive anachronism of the "American Revolution" may also furnish conditions of possibility for refusing oppressive, proprietary identifications of Revolutionary time with nation-formation—and more specifically, for contesting the liberal scripts subtending such identifications which associate freedom with abstract representation, profit, and progress. Adams's writings reveal that the linear freedom narrative of Revolutionary history had not congealed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and hence that what constituted revolutionary historicity was very much up for debate. Moreover, Adams's remarks usefully suggest that Revolutionary and national time are not coterminous, which means that it is possible to ask questions about Revolutionary history that shear away from U.S. nationalist forms of symbolic enclosure. This is an insight I attempt to develop across my chapters. While the American Revolution is conventionally understood to end with the conclusion of hostilities between European powers and the seceding colonies at the 1783 Treaty of Paris, I show that for decades after this point the Revolution remained unresolved: an urgent problem engaged in the present that was limned in experiences of grief, vulnerability, and scarcity carried on from (and in some cases still being fought in)

wars whose outcomes had yet to be decided.

Collectively, my chapters argue that Revolutionary counter-memories survive in form where they may resist linear narration as well as abstract representational or self-authorizing language. Each chapter considers what I call an “old-fashioned” form or format—allegory, anthology, tragedy, and petition—which hosts engagements with Revolution on non-linear and non-triumphalist terms. Chapter 1, for instance, reads Susanna Rowson’s *Charlotte Temple* (1791/94) as an allegory that recalls discourses of the 1770s-80s in which the colonies’ rebellion figures as an outbreak of parricidal madness that destroys its sufferers. Departing from scholarly discussions of *Charlotte Temple* that have long identified it with the social and political contexts of the early U.S. republic, I suggest that Rowson’s return to parricidal allegory unfixes Revolutionary history from the time of the nation-state by summoning it to mind as a horrific revolt of the body against itself that can only end in death. Yet differently from arguments that have read expressions of anxiety in the early republic as gothic symptoms of the incomplete promises of the Founding, I argue that Rowson’s counter-national epistemology of Revolutionary history dwells in *unincorporated* loss that lead perilously out into ever-widening circles of revision and remorse. Rowson thus uses allegory to transform the remains of Revolutionary grief and remorse into another form of time, counseling the reader to slow the rapid temporal accelerations of Revolutionary modernity that bring about such calamities through the homeopathic adoption of allegorical reading practices, whose deliberative turns and re-turns withstand liberalism’s acquisitive injunctions to extort meanings from substances.

In this first chapter and those that follow, I have chosen to focus on the reuse or

recycling of “old-fashioned” forms and formats in order to move away from emphases on literary innovation and newness which, in the eighteenth century, have often led to the enshrinement of the novel, the autobiography, and the manifesto as Revolutionary genres par excellence. In addition to being outmoded or untimely, each of the recycled forms I examine in my chapters are also non-narrative in their purest expressions, though in many cases I am interested in partial or “impure” adaptations of these forms as they travel across other modes of literary and visual exposition. Thus in Chapter 1, I track allegories of parricide through political cartoons and pamphlets as well as in Rowson’s seduction tale; and in Chapter 3, I argue that the tragedy of Major John André transpires in fragments of epistolary and reported speech as well as in William Dunlap’s fully elaborated tragic drama on André’s death.

I have gravitated toward old, non-narrative forms in every case because they seem to me to constitute their own kind of “remains”—left over from the past, they have called to me because they stubbornly resist conventional protocols for literary historicization. Allegory, anthology, tragedy, and petition all seem to produce material environments for reading and writing in which the nature of historicity seems to be precisely what is at stake *in* reading and writing. In other words, all of these forms seem in their own ways to operate as temporalizing mediums that push back against the imposition of context as a decoding external container for texts. What happens as a result is that the revolutionary experiences of time engaged by these forms can take on the qualities of the forms in which they appear. By this I mean that “revolution” tends not to operate in the materials I investigate in extrinsically given or preconceived terms; neither closely synonymous with restoration nor heroically advancing into futurity, revolutionary time emerges in

each case, instead, as a quality whose contours are openly negotiated as modalities of form itself. In Chapter 1, allegory's interest in the absorption of matter by force allows for ruminations on Revolution in which bodies are overtaken by fatal desires, but revolution is also refigured through allegorical reading as a way back to the common calamities of Fortune that take all in their cyclical sweep. In Chapter 2's discussion of the captivity anthologies, I suggest that anthology's characteristic gathering of decontextualized examples supports evocations of U.S. military defeat by Native insurgents as a temporal experience of serial repetition that goes nowhere. In Chapter 3, I argue that tragedy's technologies for scrutinizing the false dilemmas of binary work in the case of John André to stall dialectic epistemologies of Revolution in contradiction. My last chapter on the writings of the self-liberated black refugees who traveled to Sierra Leone in the 1790s argues that the refugees' use of petitionary rhetorics of appeal may radically recast revolution as an *everyday*, creative and collective struggle to redress ordinary needs and desires. The alternative temporalities embedded in form, I argue, can thus open up new ways of thinking about Revolutionary periodization as well as the politics of revolution itself.

Perhaps because they are all pre- or early modern in their lineage, none of the forms around which I have organized this project are particularly hospitable to possessive individualism; indeed, they tend to elaborate—or at least to allow for—visions of time in which life is subject to forces beyond its control. Allegory's deep Medieval traditions remind us of our mortality, while tragedy stages encounters with fate in which the wellsprings of history seem to arise beyond the reach of individuals, in socio-political accidents. Anthology—from *anthos* (flower) and *logia* (collection)—is an early modern

form which originally denotes the gathering of a “posy” of verse; botanical in its leanings, it tends to snip its specimens down to size from subjects to illustrations. Finally, petition is an ancient tactic of last resort, the recourse of the oppressed for whom the law provides no shelter. Unlike the classical precedents of Greco-Roman antiquity on which U.S. republican imagery often drew in the 1780s-90s (one thinks, for instance, of Columbia’s promotion as the goddess of the nation), I suggest that these “old” forms are all situated in genealogies of dispossession and temporal reordering that can be difficult to harness for the purposes of legitimating authority. Three of these forms—allegory, tragedy, and petition—could also be described as very old technologies for protesting differential arrangements of power, critiquing commodified logics, and managing mundane suffering. Where Amy Kaplan has shown that U.S. American comparisons to the Roman Republic negotiate desires for historical transcendence in tandem with fears of inevitable decline, the “old” forms that interest me tend to ruminate on the more ambiguous sorrows of non-transcendent historical being, eschewing visions of rise and fall in order to keep watch with the embarrassing chances and necessities of sublunary existence.<sup>22</sup> While they can, of course, be taken up otherwise—and while I do not interpret their political import to be either reducible to pain or guaranteed to provide radical outcomes—I have been drawn to the activations of these forms in each instance because they seem so often to probe the possibility that history might not be a domain of mastery or a source of consolation, but the force through which our knowledge of ourselves as autonomous beings is undone. I find in all of my chapters that such undoings are more than losses; indeed, the

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<sup>22</sup> Amy Kaplan, “Imperial Melancholy in America,” *Raritan* 28.3 (2009): 13-31. For another influential discussion of the adoption of classical precedent in the U.S. following the Constitutional debates, see Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “Dis-Covering the Subject of the ‘Great Constitutional Discussion,’ 1786-1789,” *Journal of American History* 79.3 (1992): 841-73.

dethronement of the proprietary, rights-bearing liberal subject provides opportunities in the texts I explore for perishable life to rejoin with itself in loving, compassionate relation through endurance, and in common struggle.

Just as my chapters track alternative figurations of revolutionary temporality, then, they also suggest that revolutionary personhood and politics may be productively considered as being relationally (dis)organized through literary form rather than through the preconceived categories of identity we sometimes bring to this period as scholars. Indeed, I argue in my chapters for the creative activation of formal use and re-use as well as the liminal affects to which use gives rise as sites of insurgent political possibility in their own right. By this I mean that the temporal and affective itineraries along which untimely forms travel provide resources and descriptive vocabularies for collective association and identification that are not reducible to abstract allegiance or essentializing identitarian constructs. I understand “politics” quite simply to mean forms of associated life, though the dead have place in them as well. Borrowing from Hortense Spillers’s theorization of the flesh, “politics” might more broadly name “text[s] for living and for dying, and a method for reading both in and through their diverse mediations.”<sup>23</sup>

As I moved through this project, I found that the writings to which I had been drawn might be described not simply as counter-nationalist, but more broadly as *counter-modern*, in their outlook. These writings often register the hallmarks of liberal modernity for which the American Revolution is often celebrated—progressive time, proprietary subjectivity, and representative politics—as damaging machines that destroy lives and fellowships with their prescriptions of mastery. But all of the forms that interest me also

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<sup>23</sup> Hortense J. Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” *Diacritics* 17.2 (1987): 68 [64-81].

support re-sensitizing counter-praxes for liberal modernity by sustaining complex modes of relation which take shape in the dark: beyond reason, beyond conclusion, beyond individuality, beyond the promises of legal or symbolic repair, and quite often near or beyond the limits of language. I insist, however, that these “beyonds” are not transcendent mystifications but concrete possibilities for politics without identity, or what I call the politics beyond Politics, which draw on materially situated formal practices and descriptive terminologies for their elaboration. I have therefore attempted to think throughout my chapters about modes of collective association that might be described as allegorical, anthological, tragic, or petitionary—or, in related temporal and affective registers: mortifying, serially repetitive, fateful, and exigent.

My characterization of the politics encoded in the forms I study as “insurgent” (*in* – into toward, *surgere-* rise) is intended to evoke revolutionary transformation as a startling, brief, or incomplete uprising. “Insurgent” is a word often used for enemies of the state, and unlike U.S. nationalist appropriations of “revolution” which work to legitimate the state through the call to order, insurgencies suggest rebellious trajectories that offer intense disturbances to existing orders—as well as intense, unforeseen possibilities for social life—that are not necessarily oriented aspirationally toward the recognition of official power. By thinking about politics as modes of associated life that can take shape provisionally through formal practices, I hope to suggest that we might wrest our notions of revolutionary politics away from ends-based criteria that marks as “failed” any revolutionary political endeavor that does not terminate in the establishment of a new representative regime. The “beyonds” of politics that interest me are not utopian or liberatory. Indeed, they are in many ways captive, constrained, open to

wounding. But guided by black feminist thinkers, and particularly by the work of Hortense Spillers, I hope to suggest that these “beyonds” might also be common spaces for proximal dwelling in the maw of timely, material pressures.<sup>24</sup> The formal literary practices I investigate here may thus provide “texts for living and for dying, as well as methods for reading in and through their diverse mediations.”

My investments in tracing the politics beyond Politics arises from my frustrations with descriptive paradigms for Revolutionary politics that tend to associate the Political with taxonomies of allegiance to cause or nation. Such paradigms have traditionally reduced to some kind of binary formula of “sides”: American/British, for instance, or Loyalist/Patriot. In the first place, the issue with such formulas is that they are threaded with the *telos* that binds Revolution to the emergence of the United States. That is because in both instances, these taxonomies boil down the struggles and contestations of myriad contests to a single issue of which U.S. America is the subject: independence. Were you with us or against us? One of the most obvious problems here is that any accounting of Revolutionary politics premised teleologically on a U.S. national outcome reproduces the anachronism of the “American Revolution” itself, bulldozing the ambiguities of Revolution’s unburied histories of unlawful violence to reach the bilateral clarity imposed by national retrospection. While I do not deny that people in the

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<sup>24</sup> Black feminist work from which I have drawn inspiration includes Angela Davis, *Women, Race & Class* (New York: Vintage, 1981) and *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2007); Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) and *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2007); Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Vintage, 1993); Hortense J. Spillers, *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Sylvia Wynter, *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, Ed. Katherine McKittrick (Durham: Duke UP, 2015).

Revolutionary period felt and acted on abstract forms of allegiance, I have found that they rarely seem to have worked out as neatly as these rubrics imply.

The most pressing issue for me, however, is that conscientious alignment to an official cause is an absurdly narrow measure for what constitutes politics: one that is premised both on a volitional subject with clear choices before him, as well as on the constitutive exclusion of social life from political consideration. As I discuss at greater length in Chapter 3, the orthodoxy that the Revolutionary wars split the colonial population into thirds—Patriot, Loyalist, and “neutral”—suggests even in its language that not to choose a recognizable “side” is to disclaim discernible politics altogether, to do nothing or become uncommitted: neutralized. This envisions “the political,” in liberal terms, as a specialized domain of activity that imposes as a condition of its realization the exercise of rational agency that is not permitted to be passive, ambiguous, tactical, or intermittent. The most serious problems with this assumption are clarified in the cases of extreme constraint engendered by the Revolutionary wars for deeply oppressed constituencies, especially Native people and enslaved people of African descent.

Indeed, the language of partisanship obscures the challenges faced and met by Native people and the enslaved, whose Revolutionary partisan “options” were not necessarily indicative of their priorities. Just as importantly, binary partisanship can crop out of view the creative negotiations of risk undertaken by Native and enslaved persons who pursued their own freedoms across the Revolutionary period. In Chapter 2, I discuss how understandings of the Revolution as a conflict between Britain and America that ended in 1783 erases Native peoples’ ongoing struggles against U.S. settler-colonial encroachment on their lives and lands into the 1780s-90s, focusing on the spectacular

successes of the Western Confederacy against the United States in the early 1790s. I also take up the erasures entailed in binary political taxonomies in Chapter 4, which examines the petitions written by self-liberated refugees from slavery in Sierra Leone during the 1790s. The men and women whose writings I discuss in that chapter have been recuperated as “Black Loyalists,” but I argue that the ascription of imperial allegiance to this constituency shoehorns their radical freedom practices into a patronizing historical narrative in which black actors appear as the beneficiaries of freedom bestowed on them as the gift of British imperial magnanimity. I suggest instead that the refugees’ adaptations of petitionary conventions theorize freedom more radically as a materially engrossed, fugitive, and improvised performance that exceeds the divisions of partisanship as well as those that separate social from political and economic matters. For the refugees, freedom has as much to do with domestic necessities such as soap, rum, food, and paper as it does with suffrage, property, and labor. Like many of the other figures I discuss in this project, the Sierra Leonean refugees’ writings thus sustain complex forms of relation in contact with pain and discomfort that can’t be avoided, but which also produce space and time for collective solidarities in—and with—what Walter Benjamin calls “the world of earthly things.”<sup>25</sup>

I have turned to form as an organizing concern in this project out of a concern that the pre-existing liberal taxonomies for Revolutionary politics efface urgent challenges confronted by colonized and enslaved people during the period and for long afterwards. But by asking how form can register and enact revolutionary experiences of rupture that may productively elude preconceived identitarian and political taxonomies, I have hoped

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<sup>25</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Origin of German Tragic Drama* [1928] (London: Verso, 1963), 232.

to parry problematic re-inscriptions of Revolutionary history’s supposed margins and centers in order to reveal that binary political taxonomies and linear narratives are *broadly* inadequate for describing Revolutionary history as it was experienced in its opening phases of contestation. My chapters trace formal itineraries that traverse artificial distinctions between canonical and non-canonical materials, between literary and non-literary texts, and between supposedly central and peripheral concerns, thus gathering in the non-identical kinships established by formal practices what identitarian, state, and partisan classifications channel into separate interests. Hence while Chapters 2 discusses “frontier” materials that have been almost entirely neglected by literary scholars and Chapter 4 reads petitions that have been interpreted exclusively as historical evidence, Chapters 1 and 3 examine texts that have received a great deal of attention in literary studies. In fact, they are widely perceived to be paradigmatic examples of early U.S. republican cultural production. Rowson’s *Charlotte Temple* is commonly identified as an exemplar of the early American novel, while William Dunlap—author of *André* (1798), which I discuss in Chapter 3—is hailed as the father of the early American theatre. However, I argue that Rowson’s and Dunlap’s texts have been read through U.S. nationalist cultural lenses and binary political partisanship that they can be seen otherwise to eschew, complicate, and undermine with their meditations on the irreparable griefs engendered by Revolutionary history.

My chapters thus furnish an account of Revolutionary history in which sorrow, constraint, provisionality, and non-linear struggle are pervasive. The reason I believe this is important is that it refuses liberal political logics which routinely fail to construe their own symbolic frameworks as sources of violence that produce historical alienation,

suffering, and complaint. Within liberal politics, subjectivity is normatively considered to be painless, and agony is therefore considered first, to be an absolute condition (not permitted to be complex, partial, intermittent); and second, to be a perverse or “minority” problem for which symbolic recognition is the cure.<sup>26</sup> Such assumptions continue to structure Revolutionary historiography, which often segments along identitarian or partisan fault lines.

Indeed, some of the richest scholarship that covers the Revolutionary wars—and certainly some of the work that I have most often turned to for research—has been produced by scholars of Native and Afro-American history such as Herbert Aptheker, Jodi A. Byrd, Ned Blackhawk, Colin G. Calloway, Sylvia Frey, Gary B. Nash, Marcus Rediker, Daniel K. Richter, and Benjamin Quarles.<sup>27</sup> Yet the key insights of this scholarship can sometimes appear to be relegated to the sidelines of Revolutionary

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<sup>26</sup> I am drawing here on Lauren Berlant’s extensive work on liberal cultures of U.S. sentimentality, which connects the arrangement I have just described to white supremacy and classism. “Sentimentality has long been the means by which mass subaltern pain is advanced, in the dominant public sphere, as the true core of national collectivity. It operates when the pain of intimate others burns into the conscience of classically privileged national subjects, such that they feel the pain of flawed or denied citizenship as their pain. Theoretically, to eradicate pain those with power will do whatever is necessary to return the nation once more to its legitimately utopian odor. Identification with pain, a universal true feeling, then leads to structural social change. In return, subalterns scarred by the pain of failed democracy will reauthorize universalist notions of citizenship the national utopia, which involves believing in a redemptive notion of law as the guardian of public good. The object of the nation and the law in this light is to eradicate systemic social pain, the absence of which becomes the definition of freedom.” “The Subject of True Feeling: Pain, Privacy, and Politics,” *Cultural Pluralism, Identity Politics, and the Law*, Eds. Austin Sarat and Thomas R. Kearns (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 53 [49-84].

<sup>27</sup> Herbert Aptheker, *The American Revolution: 1763-1783* (New York: International Publishing, 1960) and *American Negro Slave Revolts: 1526-1860* (New York: Columbia UP, 1943); Ned Blackhawk, *Violence over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2006); Jodi A. Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); Colin G. Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country: Crisis and Diversity in Native American Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995); Sylvia R. Frey, *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991); Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000); Gary B. Nash, *The Forgotten Fifth: African Americans in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2006); Daniel K. Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2001); Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution* [1961] (Chapel Hill: Omohundro/UNCUP, 1996).

historiography. In *The Oxford Handbook of the American Revolution* (2013) which synthesizes many of the newest developments in American Revolutionary historiography, Native and Afro-American histories are given only one chapter each: “Native Peoples in the Revolutionary War” (Jane T. Merritt) and “The African Americans’ Revolution” (Gary B. Nash). These appear in the same section with other single-chapter treatments of minoritized groups: for instance, “Women in the American Revolutionary War” (Sarah M. S. Pearsall) and “Loyalism” (Edward Larkin).<sup>28</sup> While I admire the work of these individual contributors, I am troubled that their contributions are bracketed within a major historical overview in a manner which suggests that racialized, female, and failed partisan subjects (Loyalists) can be circumscribed and sequestered at a distance from an unmarked, majoritarian frame of political reference that is implicitly white, male, and Patriot in its outlook. What is silently asserted here is that the history of the American Revolution continues to find its base of operations in the camp of the supposed victor—a victor who is suggested by virtue of his unmarked status to have been unimplicated in the various grievances of this gaggle of “losers.”

As I tracked the movements of allegory, anthology, tragedy, and petition across this project, a very different picture from this one emerged. Every one of my chapters shows that questions of race, gender, and sexuality were absolutely central to the construction and deconstruction of Revolutionary historical meaning, both before and after the “peace,” inside and outside the thirteen seceding colonies, within and beyond what has since become canon, and along the serrated edge of nationalist ideology as well

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<sup>28</sup> *The Oxford Handbook of the American Revolution*, Eds. Edward G. Gray and Jane Kamensky (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013). The name of the section in which these chapters appear is “War,” but in the Conference on the American Revolution hosted by the Scherer Center (Chicago: February 10-12, 2011) at which the manuscript was workshopped, it was called “We, the Other Americans.”

as in counter-modern refigurations of revolutionary time. While I in no way mean to suggest that the experiences of Revolutionary historical contingency I trace in my chapters are flatly comparable to one another, my research does affirm that Revolution was widely apprehended as a calamitous onslaught of modernity that shredded the hearts even of white, male, colonial subjects who are supposed to have been its beneficiaries. The clearest example of this is in Chapter 3, where I examine the posthumous legacies of Major John André, hanged as a spy at George Washington's command in 1780. In that chapter, I ponder the anguished responses to André's death among Patriot-aligned men, whose partisan affiliation with the independence movement would, according to conventional logics, have disbarred André from compassion as an enemy combatant. However, I argue that André's execution was experienced even within the Continental camp as an unendurable, recognizably liberal demand to sacrifice social entanglements to abstract Political responsibilities. The pain of U.S. liberal nationalism's symbolic law was not at its emergence, and is not today, a "minority" problem; it concerns everybody and wounds us all precisely because it tells us that wounding is the property of the Other and a symptom of failure.

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My interests in liminal, excessive, partial, and non-representational literary forms have led me throughout this project to decline both resistant reading and recovery effort as primary methodological concerns, though I engage in both at different times and make no programmatic proscription against either. The reason I decline resistant reading on this occasion is that I have tried to show across my chapters that it is not necessary for the texts I examine. Indeed, the core claim of *Insurgent Remains* is that reactivations of old,

non-narrative forms across the period 1770-1820 seem to provide means of expression for revolutionary experiences that cannot be fully cognized in symbolic or narrative terms. I thus contend that the forms I examine here already passively resist liberal nationalist teleologies of Revolutionary history—my task has simply been to show how U.S. interpretive paradigms may have obscured this from our view. I have tended to decline resistant reading as well due to my engagements with queer and feminist methodologies and theories of time, particularly those of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, whose theory of “reparative reading” has inflected my approach. Indeed, I became interested in how the forms I examine seem not just to furnish alternative visions of revolutionary historical experience, but also to provide manuals for dealing with the emergencies those visions produce.<sup>29</sup> Perhaps another way of saying this is that old, non-narrative literary forms can teach or demand reading practices that withdraw from abstract economies of symbolic value in order to engage procedurally with materially-situated ways of knowing. Anthology, a serial form, wants you to repeat yourself. Tragedy, whose pharmakon is duality, counsels patience through contradiction. Petition, which is a performative technology for pleading, should be heard as well seen. Allegory is about the absorption of matter by force; as a result, it asks the reader slow down and sink into substance. I have tried, then, not to resist but to give myself over methodologically to my

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<sup>29</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think this Essay is About You,” *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke UP, 2003), 123-51. See also Sharon Marcus and Stephen Best, “Surface Reading: An Introduction,” Special Issue: “The Way We Read Now,” *Representations* 108:1 (2009): 1-21. Studies in queer time that have influenced me include Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham: Duke UP, 1999); Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke UP, 2004); Carla Freccero, *Queer/Early/Modern* (Durham: Duke UP, 2006); Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham: Duke UP, 2010); Judith “Jack” Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke UP, 2011) and *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: NYU Press, 2005); and Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2007).

objects, and to generate descriptive language out of the relation produced by this surrender that may not always line up with our present political desires but which *do* give notice (in Benjamin's words) that “the state of emergency” in which we live is not the exception, but the rule.”<sup>30</sup>

In many cases, the environments for reading that the forms I examine seem to encourage *less* critical clear-sightedness. Scopic images of dimming and darkening abound, and I have speculated in several instances that the forms I engage get activated in order to cope with or forestall the violence entailed in regimes of representation that demand harrowing visibility at the cost of fleshly life. This is one of the reasons that I have not pursued recovery as a primary methodological objective, though I share in the convictions of recovery-based scholarship that history is an ongoing political project.

Recovery work in the Revolutionary period can often be cornered into urging recognition for the disprized in an effort to reform or expand established frameworks according to a logic of inclusion—this, I suggest, may be related to the pattern I described above, in which “minoritized” identities gain access to majority representation as a function of their minoritization. My foremost preoccupations in *Insurgent Remains* are with the ways in which non-narrative forms may generate their own revolutionary temporalities, relational modes of being, and structures of non-essentializing identification that can lay the groundwork for radically inclusive collectivities precisely because they are not routed through representation. I argue for unfixing, other ways of knowing, and transformations of time. Not a gathering in, but a following out. Perhaps somewhat counter-intuitively, then, I have adapted “reparative” reading not as a methodology of recovery per se, but

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<sup>30</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, Ed. Hannah Arendt, Trans. Harry Zohn. (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 257.

rather simply, as a call to undo the responsibility of the scholar for producing political interpretations by putting a certain kind of trust in the capacity of the things we read to disrupt and reconfigure what we think we know on their own strange terms.

It is of course fair to say that I have at several points in this project had the very great joy and privilege of stumbling across friends I didn't know I was looking for. The Sierra Leonean refugees I discuss in Chapter 4 were perhaps the most surprising, as I had never heard of them. I ran into their petitions quite by accident while following the footnotes to Sylvia R. Frey's magisterial study of the war in the South, *Water from the Rock* (1991). Though they are almost or entirely unknown by literary scholars, historians have been aware of them for a long time, and Nova Scotians and Sierra Leoneans for longer. I have thus strenuously avoided using the language of recovery, discovery, or rescue around them, as they are not a secret and they did not need my help. I have argued for them with genuine passion on different terms than they have previously been read, but they are, happily, on the wing, and my argument is a provisional report of the things I heard in the thrall of their writings. In any case, I would consider myself to have failed badly if I was thought to be calling the refugees back into the unreconfigured historical ken of the American Revolution. They labored long to escape it.

All of this is perhaps simply to say that the associations of recovery with restorations to normalcy or wholeness, and "the fact or process of gaining of or a right to property, compensation, etc." (OED) sit uncomfortably with me, as do recovery's associations with things stolen, "lost or taken away" (OED), because my efforts have been precisely to undo the proprietorships that bind Revolutionary to national time—indeed, to unfix the links between liberal concepts of revolution and questions of rights,

property, and recompense more generally. But I have tried to suggest that such undoing can be approached by reading along the grain of time-traveling, up-rising remains: the partial, the liminal, the excessive, the unhallowed. If I call for something to be recalled from oblivion in this project, then it is not so much the creative, disruptive energies of objects I engage—which I insist were never hiding—but rather a greater awareness of the vanishing scripts and paradigms that have covered and re-covered them. The pairing of insurgency with remains in my title forms a curious image that may thus be considered as a kind of reconfiguration of recovery as a return, or re-turn. Remains are left over, lying about, seemingly inert; insurgents are jumping with energy, on a rampage, rising up in flashes. Together, “insurgent remains” suggest the uprising of what is left over or unburied, and it might be taken to evoke the rebellious trajectories of what is already lying within our field of vision but perhaps not always considered as manifesting its own politics. Or perhaps: insurgent remains are the leftovers that disturb conventional knowledge by returning from where they always were to unfix things for representation.

I have sequenced the chapters that follow in two parts as I follow insurgent remains out of the temporal and political frameworks that have come to structure Revolutionary history. The first part comprising Chapters 1 and 2 examines cases that unravel the association of the Revolution with the independence movement and the assumption that Revolutionary history concludes with the birth of the U.S. nation in the early 1780s. These first two chapters stay fairly close to U.S. American cultural geographies in an effort to unravel them, beginning with one of the most canonical texts in Early American literature and moving on in Chapter 2 to “the frontier.” Chapter 1, “Strains of Compunction,” offers an extended reading of *Charlotte Temple* that argues for

the text's engagements with an allegorical tradition from political debates of the 1770s in which the conflict between Britain and its refractory colonies figures as a fatal separation of mother and daughter. Rowson's return to this tradition in the early 1790s calls up the history of Revolution as an unnatural cleavage of a single body from itself rather than a conflict between opposing, autonomous forces. Her novelization of this allegory thus antagonizes both bilateral views of the American war and the notion that it could end in success; in mother-daughter parricidal scripts, in particular, the notion that a child could survive her revolt is out of the question. Whereas *Charlotte Temple* is typically read in relation to early U.S. national cultural formations, I suggest that it may be interpreted instead as a feminist reckoning with the impossible Revolutionary conditions that bring about the daughter's ruin. It creatively redeploys allegory to links questions about British imperial governance to questions about British patriarchal arrangements not to resolve them, but to compel ever-widening circles of unfinished reflection.

Chapter 2, "Time/Lines," turns from Atlantic crossings to the borderlands and Indian country. This chapter shows how 1780s-90s U.S. captivity anthologies attempt to reconfigure "the frontier" as an advancing temporal boundary of U.S. Revolutionary history, weaponizing Revolutionary memory to justify the seizure of Native lands. However, I show that the anthology form resists this function, often preserving disturbing memories of the bitter violence between British, colonial, and Native constituencies that wracked the borderlands during the official phase of the American War. Taking Arthur St. Clair's 1791 defeat by the Western Confederacy as a flashpoint, I read popular elegies and broadsides alongside two texts which recall the St. Clair campaign in different ways as a scene of repetitive capture and inertia: *The Remarkable Adventures of Jackson*

*Johonnet* (1793), a captivity narrative; and *The Hapless Orphan* (1793), a gothic novel. I read these texts as absorbing the repetitive structure of anthology to evoke Revolutionary time as a serial, open-ended encounter with violence that breaks off linear developmental narratives of self and nation.

The second part of this project, comprising Chapters 3 and 4, pivots to consider the more neglected terms of the rule of thirds—Patriot, Loyalist, and neutral—in order to challenge their coherence. Whereas the first two chapters focus on the “Patriot” part of this equation, Chapter 3, “The Parties to Which We Belong,” delves into the designation of “neutrality,” a seemingly apolitical term that functions in conventional accountings to maintain the clarity of the Patriot/Loyalist distinction. This chapter closely examines the ghostly afterlives of Major John André, arguing that “neutrality” may actually be usefully considered through André’s case as an ambiguous zone of multiple affiliation and queer yearning, particularly between men, that is traumatically bisected by liberal nationalist demands of a choice between “sides.” I argue that André’s case activates tragedy, whose conventions appear in diverse accounts of André’s death and subsequent hauntings to provide resources for protesting his sacrifice. In my closing reading of William Dunlap’s *André* (1798), I argue that Dunlap uses tragedy to preserve rather than exorcise the dangerous energies of loving and mourning across enemy lines, and thus memorializes the Revolution as a site of uncompensated suffering, and its leaders as champions of empty, inhumane ideals.

My fourth and final chapter drifts even further from the Revolution’s familiarly mythologized partisan and geographic terrain, journeying with self-liberated black refugees from New York to Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone from the early 1780s-1800.

While historians typically describe the Sierra Leonean settlers either as dutiful subjects of the king or as agents of U.S. liberal democracy, I suggest that we look to the settlers' deployments of a revolutionary print form—the petition—for a fuller sense of their collective politics. I argue that petitionary form is transformed in the hands of the Sierra Leonean settlers, who repurpose its conventions of political address to serve the specific needs of their community on a day-to-day basis. Refusing crude dichotomies that segregate the implicitly elevated sphere of liberty from its raw materials, I argue that the settlers' petitions enact forms of political subjectivity that are not based on rational self-possession, but rather in shared experiences of need and a common susceptibility to violence that permeates everyday life.

## CHAPTER 1

### Strains of Compunction: *Charlotte Temple's* Revolutionary Allegories

Between the novel and America there are peculiar and intimate connections. A new literary form and a new society, their beginnings coincide with the beginnings of the modern era and, indeed, help to define it. We are living not only in the Age of America but also in the Age of the Novel, at a moment when the literature of a country without a first-rate verse epic or a memorable verse tragedy has become the model of half the world.

--Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960)<sup>1</sup>

#### I. Revolution and National Culture

Charlotte Temple can't get out of America. Or is it the other way around? Can we not help but read America into *Charlotte Temple*? Deracinated by Atlantic crossing and subsequently abandoned in New York, Charlotte spends most of her colonial sojourn longing to go home and proving pitifully unable to do so. For Charlotte—"doomed to linger out a wretched existence in a strange land"—Revolutionary America proves to be a nightmare and a death trap, the end writ large, but her story has consistently been associated with U.S. national beginnings.<sup>2</sup> Since its feminist recovery in the 1980s, scholars have identified Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* with the emergence of a distinctly national literary culture in post-Revolutionary America, and it is perhaps best remembered today by the caption Cathy Davidson gave it in 1986: "America's first best-selling novel."<sup>3</sup> Yet Rowson's tale stands as a troubling outlier within histories of the

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<sup>1</sup> Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press, 2008), 23.

<sup>2</sup> Susanna Rowson, *Charlotte Temple: A Tale of Truth* (1794), ed. Cathy Davidson (Oxford: OUP, 1986), 73. All quotations are from this edition.

<sup>3</sup> Cathy Davidson, Introduction, *Charlotte Temple* (Oxford: OUP, 1986), xi. For other key feminist interventions of the 1970s-80s, see Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1978); Nina Baym, "Melodramas of Beset Manhood: How Theories of American Fiction Exclude Women Authors," *American Quarterly* 33 (1981): 122-39; Jane

early American novel which have tended overwhelmingly to identify that category with texts that were, in Davidson's words, "written in America, by an author born in America, published first in America, set in America, concerned with issues that are specifically grounded in the new country [ . . . ]."<sup>4</sup>

*Charlotte Temple* arguably meets none of those criteria. First published in London as *Charlotte: A Tale of Truth* (1791), the novel became tremendously popular in the former Anglo-American colonies after its 1794 re-publication by Matthew Carey, earning a devoted following whose activities famously included mourning at Charlotte's spurious grave in New York's Trinity churchyard. *Charlotte Temple*'s popularity, then, has formed the basis of its inclusion in early American literary history. And while this might be said to embrace a model of literary history which privileges readerly identifications over preconceived authorial, generic, or national identities, even *Charlotte Temple*'s most sophisticated commentators of the last few decades have tended to elide the implications of this gesture by folding it back into US national cultural frameworks even—and sometimes especially—after they acknowledge the pitfalls of doing so.<sup>5</sup>

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Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction* (Oxford: OUP, 1986); Cathy Davidson, *Revolution and the Word* (Oxford: OUP, 1986).

<sup>4</sup> Cathy Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America* (Oxford: OUP, 1986), 85.

<sup>5</sup> Perhaps most perplexing of all is the repeated invocation by feminist scholars of a putative distinction between *the American* and *the British* novel in the post-Revolutionary period. Davidson is keenly aware that "it is both insular and ahistorical to develop a model of the 'American tradition' based solely on books written in America," yet she claims not to "examine the early American novel in comparison with British novels." *Revolution and the Word*, 10-11. More recent monographs of Julia Stern, Shirley Samuels, Elizabeth Barnes, and Elizabeth Dillon (some of which I discuss below) all demarcate the boundaries of the canon in the same way. Stern, *The Plight of Feeling: Sympathy and Dissent in the Early American Novel* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1999); Shirley Samuels, *Romances of the Republic: Women, the Family, and Violence in the Literature of the Early American Nation* (Oxford: OUP, 1996); Elizabeth Barnes, *States of Sympathy: Seduction and Democracy in the American Novel* (New York: Columbia UP, 1999); Elizabeth Dillon, *The Gender of Freedom: Fictions of Liberalism and the Literary Public Sphere* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2004).

In fact, the ground-breaking interventions which helped to revalue “early republican” texts like *Charlotte Temple* relied for their legibility on nationalist reifications of the Revolutionary war as an original moment, a *fait accompli*, that made plausible the invocation of US national culture, not (in Fiedler’s terms) as a quasi-mystical essence, but as a sociological reality. Consider, for instance, Cathy Davidson’s 1986 introduction to the Early American Women Writers edition of Rowson’s novel:

*Charlotte Temple* became America’s first best-selling novel in the earliest years of the Republic, when the fledgling nation was yet defining its own cultural and political identity, and it remained a best-seller well into the beginning of the twentieth century and America’s ascendancy as a world power. Canonized, in effect, before the American canon was invented and then excluded from it in our own time, the novel still must be deemed one of the best-loved books in American literary history.<sup>6</sup>

*Charlotte Temple* is American because it was identified as American by Americans; it was canonized before the canon was invented. The novel’s popularity seems to figure as a catachresis for a preexisting US national public.<sup>7</sup> And this proceeds, I suggest, from the

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<sup>6</sup> Cathy Davidson, Introduction, *Charlotte Temple* (Oxford: OUP, 1986), xi.

<sup>7</sup> My own doubts about critical investments in the existence of national print sphere in the early US republic concern the reliance of this formulation on teleological narratives of Revolutionary time, but they pair nicely with Trish Loughran’s recent argument that the notion of there having been a national print and reading public in U.S. America before the mid-nineteenth century overstates the sociological and territorial coherence of the early republic. Writes Loughran, “there was no ‘nationalized’ print public sphere in the years just before and just after the Revolution, but rather a proliferating variety of local and regional reading publics scattered across a vast and diverse geographical space.” Loughran, *The Republic in Print: Print Culture in the Age of U.S. Nation Building, 1770-1870* (New York: Columbia UP, 2007), xix.

assumption of the Revolution's epochal significance evinced by Davidson's opening claim. *Charlotte Temple* only counts as America's first best-selling novel if nothing counts before 1783: that is, if it can be taken for granted that something called "America" came into being after the Revolution as a kind of autonomous subject ("the fledgling nation") which then went about gathering a history to itself, spreading its metaphorical "wings" on the flight to "ascendancy." The *ab ovo* national story Davidson traces here owes more to Leslie Fiedler's thunderous exceptionalism than one might expect. *Charlotte Temple* was there when the "fledgling" republic had yet to consolidate its "own" identity, and it was there as well when the nation entered the zenith of "world power." The story is Fiedler's—linear, progressive, even triumphal—except that the history of US national origins is now drawn through the marginalized productions of the female pen. Davidson thus garners a place for women's writing in a narrative that insists upon the nation as a natural unit of literary analysis, and which inscribes the Revolution as a scene of birth that marks the division between worlds.

In *Charlotte Temple*, however, the Revolution is not over, may never be over, and shows few signs of creating anything other than wrack and ruin; for Charlotte, revolution is a seduction that concludes with death. The tendency to quarantine "American" from "British" literary history after the 1770s has helped to seal *Charlotte Temple*'s reputation as a typical seduction tale within early American literary studies, but *Charlotte Temple*'s emphasis on the terminal destiny of seduction is rather peculiar for its moment. Considered more broadly within late eighteenth-century currents in Anglophone prose fiction, Rowson's decision to revisit the seduction tale in 1791 appears untimely, if not

downright old-fashioned. Seduction tales had last been widely popular in Samuel Richardson's heyday some 50 years earlier, when *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1748) had enjoyed phenomenal success. But the fact that Rowson's heroine actually dies is also unusual for late-century novels which feature seduction plots or sub-plots.<sup>8</sup> And distinctly unlike the most famous eighteenth-century exception to this rule, Richardson's Clarissa Harlowe, Charlotte is not in any obvious way the victim of an oppressive parental regime.<sup>9</sup> In fact, Charlotte spends much of the novel fixating on the violence she believes she has committed against her adoring family through her transgression, agonizing that it constitutes a kind of physical assault on Mrs. Temple in particular. Whilst suffering from the puerperal fever that kills her, for instance, Charlotte thinks she sees Mrs. Temple's "poor bosom bleeding at every vein, her gentle, affectionate heart torn in a thousand pieces, and all for the loss of a ruined, ungrateful child."<sup>10</sup> Yet Charlotte is mistaken in her conviction that she has been cast out of her parents' memories. The Temples remain more than willing to forgive her long after she disappears to America with her seducers, Montraville and Mlle. La Rue. "Would she [Charlotte] but return," says Mrs. Temple, "

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<sup>8</sup> There are examples of English novels in the latter eighteenth century that take seduction (or its possibility) as a major concern, for instance Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766) and Frances Burney's *Evelina* (1778), but in these cases we tend to see a shift away from logics of tragic inevitability toward ones of comic resolution. For how this relates to "early American novels," see n. 12.

<sup>9</sup> Jay Fliegelman notes that Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748) was popular in America from the date of its first American printing in 1772. However, every American edition of *Clarissa* was abridged, and American reprintings of the novel from the end of the century emphasize that Clarissa is "purely a victim caught between [the] two tyrannies" of her parents' severity and Lovelace's designs." Fliegelman compellingly marshals this as evidence that a Lockean paradigm of parent-child relationships underwrote colonial fulminations in the 1770s, yet *Charlotte Temple* (published twenty years later) does not conform to this trend. By removing the mitigating factor of parental neglect present in Richardson's text, Rowson shifts the calculus of responsibility for Charlotte's seduction onto her education, Montraville, and La Rue. Rowson thus also precludes the possibility of reading Charlotte's departure from her mother's house as a revolutionary "liberation" from parental authority. *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution against Patriarchal Authority* (Cambridge: CUP, 1982), 87.

<sup>10</sup> Rowson, *Charlotte Temple*, 111.

‘with rapture would I fold her to my heart, and bury every remembrance of her faults in the dear embrace.’ ”<sup>11</sup> Moreover, unlike characters in the “early republican” novels with which *Charlotte Temple* is most often compared—William Hill Brown’s *The Power of Sympathy* (1789) and Hannah Foster’s *The Coquette* (1797)—Charlotte is not so explicitly marked either as a casualty of her parents’ indiscretions or as a flirt held up for punishment.<sup>12</sup> The formula is precise: a perfect girl with perfect parents falls into bad company and is seduced despite her resolutions. She wishes to come home, she is *welcome* to come home, and yet she dies.

Taken broadly in the context of late eighteenth-century Anglophone fiction, the structure of *Charlotte Temple*’s plot thus appears to be fairly anomalous. But I shall argue here that Rowson’s readers on either side of the Atlantic would have recognized in it the contours of an allegory from the 1770s-80s in which the rebellious American colonies figured as the seduced or suffering child of a benevolent parent. In this paradigm, children who contradict their parents—willfully or not, excusably or not—

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<sup>11</sup> Rowson, *Charlotte Temple*, 56.

<sup>12</sup> Canonical “early American” novels have a well-earned reputation for doom. *The Power of Sympathy* is an incest plot that focuses on Harrington’s planned seduction of (and eventual reformation by) Harriot, who is later revealed to be his illegitimate sister, the result of their father’s extramarital affair. *The Coquette* is much more punitive in its overt logic than either *Sympathy* or *Charlotte Temple*, as its plot turns Eliza Wharton (the titular “coquette”) reaping tragic consequences for wandering affections. I take the distributions of personal and parental responsibility for seduction in each of these novels’ familial scripts to bear political implications that are specific to, and potentially divergent in, each configuration. I do not read them here because I am specifically interested in the history of the allegory it revisits about mothers and daughters. I believe *Charlotte Temple* may be more usefully compared with novels that have not made it into the American canon, such as the anonymous *Amelia: or, the Faithless Briton* (1798) and Samuel Jackson Pratt’s *Emma Corbett; or, the Miseries of Civil War* (1780). See also William Hill Brown, *The Power of Sympathy*, and Hannah Foster, *The Coquette*, Ed. William S. Osborne (Albany: New College and University Press, 1970).

transgress the natural law and so unleash anarchic forces that eventually consume them. The possibility that a self-identical, independent body could emerge from such conditions is out of the question. Filial independence is marked as unthinkable: more accurately conceived as a horrific rending of bodies, minds, and hearts than the onset (however sinister) of a distinct historical trajectory. Rowson's seduction plot is not so much out of place as it might be out of time or medium. *Charlotte Temple* narrativizes an allegory that had circulated widely in political discourse of the American Revolutionary period some twenty years earlier. Her text thus recalls a powerful strain of compunction that can be traced to the debates of the Revolutionary era: it plunges back into anxious Revolutionary epistemologies of grief that directly contradict sanguine liberal assurances about the inevitability of colonial independence, and which continue to be eclipsed by liberal narratives of the period.

My contention that *Charlotte Temple* evokes a vision of the Revolution that is structured by familial allegory is not itself a new claim. In what has become an authoritative account of the era, Jay Fliegelman's *Prodigals and Pilgrims* (1982) argues that the Revolution was result of a decades-long shift in the colonies toward liberal ideals of filial development that presumed the eventual independence of children from their parents.<sup>13</sup> Fliegelman argues that the rise of Lockean individualism underwrote the prevailing nationalist defense of the colonies' refractoriness as the natural, desirable behavior of children who had reached their majority. However, this chapter points to a contemporaneous counter-discourse in which colonial American "children" figured as

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<sup>13</sup> Jay Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution against Patriarchal Authority* (Cambridge: CUP, 1982).

organic extensions of an affectionate mother country. Here, Britain and America appear as members of a closely-knit union whose disarticulation constitutes a violation of nature with universally catastrophic consequences. As a wide range of commentators across the Atlantic made clear, one of the most germane descriptors for an intrafamilial breach on this order is that of civil war.<sup>14</sup> Writing in 1776, for instance, one polemicist exhorted his readers not to “look tamely on and see this great empire torn to pieces and dismembered by unbridled faction at home, and unprovoked rebellion abroad.” He continues: “Humanity cries aloud for the full exertion of a force without a doubt sufficient to end the controversy, for a protracted civil war adds dreadfully to the calamity.”<sup>15</sup> Almost a decade earlier, John Dickinson mused that “when cool, dispassionate posterity shall consider the affectionate intercourse, the reciprocal benefits, and the unsuspecting confidence that have subsisted between these colonies and their parent country, [. . .] they will execrate with the bitterest curses the infamous memory of those men, whose

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<sup>14</sup> This is becoming a more widely discussed subject in early American and long eighteenth-century British scholarship. One response has been a resurgence of interest in Loyalist history, which I discuss in Chapters 3 and 4. Other recent work that engages the Revolution’s civil war discourse include Troy Bickham, *Making Headlines: The American Revolution as Seen through the British Press* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois UP, 2009); Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire, and the World, 1600-1850* (New York: Anchor Books, 2004); Stephen Conway, *The British Isles and the American War of Independence* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002); H.T. Dickinson, ed., *Britain and the American Revolution* (London: Routledge, 1998); Brendan McConville, *The King’s Three Faces: The Rise and Fall of Royal America, 1688-1776* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina P, 2006). I am especially grateful to Eve Tavor Bannet’s introduction to and editorial work on the Broadview edition of *Emma Corbett* for synthesizing some of these trends. Eve Tavor Bannet, Introduction, *Emma Corbett, or the Miseries of Civil War* (Toronto: Broadview, 2011): 9-36.

<sup>15</sup> Anonymous, *An Address to the People on the Subject of the Contest between Great Britain and America* (London, 1776). Reprinted in Samuel Jackson Pratt, *Emma Corbett, or the Miseries of Civil War*, ed. Eve Tavor Bannet (Toronto: Broadview, 2011), 259.

pestilential ambition, unnecessarily, wantonly, first opened the sources of civil discord between them [ . . . ].”<sup>16</sup>

Such invocations of civil war embarrass the ideological binaries upon which nationalist Revolutionary historiography is typically predicated. In the passages I’ve just quoted, it is true, the pamphleteer (on a tory spectrum) and Dickinson (on whiggish one) espouse different views on the conflict between Britain and the colonies.<sup>17</sup> The former demands the revolt’s suppression, whilst the latter presents a conciliatory case for the devolution of fiscal responsibility to colonial governments. The pamphleteer insists that the colonies have behaved like ungrateful children, while Dickinson suggests that the colonies’ experience of their mother’s love has been corrupted by the ambition of grasping ministers. Yet these arguments both assume that the rupture between Britain and the colonies is an unnatural disfiguration of the bond between parent and child whose

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<sup>16</sup> John Dickinson, *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania* (1767). Since *Letters* was originally published in newspapers, I cite from a 1774 London edition reprinted from the first Philadelphia run. *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania to the Inhabitants of the British Colonies*, London: J. Almon, 1774, 55-56.

<sup>17</sup> The relationship of party identification to political ideology in British Anglophone culture is almost impossible to map consistently in this period, and indeed across long eighteenth-century. I owe an unpayable debt to Toni Bowers for helping me to think through the various befuddlements of this question, and I use her account of this difficulty around “toryism” in an earlier moment to guide my own approach: “Nor do I mean to equate ‘party’ with ‘ideology.’ On the contrary, I mean precisely to *distinguish* partisanship—a conscious, programmatic commitment to getting or keeping power in the hands of a certain recognized group (the Tories, the Whigs) in order to direct public policy in certain ways—from ideological sensibility—a more amorphous matter of values, attitudes, and default assumptions.” In the moment I am investigating (the 1770s-1790s) what I identify as “whiggery” is strongly associated with what is now called liberalism, though it may not always be tantamount Whig party affiliation. Prior to the colonial independence movement, “whiggish” and “tory” politics seem to articulate more as a competing interpretive assumptions which drive reading practices (i.e. around the question of filial obedience) than they do as totally separate ideological platforms. After independence was established as the goal of colonial dissent, a cleavage emerges that congeals along proto-nationalist lines: whiggery/liberalism becomes Whig and American, and toryism becomes Toryism. After roughly 1776, in other words, there is not supposed to be any such thing as American toryism, which gets cast by the Revolution’s spokesmen in nationalist terms, as an anti-American, or British, construct. This happens because the whiggish colonial leadership changed the script around filial obedience, as I discuss in what follows. Toni Bowers, *Force or Fraud: British Seduction Stories and the Problem of Resistance, 1660-1760* (Oxford: OUP, 2011), 5.

eventual reassertion they maintain as a given. For the author of “An Address to the People” the crisis is a “dismemberment,” and for Dickinson an outbreak of “pestilence.” In both cases, the political drama one of inward *revolt*—a febrile, lacerated imperial body riven against itself—rather than one of *revolution*, where that word presupposes either the progressive unfolding, or the radical break, of a proto-national body away from a prior condition of dependence. Neither Dickinson nor his tory counterpart entertains the permanent separation of the colonies from Britain as a conceivable outcome of the plight in which they are ensnared. Unlike the liberal concepts of revolution that are sponsored by Lockean ideals of filial independence, then, the familial script of civil war conceives of the disunion of children from their parents as a species of terrible misfortune. As a result, it offers a vision of “revolution” that is both substantially compatible with that of “revolt” (deviant; disgusting), and aspirationally oriented toward repair.

*Charlotte Temple’s* return to allegories of civil war that center on the dramatic separation of mother from daughter thus challenges entrenched political and chronological narratives that subtend Revolutionary historiography as it has been elaborated retrospectively through a U.S. nationalist telos. The assumption that the field of Revolutionary politics reduces into binary terms (Tory/Whig, Loyalist/Patriot, imperial/national) disintegrates under the pressure of this largely forgotten arrangement, and with it, the orthodoxy that the Revolutionary period has a linear trajectory propelled by the ideological contest between two “sides.” That *Charlotte Temple’s* allegorical armature revisits the Revolution as a scene of trauma almost a decade *after* the war officially ended may therefore prompt a reevaluation of delineations of early American

literary history that take the Revolution to mark the boundary between colonial and national time. But I propose that what is most significant about *Charlotte Temple*'s allegorical plot is that it elaborates understandings of the Revolutionary war as a civil conflict, and of rebellion as a form of parricide, which powerfully resist nationalist typologies of freedom implied by liberal discourses of filial autonomy. By this I do not mean, of course, that Rowson's novel is unavailable to national readings of any kind. Rather, I propose that *Charlotte Temple*'s revolutionary allegory opens into a history of rupture that does not inevitably terminate in the creation of a nation-state, and whose politics are not *necessarily* addressed to, or exhausted by, the inauguration of democratic liberal national culture. Part of what is at stake in reading *Charlotte Temple* allegorically is a chance of sighting in it a grievous counter-epistemology of revolution whose costs cannot be fully defrayed by the emoluments of national history, or even those of linear time.

In this way, I depart not only from Fliegelman's liberal ur-thesis, but also from scholarly discussions of the past few decades that have situated *Charlotte Temple*, as Davidson does, in relation to early U.S. national social life and the (tortured) legacies of the "Founding." Rowson's more recent feminist readers have linked *Charlotte Temple*'s—and other "early republican" novels'—concerns with seduction to the problems of post-Revolutionary U.S. liberal democracy. Most recently, Elizabeth Dillon has read "the confused and seemingly misdirected vectors of desire" in such novels of the 1790s as being symptomatic of the adjustment to "new" liberal ideals of companionate marriage in the aftermath of the Revolution, which replaced the centralized structure of "monarchical authority" with a "headless" state comprised by "individuals [ . . . ] who

engaged in contracts.”<sup>18</sup> Dillon’s argumentative framework self-consciously departs from US nationalist paradigms of literary study; she focuses on the rise of liberalism (a transnational phenomenon) rather than on rise of US national culture and ideology per se. However, this distinction tends to dissolve in her analysis of “early republican” seduction novels because she continues to identify the Revolution as the cutoff between “old”/monarchical and “new”/liberal-democratic representational orders. I am suggesting that the identification of the Revolution with the consolidation of a “new” order is itself a US nationalist historiographic conceit subtended by liberal assumptions.

While Dillon argues that the detailed anguish of seduction tales ultimately serves the interests of the status quo, other scholars interpret seduction narratives as complex feminist critiques that (re)constellate US national collectives through relations of grief. In two such stunning analyses, Eva Cherniavsky and Julia Stern contend that the identificatory energies unleashed by Rowson’s narrative are channeled into the creation of a national body organized by what Cherniavsky calls “incorporated loss.”<sup>19</sup> Both Stern and Cherniavsky argue that Charlotte’s death sets into motion a feminized affective economy in which particularized, embodied experiences of mourning and complaint

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<sup>18</sup> Dillon, *The Gender of Freedom: Fictions of Liberalism and the Literary Public Sphere* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2004), 133-136. For Dillon, seduction tales perform a crucial pedagogical function within a public made up of “voluntary citizens of a nation where political authority derived from ‘the consent of the governed’ ” (143) and personal authority from the institution of marriage. In such a public, seduction tales help to create and maintain an ideal of “separate-yet-entwined public and private realms” (42) through the cautionary presentation of its collapse.

<sup>19</sup> Cherniavsky, “Charlotte Temple’s Remains,” 40. Julia Stern, *The Plight of Feeling: Sympathy and Dissent in the Early American Novel* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1996); Eva Cherniavsky, “Charlotte Temple’s Remains,” *That Pale Mother Rising: Sentimental Discourses and the Imitation of Motherhood in 19<sup>th</sup>-century America* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995), 24-40. See also Elizabeth Barnes, *States of Sympathy: Seduction and Democracy in the American Novel* (New York: Columbia, 1996); Donna R. Bontatibus, *The Seduction Novel of the Early Nation: A Call for Socio-Political Reform* (East Lansing: Michigan State UP, 1999).

become the basis for national attachment. Writes Stern: “the sorrow [Charlotte’s] death provokes [. . .] allows for the cohesion of an ‘imagined community’ around the wound to the social body that her passing represents. Thus, the fabric of narrative [. . .] becomes Rowson’s abiding utopian figure for the new nation itself.”<sup>20</sup> For Stern and Cherniavsky alike, then, *Charlotte Temple* sets loose subversive sorrow—yet for both of them, the politics of its subversion take shape within a horizon of meaning set by the “Founding” in a decidedly *post*-Revolutionary age.

Reading *Charlotte Temple* as an allegory of civil war that holds the prospect of futurity in abeyance, however, may allow us to detect in it a grief that wanders more restlessly across space and time, and which may not answer faithfully to the call of the US nation-state. The specific terms of *Charlotte Temple*’s allegory cast the rebellion of children against their parents as a kind of manifest impossibility—a bout of madness, a dismemberment, an outbreak of pestilence—for how could it otherwise be that an extension of the body would revolt against the body? Parricidal allegories of revolt thus also theorize an experience of Revolutionary time characterized not (as we have come to expect) by a teleological march towards autonomous governmentality, or the production of a new symbolic regime, but rather by the unfinished reckoning of accumulating disasters. Which is to say that we may be able to catch in the wreckage of Charlotte Temple’s ruined life a glimpse of history as an inconclusive encounter with violence on a massive scale that may itself qualify as a “revolutionary” political condition of a different

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<sup>20</sup> Stern, *The Plight of Feeling*, 34.

kind. In Rowson's case, I suggest that this vision of revolutionary history is yoked to specifically feminized conditions of abjection made newly visible by Rowson's intervention into late-century allegorical paradigms. Indeed, Rowson innovates on her source materials by laying the emphasis of her narrative on gendered economies of the mind that allow and encourage men to forget their families but require women to remember them at all costs.

My emphasis on the feminist politics of *Charlotte Temple*'s allegorical structure seem to put me at odds, once again, with other feminist scholars of Rowson's text, who widely acknowledge that it invites allegorical readings but have so far resisted pursuing them. Davidson writes that “[. . .] the pathos of Charlotte's fall *could easily be read* as an allegory of changing political and social conditions in early America” (my emphasis) and leaves it at that.<sup>21</sup> The unspoken assumption seems to be that allegorical reading is naïve; it's too easy—a methodological disgrace. Moreover, allegory seems poised to strip *Charlotte Temple* of its potential feminist import. In her exquisite discussion of the novel, for example, Julia Stern writes that what is at stake for her is “a reading [. . .] that extends beyond a reductive decoding of Rowson's politics as patriarchal and conservative, as antirevolutionary.”<sup>22</sup> A feminist imperative has emerged to save *Charlotte Temple* from allegory, and to accept in so doing that allegory cannot be saved for feminism. But all of this rests on an understanding of allegory as “reductive

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<sup>21</sup> Davidson, Introduction, *Charlotte Temple*, xi (my emphases).

<sup>22</sup> Julia Stern, *The Plight of Feeling: Sympathy and Dissent in the Early American Novel* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1999), 35. I am troubled here by Stern's implicit assumption that the tory valences of *Charlotte Temple*'s allegorical structure are politically retrograde, which both aligns liberalism with progressive values (itself a liberal construction) and precludes the possibility that *Charlotte Temple* might bear radical potential within it precisely insofar as it is legible as an untimely expression of regret that moves against currents of partisan reading or US nationalist historiography.

decoding,” which Walter Benjamin argues is an *a posteriori* Romantic construction. In the *Trauerspiel* (1928), Benjamin writes that the view of allegory as “a conventional relationship between an illustrative image and its abstract meaning” comes out of Romantic idealizations of the symbol as “the indivisible unity of form and content.” The aesthetics of the symbol thus conceived, however, insist on a pairing of “form” with “content” that sets in motion a dialectical sequence where one is always vanishing into the other; we can never do justice “to content in formal analysis and to form in aesthetics of content.”<sup>23</sup> Benjamin contends that the Romantics transferred the onus for this state of affairs onto allegory, which they identified with a degraded situation in which semiotic value tramples the particularity of its vehicles (though subsequent generations of scholars have suggested that the responsibility for this issue may lie more with those who read the Romantics after the fact than with the Romantics themselves).

Following Benjamin, I understand allegory quite differently as the immersion of history in form and the erosion of form by history. Writes Benjamin: “Allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things.”<sup>24</sup> And again: “Everything about history that, from the very beginning, has been untimely, sorrowful, unsuccessful, is expressed in a face—or rather, a death’s head.”<sup>25</sup> I take Benjamin to be saying that allegory registers the harrowing passage of time as a constitutive feature of its expression. Allegories flout separations of text from context, and form from content, because they are attenuated by the very historical pressures with which they are aesthetically concerned.

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<sup>23</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* [The Origin of German Tragic Drama] (1928), Trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 2009), 159-60.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 178.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.,166.

Ruins signify ruin because they are ruined. The death's head signifies mortality because it is mortified. Allegories bear witness to history as it transpires within the reach of aesthetic honor and discredit—indeed, it abolishes the distinction between the aesthetic and the world. This means that allegory resists contextualization by methodologies that conceive of The Historical as a kind of box-like container surrounding aesthetic objects extrinsically. By the same token, allegorical aesthetics offer no protection from historical flux. The scene of allegorical reading is thus one in which the reader is caught up, with allegories themselves, in the ferment of historical process. To read allegorically is to enter into unsheltered negotiation with contingencies whose purport remains to be decided. Allegory's ruinous absorption by time is therefore characterized by sorrow—the sorrow of non-transcendent historical being—as well as by a kind of indigestible surplus of interpretations. Indeed, “allegory” seems to name a specific formal arrangement for Benjamin as well as the knowledge of history that it entrains: a knowledge that subsists not in mastery over time, but rather in our enthrallment by its motions.<sup>26</sup> Where history is not a series of facts but a relentless force of attrition that impairs everything in its maw,

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<sup>26</sup> Paul de Man also associates allegory strongly with counter-modern temporality and has a similar interpretation of why allegory came to look jejune after symbolism: “Allegory appears as dryly rational and dogmatic in its reference to a meaning that it does not itself constitute, whereas the symbol is founded on an intimate unity between the image that rises up before the senses and the supersensory totality that the image suggests. [...] The supremacy of the symbol, conceived as an expression of unity between the representative and the semantic function of language, becomes a commonplace that underlies literary taste, literary criticism, literary history” (189). De Man is helpful because he argues that this development was not unidirectional after Romanticism; indeed, he points to several Romantic authors, including Coleridge and Rousseau, who seem to turn back to allegory in their writings (e.g. Coleridge’s concept of the symbol). Like Benjamin, De Man takes time to be the issue that is at stake in allegory: “the prevalence of allegory always corresponds to the unveiling of an authentically temporal destiny [...] in a subject that has sought refuge against the impact of time in a natural world to which, in truth, it bears no resemblance” (206). De Man differs from Benjamin—and this is why I use Benjamin instead—by assuming that the turn to allegory is a retreat inward (a “refuge”) rather than an opening out, one that is subtended by the insurmountable difference of “a subject” from things. Paul de Man, “The Rhetoric of Temporality,” *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, Wlad Godzich, ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 206.

allegory affords no vantage from which it can safely be observed and evaluated, and no etiology of calamitous events that traces them reliably to a given source. History guarantees only a dispersion of loss that appears simultaneously arbitrary and preordained, and allegory is the shape of its accompanying bafflements unredeemed by adequate explanation.

Benjamin's analysis challenges allegory's reputation for being closed and reductive. Though he theorizes it in bone and brick, Benjamin insists that allegory is in fact a highly labile form; it simply eschews models of clarification which turn on the discrimination of latent from manifest meaning. Benjamin's emphasis on the hermeneutic indeterminacy of allegory offers a critical aperture on Rowson's treatment of Charlotte's sexual "ruin," for there are always too many, and not enough, explanations for Charlotte's seduction, and too many ways (or not enough) left to remember her death. The novel's allegorical structure courses with ambiguities, absences, and excesses of meaning that paradoxically leave us in a state of doubt. In *Charlotte Temple* I suggest that those semiotic instabilities become zones of feminist intervention and feminist lament. Indeed, Rowson does not merely rehearse what I have called an allegorical strain of compunction from the pamphlets and iconography of the Revolutionary period; she deftly exploits the over- and under-determinations of those allegories in order to stage a critique of gendered expectations which require women to bear the unbearable and impossible burdens—the *strains*—of remembering their parents above all. Reading *Charlotte Temple* allegorically does not therefore foreclose its feminist potential, but rather prompts us to think with the text about how allegory supports the enactment of a feminist critique of memory, and feminist memorial politics, whose meanings do not take

shape primarily in relation to the post-Revolutionary liberal nation-state, but arise as conditions of ongoing revolutionary *impossibility*.

## II. Allegorizing Revolution

According to Jay Fliegelman, the American Revolution was the flower of a “broader cultural revolution” in Anglo-American culture, beginning in the late seventeenth century, which saw the rise of a new liberal ideology that idealized “a more affectionate and equalitarian relationship” between parents and their children.<sup>27</sup> By the mid-eighteenth century, the shift away from older patriarchal ideals of unconditional filial obedience to parental authority was firmly established. To hold that children bore a sacred and irrevocable duty to their parents was to offend the laws of nature, and parents who attempted to keep their children in a state of nonage were deemed guilty of tyranny. The American Revolution, writes Fliegelman, is “the most important expression” of this longer “revolution against patriarchal authority.”<sup>28</sup> It represents the culmination of decades-long social and cultural trends towards liberal doctrines of rational autonomy and contractual union.

Fliegelman’s account remains among the most influential of the Revolutionary period, but it tends to posit U.S. independence as a foregone conclusion by implying that older notions of filial obedience had already been outmoded by liberal emphases on filial autonomy by the time the imperial crisis heated up. In this section I suggest, by contrast,

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<sup>27</sup> Jay Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution against Patriarchal Authority, 1750-1800* (Cambridge: CUP, 1982), 5, 1.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 5. Fliegelman is invoking the term “patriarchy” here in the very specific sense that Robert Filmer uses it in his *Patriarcha, Or the Natural Power of Kings* (1680). Writes Fliegelman, “The theory asserted that kingly authority derived from parental powers that kings received as a special inheritance from the first father, Adam, and that were understood to oblige subjects to a lifelong filial obedience” (4).

that what Fliegelman identifies as the “older” and “newer” familial values were *coeval* in the 1770s and beyond. The notion that one set of values simply or easily won out over the other (that they were neatly partisan in the first place) looks to me suspiciously like a back-formation of liberal invention.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, colonial independence was enormously contentious, and belatedly considered, even amongst leading colonial Whigs. As I discuss below, it was not until 1776 that independence emerged as the ostensible goal of colonial fulmination, and even then the settler population was deeply divided.<sup>30</sup> Well into the 1770s, moreover, the colonies’ fealty to the Crown was phrased on every side of the debate as an emphatically affectionate obligation: an irrevocable duty borne lightly because it was borne in love. In whiggish political rhetoric and iconography up to and including 1776, then, there is no choice to make between tyrannical parental authority on the one hand and natural independence on the other; the challenge is rather to make colonial expressions of grievance consistent with proper filial acknowledgements of Britain’s parental benevolence. Hence the First and Second Continental Congresses assiduously maintained the colonies’ filial allegiance to Britain and its monarch deep into

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<sup>29</sup> See n. 17, above.

<sup>30</sup> The question of numbers is among the most vexed of U.S. Revolutionary historiography. Conventional wisdom is that the mainland settler-colonial population was roughly split into thirds: Patriot, Loyalist, and neutral. Maldwyn A. Jones, *The Limits of Liberty: American History 1607-1992* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 48. This figure, however, is based on a very binary view of the war as a white conflict between Britain and the colonies; it does not take into account the fact that the war extended into the Caribbean and Canada, as well as to the shores of Britain. Even within the thirteen colonies, however, it completely discounts the approximately 80-100,000 enslaved people of African descent who escaped the Southern plantations in the course of the war (an estimated third of whom served in some capacity behind British lines), as well as the thousands of native combatants in the trans-Appalachian west. Seen from this vantage, the Revolution’s spokespersons represent an even tinier proportion. Indeed, taken together, constituencies that have been historically identified as minority or marginal figures in relation to Revolutionary history (native peoples, Loyalists, neutrals, women, and the enslaved) may in fact constitute the vast majority of those embroiled in the struggle.

the 1770s, directing their protests at Parliament and not at George III or their “fellow subjects in Great Britain.”<sup>31</sup>

In the *Declaration and Resolves of the First Continental Congress* (October 14, 1774), for instance, John Adams writes that the colonists’ “dutiful, humble, loyal, and reasonable petitions to the Crown for redress, have been repeatedly treated with contempt by His Majesty’s ministers of state” (119). Adams carefully deflects blame away from the King, whom he represents as being sympathetic to the colonists’ wishes for “peaceable” (122) reunion with “the mother country” (120). The King, like the colonists, has been manipulated by his shadowy ministers and is thus unaware of the colonies’ outrage, in which he is fully expected to share. A similar logic emerges in Paul Revere’s cartoon of the same year entitled “The Able Doctor, or America Swallowing the Bitter Draught” (fig. 1). The print depicts America as a half-clothed native woman who is forced to drink tea by two British ministers while a third peers up her skirts.<sup>32</sup> Revere brilliantly equates Britain’s economic policies with rape and plunder (the print proleptically envisions “Boston cannonaded” in the distance), but Britannia herself stands outside the circle of oppression that dominates the foreground. Britannia receives none of the blame for America’s abuse here; on the contrary, she seems to express shame and remorse at the spectacle before her. Britannia *shares* rather than perpetuates America’s

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<sup>31</sup> Declaration and Resolves of the First Continental Congress [1774], in Samuel Eliot Morison, *Sources and Documents Illustrating the American Revolution 1764-1788* (London: OUP, 1929), 122.

<sup>32</sup> From left to right, the ministers are Sandwich, North, and Mansfield. Lord Bute stands to the far right, and Spain and France observe the scene from the far left. The “Indian Princess” was the single most common allegorical figure for the colonies during the Revolution, though she was largely replaced by the figure of Columbia after the war. See Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “Dis-Covering the Subject of the ‘Great Constitutional Discussion,’ 1786-1789,” *Journal of American History* 79.3 (1992): 841-73.



Fig. 1. “The Able Doctor, or America Swallowing the Bitter Draught” (1774). British Cartoon Prints Collection, Library of Congress.

mortification; mother and daughter are bound in sympathy, and we are to construe the ministers’ actions as a double violence that hurts them in equal measure.

It is a convention of eighteenth-century political allegory to represent America and Britain as female figures, but I suggest that this convention acquires special significance in the context of Revolutionary-era political debates about the nature and limits of filial obligation. Indeed, eighteenth-century ideals of filial obedience and parent-child relations are governed by different gendered expectations for men and women, respectively. Eighteenth-century liberal discourse may presume the eventual autonomy

of sons from fathers, as Fliegelman's analysis makes clear, but this is emphatically not the case for mothers and daughters. Hence "The Able Doctor" makes affective claims on the viewer precisely by underscoring what it designates as a natural identification between mother and daughter *as women*. Note, however, that Revere deemphasizes America's "Indianness" to secure this arrangement. Philip Deloria has shown that the figure of the Indian was deployed during this period to accommodate contradictory positions and identities; cartoonists controlled its valences "by arming it, clothing it, shifting its gender, or coloring its face."<sup>33</sup> In this case, Revere downplays America's phenotypic and cultural differences from Britannia so that the sanctity of reproductive female bodies (virgins, mothers) and their relationships to each other (mother-daughter) can come to stand for civilization as such. The common lot of female precarity becomes in this way the basis for colonial claims to political affinity with Britain, as America paradoxically achieves parity with her mother at the far limits of physical abuse.

Colonial rhetoric remained unchanged after hostilities broke out on April 18, 1775, at Lexington and Concord. The Second Continental Congress convened in May and issued two statements that July: the "Olive Branch Petition" (attributed to Dickinson) and the "Declaration of the Causes of Taking Up Arms" (attributed mostly to Jefferson). True to its name, the "Olive Branch Petition" sued for the peaceful resolution of conflict between Britain and the colonies, outlining the events to date and, remarkably, stressing the colonies' loyalty to the Crown in the unequivocal terms of filial love. Months after blood had been shed, then, Congress continued officially to blame Parliament for the

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<sup>33</sup> Philip Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1998), 29.

crisis: “Your Majesty’s ministers [ . . . ] have compelled us to arm in our own defence [sic], and have engaged us in a controversy so peculiarly abhorrent to the affections of your still faithful colonists [ . . . ].” The “Olive Branch” insists that the colonies and Britain are bound by blood and sympathy (connected by “the strongest ties that can unite societies”), and hence that conflict between them is “abhorrent”: both undesired and unnatural. Specific political grievances are subsumed altogether in Dickinson’s emotional appeal: “our breasts retain too tender a regard for the kingdom from which we derive our origin, to request such a reconciliation as might, in any manner, be inconsistent with her dignity or welfare [ . . . ] your Majesty will find our faithful subject on this Continent ready and willing at all times [ . . . ] to assert and maintain the rights and interests of your Majesty, and of our Mother Country.”<sup>34</sup> Jefferson’s “Causes” makes a similar case, asserting that the colonies have “taken up arms” only to defend themselves against Gage’s troops and not to “dissolve that union which has so long and so happily subsisted between us [Britain and the colonies], and which we [the colonies] sincerely wish to see restored.” The Anglo-American conflict is not a war of independence here, but a civil war whose resolution figures as a kind of homecoming.<sup>35</sup> Both Dickinson and Jefferson are, of course, mobilizing highly conventional rhetorical forms, and I should emphasize that I am not attempting to make factual claims about what their beliefs or motivations may or may not have been. What interests me is that the language of filial love and duty continued to carry rhetorical weight deep into the imperial crisis, and that

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<sup>34</sup> “Olive Branch Petition.” 1775. Philadelphia: Second Continental Congress.

<sup>35</sup> “Declaration of the Causes of Taking Up Arms” (1775), *Sources and Documents Illustrating the American Revolution 1764-1788*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1929), 145.

as late as 1775 the governing paradigm is one in which colonial separation from the “mother country” is officially unthinkable.

The elaborate assurances of colonial allegiance to, and affection for, “King and Country” staged by Jefferson and Dickinson’s petitions are shaped by arguments they do not explicitly acknowledge. Their rhetoric aims to defuse readings of the conflict between Britain and America in which the latter figures as deranged or homicidal child. As “The Parricide” (fig. 2) shows, it was in precisely these terms that detractors interpreted the colonies’ actions. Published in London in 1776, “The Parricide” inverts the spatial and symbolic equations of “The Able Doctor” (fig. 1). This time Britannia’s half-naked body is the violated object of our gaze. British ministers sympathetic to the American colonies hold Britannia by the arms; Camden guides the lion toward her, and Wilkes seems to direct America to drive her dagger into her mother’s breast.<sup>36</sup> America appears once more as an “Indian Princess,” but the cartoon appears to phrase this depiction pejoratively, mapping its claims about America’s filial transgressions onto a visual plane that entwines a binary gendered logic with a binary, complexion-based account of morality. To the extent that the dark-skinned, hydra-headed figure of Discord on the far left of the frame can be said to have a human gender assignment, his well-muscled legs, torso, and upheld arms mark him in hyper-masculine terms.<sup>37</sup> Discord’s

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<sup>36</sup> Don Cresswell, *The American Revolution in Drawings and Prints* (Washington DC: Library of Congress, 1975). Cresswell identifies the figures in this print, which was first published in London.

<sup>37</sup> This is a depiction of the same figure Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker identify as “an antithetical symbol of disorder and resistance, a powerful threat to the building of state, empire, and capitalism.” They note that from the early 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries, “rulers referred to the Hercules-hydra myth to describe the difficulty of imposing order on increasingly global systems of labor.” *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon, 2000), 2-3.



Fig. 2. "The Parricide. A Sketch of Modern Patriotism" (1 May 1776). Note that this print first appeared before the Declaration had been drafted, and well before news of it reached London. British Cartoon Prints Collection, Library of Congress.

"blackness" is restated on the right of the frame by the lion's "beastliness," and the radical Whig, Charles James Fox, has transformed into his namesake in the right background. Caught in the closing circle of anarchy, Britannia's exposed torso and supine posture underscore her position as a hyper-feminized victim, her emphatic "whiteness" evincing innocence at once moral, racial, and sexual.

"The Parricide" thus seems to establish a civilizationist schema that imagines Britannia attacked on every side by "barbaric" forces: blackness on one flank, beastliness on the other. The crux of the drama, however, unfolds between Britannia and America in

the center of the frame, with America's line of movement suggesting that she proceeds from "savage" quarters as she goes in for the kill. But while America actually perpetrates the unnatural violence against her mother she does not appear to be fully accountable for that violence. For all its polemics, the politics of this allegory are ambiguous. Note, for instance, America's ambivalent racialization. Positioned between the extremes of Discord and Britannia, America wears a feathered headdress but is otherwise clothed in neoclassical fashion. Her skin is as pale as Britain's, all except for the slight shadow across her face (a "blackening" perhaps legible as rage) and—most startling of all—her left arm, poised to strike Britannia's breast, the hand that clasps the dagger quite deliberately framed in the empty space between two standing figures. Inside the imperial family but also attempting to destroy it, America is neither black nor white, neither guilty nor innocent, but strangely and impossibly both at once. All of which is to say, perhaps, that she is a victim of seduction. Whose idea was this anyway? America's, Discord's, or the beastly ministers'? The figure of Wilkes is especially revealing; with his finger outstretched and his head bent toward America's ear, he appears to be telling America what to do—a powerful suggestion that her behavior is only the most visible portion of a agenda which is not necessarily her own.

"The Parricide" thus makes two apparently contradictory claims that are salient to my discussion of *Charlotte Temple*. It indicts the colonies' secession as an unforgivable violation of the natural order and also provides an explanatory mechanism for this infraction through the grammar of seduction, which partially excuses it. As a result, one ends up here (as in Rowson's novel) with a curious sense that there are at once too many and not enough explanations for what is happening. Whereas we saw Revere deploy

gender to stabilize his interpretation of the Anglo-colonial conflict in “The Able Doctor,” “The Parricide” is wracked by semiotic movement and excess, conscripting discourses of race, gender, animality, and morality into an attempt at exposition that seems perpetually to fall short of the mark. Filial autonomy clearly emerges as a kind of tragedy in “The Parricide,” but the subject(s) of that tragedy proliferate almost before our eyes: split between the obvious calamity of Britannia’s impending murder and the conditions that have led America into madness, and split again in the person of America who is not herself, and perhaps not a person, but many and none at the same time. For America, as a victim of seduction, is conscious but *not thinking* in this moment—it is unthinkable that she should be—and if her unthinkingness stands among the many pathetic subjects of this Revolutionary allegory, then it may be important, once again, that America is (or was once) a woman, because *as* a woman and a daughter, she is supposed to be open to suggestion, to remember and repeat what she is told. To the extent that it is conceived as a seduction in this print, revolution starts to look like a specifically female tragedy: the tragedy of not knowing, or of being constantly at risk of forgetting, who you are.

Yet as Peter Oliver’s makes clear in his delightfully choleric account of the war, *Origin and Progress of the American Rebellion* (1781), parricide—no matter how absent-minded, how mitigated by external factors—is inevitably self-destructive. Oliver characterizes the Revolution’s spokesmen as villainous reprobates, and America as a much-beloved child:

[America was] a Colony, wch. had been nursed, in its Infancy, with the most tender Care & Attention; which had been indulged with every Gratification that the most

foward Child could wish for; which had even bestowed upon it such Liberality, which its Infancy & Youth could not *think* to ask for; which had been repeatedly saved from impending Destruction [. . .].<sup>38</sup>

Unlike other historic revolts, Oliver argues, the American Revolution did not originate “from severe Oppressions” (3), but was manufactured by a group of “abandoned Demagogues” (145) who foisted their unholy agenda upon the people by unprincipled, propagandistic means. Such being the case, Oliver contends that the American people themselves were guilty of foolishness and not malice—“they were weak,” he writes, “& unversed in the Arts of Deception” (145). Even the priests were beguiled by the revolutionary “Wheel of Enthusiasm” which, once turning, “whirled away” the people’s reason and left a vacuum “for Adams, & his Posse to crowd in what Rubbish would best serve their Turn” (146). Like Charlotte Temple, whom Rowson’s narrator describes as “the hapless victim of imprudence and evil counsellors,” the colonies as Oliver imagines them have every advantage of loving and benevolent parents; and like her, their weakness is their impressionability.<sup>39</sup> They are quite literally talked into dangerous and ultimately damning exploits from which they cannot turn back. Even if they are not entirely to blame, however, Oliver avers that the colonies (like Charlotte) seem nonetheless doomed to suffer the terrible consequences of their actions. Charlotte sinks from ruin to penury, madness, and death, just as Oliver imagines the colonies deteriorating into waste: “The issue hath been, that a fine Country, like the Land of Canaan, flowing with Milk and

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<sup>38</sup> Peter Oliver, *Origin and Progress of the American Rebellion: A Tory View*, Eds. Douglass Adair and John A. Shutz. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961), 3.

<sup>39</sup> Rowson, *Charlotte Temple*, 57.

Hony [sic], is turned into a dreary Wilderness, enstamped with vestiges of War, Famine, and Pestilence.”<sup>40</sup> Oliver very clearly imagines the Revolution as a fall from grace, a poignant exposition of the belief that fracture, disease, and destruction are the only possible outcomes of filial revolt. Allegorized as seduction, rebellion condemns the (mostly) innocent to a life that can only end in tears.

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The seduction paradigm I have been tracking lays emphasis on the role of evil counselors who stand in the way of Anglo-American reconciliation (Whig MPs, colonial rabble-rousers, or Tory fat cats). Even the most furious partisan polemics agree on this point, whether they defend or deplore the colonies’ resistance to imperial policy. In Britain, allegorical renderings of Anglo-American conflict as a machination of slanderous provocateurs would last through the war. Such depictions appear in Britain as late as 1783, the year that the Treaty of Paris formalized the peace between Britain, the Continental Congress, and the colonies’ European allies. A British print of that year entitled “Mrs. General Washington bestowing Thirteen Stripes on Britannia” (fig. 3) shows George Washington beating Britannia while sporting a frock under a military uniform, complete with tricorne hat. Perhaps punning on the etymological link between “transvestism” and “travesty” (both derived from the Latin *travestire*, from *trans-* “across” and *vestire* - “to clothe”), the cartoonist’s portrayal of Washington partially clad in women’s clothes appears to couch the war as a fraudulent infraction of the natural order,

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<sup>40</sup> Oliver, *Origin and Progress*, 149.

in this case by marking it as an expression of sexual perversion.<sup>41</sup> “Parents shouldn’t behave like tyrants to their children,” quips Washington, a scourge in one hand and a fistful of Britannia’s hair in the other. But as in the case of “The Parricide,” closer inspection of “Mrs. General Washington” suggests that Washington may be acting out the wishes of others. Congress’s international allies (Holland, France, and Spain) stand behind Washington offering verbal encouragement: “Minheer deserves to be striped for a Fool,” “Encore mon Amy Encore,” “Me wish you Stripe her well.” While Washington’s cross-dressing works in an obvious way to stigmatize him, it may also function in exculpatory terms if taken seriously as a transgender signifier. Washington’s persuadability constitutes a crisis in normative eighteenth-century discourses of seduction, which seem to demand a female subject to the extent that those discourses are concerned with customary diversions of the will considered “proper” to women within a binary gender system. Thus to the extent that Washington can be construed as acting on his own initiative, the print implies that he is a degenerate man whose ensemble confirms his identity as a sadistic criminal. But to the extent that he is suggestible, the rules of seduction seem to demand that Washington become female. Men can be seduced, of course, but here the printmaker’s attempt to explain how this is possible—i.e. by

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<sup>41</sup> Washington’s transvestism defies the normative distinction between “man” and “woman” and carries the additional onus of sexual pathology in eighteenth-century medical discourse. Foucault writes that sexualities not “economically useful and politically conservative” were annexed to mental illness in eighteenth-century medicine. The problem with Washington’s transvestism, in these terms, is that it flouts the “proper” genealogical relation between mother and son—by dressing as a woman, Washington denies his role as procreative agent and proprietor of his family’s identity. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 37.



Mrs General Washington,  
Bestowing thirteen Stripes on  
Britannia.

Fig. 3. "Mrs. General Washington, bestowing thirteen Stripes on Britania" (1783). A skirted Washington says, "Parents should not behave like tyrants to their children," and Britannia replies, "Is it thus my children treat me?" British Cartoon Prints Collection, Library of Congress.

fashioning Washington as woman— also produces a queer gendered subject who is both/neither a man in women’s clothes and/nor a perfect lady. Similar to America’s ambiguous racialization in “The Parricide,” Washington’s ambiguous gendering in this print holds guilt and innocence in unresolved tension.

Seduction paradigms thus continued to circulate in the British press into the 1780s. But by then it had become more exclusively partisan-identified with Toryism than previously, particularly within the (former?) colonies.<sup>42</sup> That is because a different paradigm took hold in whiggish colonial rhetoric in the mid-1770s, perhaps most famously in Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense* (Jan. 1776). Where colonial petitions and political cartoons had heretofore adopted rhetorical strategies designed to mitigate the identification of colonial complaint with parricidal intentions, *Common Sense* capsized this prevailing convention of colonial grievance by abandoning its conciliatory stance. Paine told a completely different story. He claimed that if Britain was America’s mother, she was a bad one to whom America owed no allegiance. Britannia became the enemy:

Britain is the parent country, say some. Then the more  
shame upon her conduct. Even brutes do not devour their  
young, nor savages make war upon their families. [.] the  
phrase *parent* or *mother country* has been jesuitically  
adopted by the king and his parasites, with a low papistical  
design of gaining an unfair bias on the credulous weakness  
of our minds. [.] This new world hath been the asylum

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<sup>42</sup> See n. 17, above.

for the persecuted lovers of civil and religious liberty from  
*every part* of Europe. Hither have they fled, not from the  
tender embraces of the mother, but from the cruelty of a  
monster [ . . . ].<sup>43</sup>

Paine asserts that Britain is not a “parent country” at all—this is a fabrication of “the king and his parasites.” But just in case Britannia *is* a mother, then she is a monstrosity, lower than “brutes” and “savages,” because she preys on her own offspring. Hence it is Britain and not America who bears the onus of unnatural conduct, and it is America’s right, if not duty, to pursue legal autonomy. Paine is not one for consistent reasoning and spews arguments like a pinwheel, but in this moment his strategy is to sponsor independence through misogyny. As the king retreats rather anticlimactically into the shadows, Britain’s spectacular failure as a mother takes center stage. Colonial fulmination thus appears as the liberated behavior of good children from abusive and amoral female domestic authority. And after months of strained debates and mounting grassroots pressure, another argument against the tyranny of parents carried in Congress. The Declaration of Independence was drafted by June 28<sup>th</sup> and ratified less than a week later.

I do not mean to suggest that *Common Sense* is somehow directly responsible for the Declaration. I point to the publication of Paine’s pamphlet instead as a moment in which the accusation of Britain’s gross parental neglect may have become widely and powerfully available as one rhetorical strategy among others for colonial opposition. In fact, the Declaration avoids the subject of Britain’s maternity altogether, opting instead

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<sup>43</sup> Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*, Ed. Isaac Kramnick (New York: Penguin, 1986), 84-85.

for a laundry list of the *King*'s misdeeds that takes up the majority of the document.<sup>44</sup>

The continuity between *Common Sense* and the Declaration that interests me is that they both abandon the seduction story I have been tracing in which depraved advisors appear as the architects of Britain and America's civil dispute. This is important because Rowson's emphasis on the interference of such figures in *Charlotte Temple* places her text firmly within an allegorical tradition that skips over whiggish justifications for independence after a Paine fashion. Where Paine tells a story about the flight of children from maternal monstrosity and the Declaration tells a story about the abuses of a tyrannical father, Rowson's Charlotte is persuaded to leave two adoring parents by bad advisors: Montraville, an officer in the British army, and Mademoiselle La Rue, her French teacher. The contours of Rowson's plot are those of a civil war allegory, which, according to the orthodoxy that identifies the Revolution with the inexorable coming of the independence movement, ought to have been long-since obsolete by the time of *Charlotte Temple*'s first American edition in 1794.

But it is not the case that the discourse of civil war was thoroughly eclipsed by a "new" Lockean thesis among colonial rabble-rousers. Liberal narratives of the Revolutionary period have conditioned us to think of 1776 as the moment at which the Revolution blazed to its imaginative summit, and of the Declaration, in particular, as a watershed that defines the Revolution's historical character as a "War of Independence."

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<sup>44</sup> "He has obstructed the administration of justice [ . . . ] He has kept among us in times of peace standing armies [ . . . ] He has plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burnt our towns, & destroyed the lives of our people [ . . . ]." In "A Declaration by the Representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress Assembled," *Thomas Jefferson: Writings*, Ed. Merrill D. Peterson (New York: Library of America, 1984), 20-21.

Yet even in the Declaration, liberal screed *par excellence*, the strain of colonial disaffiliation lingers. As Jacques Derrida observes in “Declarations of Independence” (1986), there is an aporia between the constative and performative in the Declaration which produces “indispensable confusion” in the text about the identity of its authorizing signatories (the drafters sign in the name of the people whom their signatures also invent) and the time in which independence takes place (it seems to be both a past, present, and future conditional occurrence).<sup>45</sup> Derrida highlights the Declaration’s incoherence as a founding articulation of sovereignty insofar as it labors openly to invent that which it purports to represent. To that I would add that the Declaration litigiously defends rights that it also asserts to be indefeasibly in place. The lengthy list of George III’s crimes acts as a warrant for independence presented to an invisible audience, yet the preamble proclaims such justification to be superfluous because the right to liberty is “inalienable.”

While the final text of the Declaration simmers with “indispensable confusions,” the unpublished draft roils with anxiety. Two long passages were edited out of Jefferson’s original draft, each of them attempts to disavow the exclusions entailed in colonial independence. The first attacks George III for sanctioning slavery and feverishly accuses him of inciting the enslaved to rebellion.<sup>46</sup> The second blames the British people

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<sup>45</sup> The Declaration’s temporal confusion is captured most clearly in the operative clause of the Declaration’s conclusion—“these united colonies are & of right ought to be free”—which Derrida describes as an instance of “fabulous retroactivity.” Jacques Derrida, “Declarations of Independence,” Trans. Tom Keenan and Tom Pepper, *New Political Science* 15 (1986): 7-15.

<sup>46</sup> I discuss some of the wartime contexts for this in Chapter 4. On my reading, Jefferson’s language in this passage can be interpreted as an attempt to address the concerns of South Carolina and Georgia, where the British had conditionally mobilized the enslaved as auxiliary forces. Delegates from those states, however, refused to sign unless it was removed from the text, though it’s easy to imagine that many others might have objected to it on the grounds that it indict the slave trade. The passage is enormously complex. Jefferson’s seems to affirm the humanity of the enslaved as “MEN,” but also suggests that “Africans” constitute an entirely separate people within the colonies; he indict the slave trade, and also implies that

for supporting Parliament and for allowing the government to send “soldiers of our common blood” to “invade and destroy” the colonies. Jefferson ruminates gloomily on the matter:

these facts have given the last stab to agonizing affection;  
and manly spirit bids us to renounce forever these unfeeling brethren. we must endeavor to forget our former love for them, and to hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, enemies at war, in peace friends. we might have been a free & a great people together; but a communication of grandeur and of freedom, it seems, is below their dignity.  
be it so, since they will have it.<sup>47</sup>

Jefferson seems to revert to the rhetoric of love and regret that characterizes earlier Congressional petitions to the “Mother Country,” but openly forbids his own fond impulses. Hence the passage radiates with internal tensions. Jefferson attempts, for instance, to police the Anglo/American split pronominally, pitting we/us against a third-person they/them, but he betrays the emptiness of this gesture when he refers to British soldiers as having “*our* common blood.” By this he means, of course, that “we” and “they” are comprised by the same body; indeed, he bases his complaint of the British

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the continuance of bondage within the colonies cannot be reversed. For a brilliant discussion of Jefferson’s views on race and its conjunction with liberal discourses of “emancipation” and the African colonization movement, see David Kazanjian, *The Colonizing Trick: National Culture and Imperial Citizenship in Early America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), esp. Chapter 2: “Racial Governmentality,” 89-138.

<sup>47</sup> “A Declaration by the Representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress Assembled,” *Thomas Jefferson: Writings*, Ed. Merrill D. Peterson (New York: Library of America, 1984), 23.

people's behavior on exactly these grounds. "Unfeeling brethren" are still brethren on the brink of civil war.

Though Jefferson repeatedly refers to the emotional connection between Britain and the colonies as a thing of the past he is thoroughly unconvincing. This passage avers that America's affective separation from Britain has already been accomplished—"these facts *have given* the last stab to agonizing affection"—while revealing that it is happening in the present and must continue in the future: "manly spirit *bids us to renounce*," "we *must endeavor to forget*," "be it so." But how can one forget on purpose when forgetting implies accident, passivity, or the suspension of consciousness? And even if "we" deliberately forgot, would it not amount to a form of memory, paradoxically preserving the lost object in the very effort to abandon it? In his reading of this passage, Peter Coviello argues (along Stern and Cherniavsky's lines) that it envisions a nation bound through affect: "[. . .] the grief that the recognized necessity of separation occasions, in Jefferson's conclusion, proves to be exactly the affect that will bind, make distinct, and hold together the new national public."<sup>48</sup> For Coviello, the unconsciously acknowledged stress of independence evinced in this passage (dis)appears under the aegis of sublimation; its attendant anxieties are metabolized, as soon as they are detected, by an incipient national community of feeling whose recognizability as such is (tautologically?) assured by the fragmentation which brings it into being. In other words, the affective disease which attends independence is always-already U.S. American. I wonder, though, if we might see a countervailing *unbinding* through memory in this passage that intercepts

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<sup>48</sup> Peter Coviello, "Agonizing Affection: Affect and Nation in Early America," *Early American Literature* 37 (2002): 452.

the conversion of loss into identity. What if we can't remember who "we" are? The strain of "remembering to forget" bursts the conceit of Jefferson's "we," which slips the noose of proto-national designation to invoke a transatlantic fraternity of Britons in the subjunctive time of desire: "*we might have been* a free and a great people together." Is it possible that, forgetting ourselves, we might be convulsed by an impossible and ruinous yearning, shearing mutinously into the past, which might threaten more dangerously to exceed the consolidations of national history? Remember: this passage never made it to the final cut.

### **III. Unbinding through Memory**

*Charlotte Temple* unmistakably revisits the "civil war" seduction paradigms that I have traced through the debates of the 1770s. Charlotte is of course a British girl, the sole product of her parents' union. At the opening of the novel, she is a student at a Sussex boarding school near Portsmouth, where, due largely to Mlle. La Rue she is seduced by Montraville, an officer in the British army awaiting deployment to the colonies. While Rowson never names the Revolutionary war as the setting for the novel, clues in the text confirm that this is where Montraville and his friend, Belcour, are headed. In the opening chapter, Belcour remarks to a love-struck Montraville that "a musket ball from our friends, the Americans, may [ . . . ] make you feel worse" (10).<sup>49</sup> In addition, when Montraville abandons Charlotte toward the end of the novel, it is because he has been redeployed to St. Eustatia, which Admiral George Rodney took in an

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<sup>49</sup> Rowson, *Charlotte Temple*, ed. Cathy N. Davidson (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986).

infamous sacking in 1781.<sup>50</sup> The reference to St. Eustatia dates the story roughly between 1780-82, a hinge period between the conclusion of Anglo-colonial hostilities on the continent (Yorktown in 1781) and the Treaty of Paris (1783).<sup>51</sup> This is not simply a point of historical interest. It means that in the diegetic time of Rowson's story, Revolution had not yet officially concluded with U.S. independence; the novel is set in a limbo period after war but before "peace," when the "end" of Revolution was yet to be determined and the U.S. nation-state did not exist. This is also the period in which Peter Oliver's *Origin and Progress of the American Rebellion* (1781) cast the colonies as victims of seduction fated to descend into "Wilderness": a scenario that the plot of Rowson's novel recalls with uncanny fidelity. Charlotte accompanies Montraville from Portsmouth to America; she becomes pregnant and eventually dies of puerperal fever somewhere in British-occupied New York. In the lead-up to her death, she laments her separation from her parents in "parricidal" terms with increasingly hallucinatory intensity. We also learn that the Temples, and Mrs. Temple in particular, have been awaiting word

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<sup>50</sup> Rodney plundered the island for wealth and subjected the Jewish population, in particular, to brutal treatment—at one point digging up the Jewish cemetery in search of hidden goods and money. Rodney's actions were widely decried in Britain, but when he defeated the French at the Battle of the Saintes (1782) he was hailed as a national hero. See Barbara Tuchman, *The First Salute: A View of the American Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1988). Derek Walcott describes the Battle of the Saintes as seen from St. Lucia in *Omeros* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1990).

<sup>51</sup> The reason for the delay between Cornwallis's surrender and Paris is that Britain was fighting naval war in the Caribbean with the colonies' European allies—France, Spain, and the Netherlands—during this time. Ironically, Britain emerged the victor from that war-within-the-war, consolidating its authority as a major naval power. This sealed Britain's imperial hold on major Caribbean territories and supported the British empire's "swing to the east," particularly on the Indian subcontinent. For the war in the Caribbean, see Tuchman, *The First Salute: A View of the American Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1988) and Andrew Jackson O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2000). For coverage of the "swing to the east," see Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: UNC P, 2006); Nicholas B. Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2006); and Myra Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World* (New York: Knopf, 2011).

from her in the hopes of bringing her home to England. But Charlotte seems doomed despite all—she dies in her father’s arms soon after he arrives in New York to rescue her. The contours of the mother/daughter familial allegory I sketched in the previous section are thus clearly visible even in this simple overview of the plot, with Charlotte as Britain’s colonial “daughter” fatally separated from her benevolent parent by a military man (the British army) and a scheming ministerial body (La Rue, Montraville).

But *Charlotte Temple*’s overt resemblances to civil war seduction paradigms are fully supported by the text’s internal operations, which couch Charlotte’s seduction as a crisis of memory that brings about her ruin. Jefferson’s lost passage from the Declaration theorizes independence as a condition that depends on forgetting: a willful amnesia that casts love aside. But for Jefferson, what must be repressed is the memory of family that Charlotte Temple compulsively remembers. Jefferson refuses to remember; Charlotte is unable to forget—on (possibly) all but one occasion. Jefferson’s passage and Rowson’s novel thus converge in their assessment that filial autonomy takes “forgetting” as its condition of possibility, except for Charlotte this is a prospect that seems inexorably linked with death. Much as in “The Parricide” (fig. 2), seduction figures in *Charlotte Temple* as a moment of unthinking with catastrophic consequences for everyone involved. However, Rowson’s narrative might usefully be considered as a kind of extreme close-up on Wilkes’s outstretched finger in that print. The pathos of parental distress is present in *Charlotte Temple*, but the narrative’s emphasis falls on the circumstances that bring about the daughter’s lapse in memory; Rowson invites her

readers into America's addled mind. Rowson thus investigates the conditions subtending the arrangement that Oliver presents as axiomatic: even if they are seduced into doing so, daughters who forget their mothers commit a murder and a suicide in one fell swoop. Daughters cannot survive without the memory of their parents.

Rowson frames her investigation of this problem in generational terms. Indeed, *Charlotte Temple* comprises two narratives. The first is nested as a flashback in the opening chapters of the novel and describes the courtship and marriage of Charlotte's parents, Henry Temple and Lucy Eldridge. The second, introduced in Chapter I and resumed in Chapter VI, relates the demise of their daughter, Charlotte, some fifteen years later. While it is perhaps an obvious point, it is worth noting that the narrative structure of *Charlotte Temple*'s opening chapters is revolutionary in the sense that it recoils on itself, which evokes the "revolting" metaphysics of civil war as inward corporeal violence. The temporality of the text is complex: written in the combustive early 1790s about a hiatus in the 1780s with an interpolated narrative from the 1760s in Chapters II-V. Tunneling backward through time in an internally looped retrospection, the narrative has a spiraling action that holds pasts and presents in constant negotiation. The involution of the opening chapters sets in motion an imperative to read cyclically—to visit and revisit evidence—that I have attempted to adopt procedurally into this chapter's discussion. The hope is that this method holds process open, much in the way that the novel's diegetic time between war and peace suspends historical outcome, resisting the assignation of final significance to the Revolution's undoings.

In thematic terms, the flashback in Chapters II-V links the question of Revolution to questions of female memory and forgetting. We have to go back to the previous

generation to discover why Charlotte's "revolt" occurs. The ostensible purpose of the nested narrative is to establish Lucy Eldridge's story as a powerful counter-instance to her daughter's: one that illustrates the correct and desirable outcome that Charlotte's pitiful mischance denies her. The difference between these two stories can be described in terms of memory. Where Lucy's obedience to her parents (her devoted remembrance of them) leads to happy marriage, Charlotte's seduction appears as a "forgetting" that brings about her death. To remember one's parents is to be re-membered in turn, through the transformation from daughter to wife; to be seduced is to forget one's family and endure dismemberment—to move from daughter to pariah, sexual object, schizophrenic and, finally, corpse.

As we learn in the flashback, Lucy Eldridge meets Charlotte's father, Henry Temple, at a moment of exigency. She has recently rejected a man named Lewis, who expected Lucy to become his mistress as a kind of return on a loan he has made to her father, Mr. Eldridge. Ever the exemplary daughter, Lucy makes Lewis's proposition known to her parents and declares that "her heart [is] perfectly unbiassed" towards him (16). Eldridge sends Lewis away, whereupon Lewis demands payment for his loan and has Eldridge jailed when he is unable to settle his debt. Lucy's brother is killed in a duel with Lewis and Mrs. Eldridge dies from shock, leaving Eldridge and Lucy alone and destitute in debtor's prison. Enter Henry Temple, a "benevolent fellow" introduced to the Eldridges by a mutual acquaintance who correctly surmises that their predicament will give Temple "a fine subject to exercise the goodness of [his] heart upon" (12).

During Mr. Eldridge's relation of his family's misfortunes to Temple, Lucy's filial excellence emerges as a quality of co-dependence first with her family, and later with her

father. This manifests as her apparently total lack of desire. She interposes no preference of her own in Lewis's consideration, for instance, declaring that she is "ready chearfully [sic] to submit to their direction" (16). Lucy's lack of desire also seems to link her with non-narrativity.<sup>52</sup> While Eldridge relates the tale of their predicament to Temple in her presence, she remains silent. She mutely adorns his story with corroborative blushes and tears, speaking only once to express that she and Eldridge are not only of one mind and voice (his), but also of one body (also his):

'Oh, my father!' cried Miss Eldridge, tenderly taking his hand, 'be not anxious on [my] account; for daily are my prayers offered to heaven that our lives may terminate at the same instant, and one grave receive us both; for why should I live when deprived of my only friend.' (14)

A few pages later, Eldridge reports Lucy as saying, "when it pleases heaven to take one of us, may it give the survivor resignation to bear the separation as we ought" (20)—but this is quite different from what she says in the passage above. She prays not to bear Eldridge's death as she ought, but to share death with him, and a common grave, and thus "never [to] leave him" (20). Her fantasy of dying and being buried with her father underlines the radical entanglement of her sentient life with his; their bodies will, and perhaps *must*, eventually molder together. Lucy's sole expression of desire is thus one

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<sup>52</sup> My understanding of the connection between desire and narrative is drawn from Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1971); and Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992), esp. Chapter 2: "Narrative Desire," 37-61.

whose realization would relieve her of a life in which any desire she experienced would unavoidably be her own. For Lucy, death is preferable to the ghastly prospect of filial autonomy. Or perhaps “death” is simply the name for the natural fact of Lucy’s existence in the absence of her parents; her separation from them literally cannot be thought or endured. When Lucy speaks for herself, as it were, she presents her self reflexively as an extension of her father’s organic being. Her remembrance of her father is self-cancelling; it reveals that there is nothing “inside” her.

And this is what wins her a husband. Temple is “moved even to tears” (14) by Lucy’s expression of devotion and takes steps to ensure that the “‘sweet maid [does] not wear out her life in a prison’” (21), first by paying her father’s debts and then by marrying her. There are, then, distinctly material rewards to be reaped from Lucy’s brand of self-erasure; likewise, her feminine charms can in some sense be purchased. Indeed, Lucy’s perfect memorial obedience to her father seems to bear commodified value, which in this case gets bound up in the patriarchal exchange of money, acting as a kind of bond on the Eldridges’ economic future. However, if Lucy can be had for a price—and clearly she can—the narrator is quick to mitigate the obvious parallels between what the villainous Lewis had attempted (buying an financially-embarrassed mistress) and what the noble Temple manages to pull off (buying a financially-embarrassed wife). The narrator emphasizes that Temple gains nothing materially by marrying Lucy except Lucy, her aged father, and a saccharine scene of rustic wedded bliss. In fact, Temple loses his birthright as a result of their match. He raises the money to discharge Eldridge’s debts by

“mortgaging part of his fortune” and subsequently gets into an argument with his father, Temple Sr., who wishes him to marry a wealthy heiress and make Lucy his mistress. When Temple refuses, his father banishes him and marries the heiress himself. If we suspect that Temple’s decision to rescue Lucy and Eldridge is motivated by anything but disinterested kindness, the narrator thus heads us off by associating such suspicions with Temple’s contemptible papa.

The Lucy narrative seems obviously to support a whole host of bourgeois ideological projects, but the argument of this chapter is that it is possible to read *Charlotte Temple* allegorically in order to reach radical feminist conclusions. This requires a withdrawal from the supposed depth of ideology critique to the level of narrative surface, much as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick describes the practice of “reparative reading,” which is adjudicated for me in this case by Rowson’s handling of allegorical form.<sup>53</sup> To proceed along these lines, then, one notes that while the narrator draws a veil over the issue, she does not deny that Henry acts on his sexual desire when he decides to rescue the Eldridges. The narrator writes: “We will not enquire too minutely into the cause which might actuate him in this instance: suffice it to say, he immediately put the

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<sup>53</sup> My reading of allegory through Benjamin has been informed and enriched by the turn in queer studies toward what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls “reparative reading.” Sedgwick distinguishes reparative reading from paranoid reading, which “places its faith in exposure” and evinces a “contagious tropism [ . . . ] toward symmetrical epistemologies” (131). This last point has been especially clarifying for me in the effort to subvert binary partisan and national interpretative paradigms. See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think this Essay is About You,” *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke UP, 2003), 123-51. My work in this chapter also draws from the influence of queer temporality studies. This bibliography is enormous. Work that I have returned to most often includes Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2007); Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke UP, 2004); Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke UP, 2011); Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham: Duke UP, 2010).

plan in execution.” Moments later, Henry’s father accuses him of the truth—“[I] cannot suppose that any thing but attachment to the daughter could carry you such imprudent lengths for the father.” This comes as a revelation to Temple, who “had never asked himself the question” of his motives (22). The narrator thus quietly reveals both that Temple’s sexual and economic investments in Lucy are embroiled, and that he is unaware of the fact until someone else points it out to him.

This becomes important in Charlotte’s story, because it will also be the case for Montraville, whose father has threatened to disown him if he forms “a precipitate union with a girl of little or no fortune” (40). Montraville takes this prohibition to heart, but in a way that has no effect on the course or management of his desires: “it was impossible he should ever marry Charlotte Temple; and what end he proposed to himself by continuing the acquaintance he had commenced with her, he did not at that moment give himself time to enquire” (41). The upshot is that Montraville will disobey the spirit but not the letter of his father’s law: he pursues Charlotte unthinkingly, but will not marry her, thereby producing the very misery that his father decries. Rowson thus draws Montraville and Temple into a rather unexpected alignment on the basis of their gender, which entitles both of them *not* to know their own minds. In this way, the Lucy narrative lays the groundwork for a critique of patriarchy which turns on the gendered disbursement of optional and mandatory memory functions: men can be “unthinking” and leave parental mandates behind, while women cannot.

Indeed, Rowson vascularizes the connection between the Lucy and Charlotte narratives with a network of examples which ensures that there are no men who disobey “good” parents in the novel, and no women who disobey “bad” ones. Temple Sr. and Montraville Sr. each set financial gain as an absolute condition for their son’s choice of wife. And while there are important differences between Henry and Montraville’s patriarchal lineages to which I shall return, the underlying continuity between them is that they both support a gendered matrix that authorizes amnesia at little or no cost to men, and de-authorizes it at the expense of women’s lives. Men get away with “forgetting” their parents in *Charlotte Temple*, while the same spells Charlotte’s destruction. Rowson thus makes it impossible to locate a gender-blind politics of disobedience in *Charlotte Temple* around the question of whether parents are “good” or “bad,” as Revolutionary polemicists had done by amplifying Britain’s innocence (Oliver) or Britain’s monstrosity (Paine) in order to excoriate or defend colonial dissent. Instead, she isolates the normative gender variables of seduction so that her readers have to deal with the most perplexing scenario of all: a perfect woman who forgets her duty to perfect parents. In this way, *Charlotte Temple* hardwires questions about rebellion’s (il)legitimacy to potentially unanswerable ones about female resistance and desire in an impacted system where women may not have either. What seems to be at issue is the proposition that good girls (Charlotte, America) are born and raised, like Lucy, to be incapable of forgetting their families.

Indeed, as we move into the second narrative, it appears that Charlotte Temple’s problems are all in her head. Her seduction is consistently described in terms of

forgetting. Near the time of her disappearance, for example, her parents discuss what a “good girl” she is. Mrs. Temple says, “She is [ . . . ] a grateful, affectionate girl; and I am sure will never lose sight of the duty she owes to her parents.” Replies Mr. Temple: “ ‘If she does, [ . . . ] she must *forget* the example set her by the best of mothers’ ” (34, my emphasis). Charlotte’s gratitude, affection, and duty are cast as mutually definitive aspects of her “goodness” and hence, according to the Temples, for Charlotte to forget her duty would be for her to forget her gratitude, her affection, and most importantly her mother’s example: to lose an identity grounded in her *vital* interdependence with Lucy. Such being their notion of their daughter’s love, the Temples’ response to Charlotte’s disappearance comes as little surprise. At first, Mrs. Temple concludes that Charlotte must be dead—surely dead, for it is unthinkable that Charlotte could have left them willingly:

‘There is one misfortune which is worse than death.  
But I know my child too well to suspect—’  
‘Be not too confident, Lucy.’  
‘Oh heavens!’ said she, ‘what horrid images do you start: is it possible she should *forget*—’  
‘She has *forgot* us all, my love; she has preferred the love of a stranger to the affectionate protection of her friends.’  
‘Not eloped?’ cried she eagerly. (78, my emphases)

A dead daughter is preferable to an insubordinate one, for if she is dead she has not necessarily forgotten her parents. A dead daughter remains with her family; a forgetful

one “prefers the love of a stranger” over that of her “friends”—she breaks apart the chain of female remembrance that knits the familial body together. This is the fate “worse than death”: not the loss of a daughter, or the daughter’s loss of her reputation se, but rather the rupture in her family’s integrity which the daughter’s absence provokes. In other words, the forgetting that Charlotte’s elopement represents is an assassination of her family’s character. A parricide.

Charlotte substantiates her parents’ parricidal logic from the opposite direction. She becomes convinced that she has committed a terrible violence against her parents by forgetting them, and hence that her parents have forgotten her in turn. She comes to recall only the immutable experience of loss, both on her person and in her own mind, describing her seduction as a visceral sundering of her being. As she writes in her final letter to her parents,

“[. . .] even in the moment when, forgetful of my duty, I  
fled from you and happiness, even then I loved you most,  
and my heart bled at the thought of what you would suffer.  
Oh! never, never! whilst I have existence, will the agony of  
that moment be erased from my memory. It seemed like  
the separation of soul and body.” (79-80)

The “separation of soul and body” that Charlotte describes once again evokes the “revolting” corporeal violence of civil war discourse from the 1770s. But Charlotte’s comments here also echo Lucy’s funereal fantasy from the opening chapters in unsettling

ways. Lucy's perfection expresses itself as a kind of auratic emptiness. She reflects the image of her father automatically, so that what she says refers back to him to such an extent that she seems unable to entertain the thought of living without him. In her fallen state, Charlotte also compulsively reflects on her parents; her mind fills up with their ineradicable memory, even when she is not thinking—even in the moment when she is “forgetful of her duty.” Memory can hurt her whether she exercises it or not; when her mind is empty, her heart still bleeds, she is in agony, she thinks of her parents’ suffering, she loves them most.

Alongside the example of her mother a generation earlier, Charlotte’s experience implies that whether they remember or “forget,” unmarried women have no choice but to remember their parents—and *either way* their lives will be consumed in the image of their parents. The mandatory compulsion to remember stays in place for Charlotte, then, just as it had for Lucy; the kinship between them as women is unbroken in this sense, though the life-preserving familial connection between them as mother and daughter has been fatally compromised. The difference between Lucy and Charlotte’s hyper-active memory of their parents is that Charlotte’s compulsion is no longer imbued with the promise of redemption which had shimmered around Lucy like a nimbus. To put this in Benjamin’s terms, Charlotte is now living allegorically, living *in* history as a passage of despair that she must also live *out* in the absence of salvation. Charlotte has become radically emblematic of the sorrow that produces her distress. She can no longer be transformed by the quantum leap from daughter to wife.

Part of what this means for Charlotte is that her allegorical image as “parricide” gains increasing purchase as a material expression of historical reality. Charlotte’s horror of her own forgetfulness (and of being forgotten in turn) appears to her in two terrifying visions that work out the mnemonic violence of her seduction in literal, corporeal terms. She recounts her first nightmare:

At other times I see my father angry and frowning, point to  
horrid caves, where, on the cold damp ground, in the  
agonies of death, I see my dear mother and my reverend  
grand-father. I strive to raise you; you push me from you,  
and shrieking cry—‘Charlotte, thou hast murdered me!’  
  
Horror and despair tear every tortured nerve. (81)

Differently than in her letter to her parents, where Charlotte’s pain at separation is the ostensible subject of discussion, in this moment Charlotte sees her own guilt and grief as functions of her parents’ agony—the metaphorics of the heart are cast now cast outwardly as corporeal truths. Charlotte’s person is not the dwelling-place of her own despair, which has instead taken on a robust and terrifying sensorial life of its own: one with scopic (“I see”), sonic (“shrieking”), tactile (“you push me”), and even environmental qualities (“horrid caves,” “cold damp ground”). Just as importantly, her nightmare *correctly* realizes the parricidal logic of her parents’ initial reaction to her disappearance: that Charlotte has “forgotten” her duty to them. In the politics of rebellion established by “The Parricide” (fig. 2), this means that she has murdered them.

As time passes and Charlotte's situation worsens, her allegorical visions completely consume her, crossing over from psychological to a physical reality and eventually claiming her life. Charlotte's experience of memory had always been a strange mix of the metaphoric and the concrete (a "heart" which bleeds), but she witnesses her own parricidal nightmares with an acute sense of her body's dismemberment. Coupled with Charlotte's earlier statement that her soul and her body separate from one another at the instant in which she leaves her family, it would appear that Charlotte's forgetfulness initiates a rift in her being that grows wider and more intense the longer she remains outside her family circle. But it is not until after childbirth that her eclipse is complete. Deranged after giving birth to a daughter, she does not recognize herself as the mother of her child but fixates on yet another matricidal hallucination:

‘Oh,’ said she one day, starting up on hearing the infant cry, ‘why, why will you keep that child here; I am sure you would not if you knew how hard it was for a mother to be parted from her infant: it is like the tearing of life asunder.

Oh could you see the horrid sight which I now behold—there—there stands my dear mother, her poor bosom bleeding at every vein, her gentle, affectionate heart torn in a thousand pieces, and all for the loss of a ruined,

ungrateful child. Save me—save me—from her frown. I

dare not—indeed I dare not speak to her.' (111)

The “tearing” that haunts the narrative—of mother from daughter, daughter from country, of letters, hymens, hearts—reaches its dramatic conclusion where it starts, in the subversion of Charlotte’s conscious mind, this time for keeps. The allegory of seduction is completely coterminous with life (or rather, death). The daughter who forgets her family by leaving them murders them, and since a daughter’s memory is co-extensive with that of her family, the “parricidal” daughter kills herself.

So Charlotte Temple’s problems turn out to be in her head after all, as it is in a very real sense her memory that kills her. Or rather, she seems to be killed by what is supposed to be her constitutive inability, as a woman, to forget her parents. The trouble seems to be that female memory and forgetting look and feel very similar. If you remember (like Lucy), you might end up in your father’s grave; if you forget, your visions of parricide will kill you. But as Charlotte’s experience shows, there is no female forgetting; Charlotte’s memory remembers even when it doesn’t. Nor is it true that her parents forgot her. Despite their initial reaction, the Temples search for Charlotte, hope to hear from her, and wish to bring her home. Charlotte’s first letter to them is intercepted and destroyed by Montraville, but a second reaches them toward the narrative’s conclusion. Lucy immediately takes it as proof that Charlotte “has not quite forgot us” and she expresses unqualified enthusiasm for Charlotte’s retrieval: “‘Oh!’ said Mrs Temple, ‘I would if possible fly to her, support and cheer the dear sufferer [ . . ].

Cannot we go and conduct her home, my love?" " (90). The Temples' reactions reveal that the descent from seduction to death that Charlotte experiences as inexorable was in fact reversible all along. Even the narrator chimes in to aver that Charlotte's belief in her own irreclaimable sin is an illusion. Shortly after Charlotte reads her first love letter from Montraville, the narrator remarks that: "Charlotte had taken one step in the ways of imprudence; and when that is once done, there are always innumerable obstacles to prevent the erring person returning to the path of rectitude: yet these obstacles, however forcible they may appear in general, *exist chiefly in imagination*" (36, my emphasis). She is forgiven, she can return, she wants to return, and yet she appears to be moved unswervingly toward destruction.

In the 1770s civil war discourse I discussed above, inexorable doom is the law of rebellion itself; it is not up for debate. But Rowson's novel deliberately yokes the allegory of rebellion-as-seduction to questions about female memory and embodiment in the social world. What appears in the prints and pamphlets as an inflexible Law of Nature (and would therefore demand Charlotte's death on those grounds alone in a straightforward accounting) thus emerges in Rowson's text as a proliferation of potentially unanswerable questions. *Why* does Charlotte seem doomed to die, why does this feel inevitable, when—as the Temples and the narrator both make clear—there is nothing intrinsically preordained about it in her case? Charlotte and Lucy's perfect filial memories are functionally identical, but for one of them memory is a ticket to redemption, and for the other despair, madness, and death. Why is this so? Who, or what, is to blame?

In order to ponder these questions, we have to start over, cycling back through the narrative for explanations that may not be forthcoming. The chief complicating factor in Charlotte's case is that her "forgetting" (already a highly suspect term) is the result of ministerial interference. Like representations of America in "The Parricide" (fig. 2) and Peter Oliver's account, Charlotte is urged to forget/kill her parents by someone—or some ones, or something—else. Like parricidal America, then, Charlotte's rebellion against her parents is merely the visible portion of a hidden agenda not necessarily her own. But whose? As Toni Bowers has shown, we have perhaps inherited a notion from the long eighteenth century "that men desire and women respond" which long eighteenth-century seduction stories labored to produce and to challenge. Bowers notes that "the century's paradigmatic seduction plot requires that female consent be originally absent and or latent and come into view only as a male achievement."<sup>54</sup> According to that logic, the first and most obvious candidate for blame is Charlotte's lover, Montraville. I have already suggested that his gendered entitlement *not* to think about what he is doing intersects with his father's injunction to marry well, with the result that Montraville's culpability is dispersed backwards along the paternal line, shared most specifically with his father and more broadly with the ideological system whose prerogatives he advances. Montraville's is a more complex case than it appears, and I will return to it (again) in the following section. For now I will simply note of Montraville that, like everyone else on the suspect

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<sup>54</sup> Bowers, *Force or Fraud: British Seduction Stories and the Problem of Resistance 1660-1760* (Oxford: OUP, 2011), 9.

list, his responsibility is only partially settled on his person. Blame in *Charlotte Temple* is spreading and genealogical, under- and overdetermined, at large. There will be too many (and not enough) explanations.

Interesting about Montraville for my present purposes is that he is only one of three prime suspects in Charlotte's seduction, along with Belcour (a supporting figure) and Mademoiselle La Rue, who is the main event. Indeed, I suggest that if there is an isolable moment in the text when Charlotte's seduction can be said to occur (and I hope to suggest that this is far from certain), it is the scene in which Charlotte first reads a letter from Montraville, who is nowhere nearby at the time. The guilty party in that scene is ostensibly La Rue. As many other readers of *Charlotte Temple* have noted, La Rue is plainly cast as the villain of the text; her name makes this apparent, as it puns on the French *la rue*, for "road," as well as the English verb "to rue," or regret—she is the road to rue and ruin. A convent escapee with a chequered past, La Rue cuts a dashing figure in the novel that is irresistibly exciting both from a contemporary feminist perspective and for Charlotte herself. She is the only woman in *Charlotte Temple* who tells her own story, which she is capable of inventing and re-inventing to suit her needs. She is also the only woman in the novel who openly expresses sexual desire. The narrator tut-tuts that La Rue has "lived with several different men in open defiance of all moral and religious duties" (26), and in the course of *Charlotte Temple* she takes at least three male lovers (Belcour, Crayton, and Corydon). She wields powerful seductive appeal for women as well. Remarks the narrator:

I have said her person was lovely; [ . . . ] he must know but little of the world who can wonder, (however faulty such a woman's conduct,) at her being followed by the men, and

*her company courted by the women:* in short [ . . . ] Mrs.

Crayton was the universal favorite: she set the fashions, she was toasted by all the gentlemen, and *copied by all the ladies.* (100, my emphasis)

La Rue confounds heterosexual scripts in which men initiate and women receive. Indeed, she subverts any orderly distinction between activity and passivity, for instance by seducing men with stories in which she casts herself as a wronged penitent, which is how she “awakens a passion” in Crayton, who marries her (58). At other times, as in the quotation above, men “follow” her, but they do so as puppies and not as wolves. To follow the road of La Rue is not to pursue (in sense of hunting or chasing), but to obey, attend, or copy.

The connotative link between following and copying is most obvious when La Rue is in the company of women. In the passage above, women *court* La Rue and *copy* her fashions: activities whose overlap constitutes a category crisis in the text. The word “court” shares an etymological root with cohort, from the Latin, *cohors*, “yard or retinue.” The court is what surrounds (yard) and follows (retinue). As a noun in the context of royalty, the court is thus a collective body that encircles, ingratiates, and flatters; and of course, in romance, to court is to woo. The association with royalty that La Rue’s “followings” conjure is I think germane, for it suggests that La Rue is a queen. This

presents a gender paradox within the novel because La Rue is a woman who rules in a world of women who remember. She is also both a (female) sovereign and a (female) sex object in a system that otherwise does not allow for the coexistence of those categories. By simultaneously occupying roles that have been mutually excluded from one another, La Rue transforms them. As a trendsetter (“she set the fashions”), she exercises power through influence rather than decree—indeed, she reveals that this distinction itself may be pliable. La Rue’s association with “followings” thus underlines continuities between imitation and obedience which become particularly dangerous when she is surrounded by any and all other women, who, in this novel, have no faculty for resistance to persuasion and reflexively un-conceal their thoughts to authority.

One of the many delights La Rue provides is the running commentary she offers on Charlotte’s incapacity for guiltless pleasure, which La Rue refuses to take seriously (“Ruin! Fiddlestick!”), and which she seems dedicated to overturn by applying pressure to Charlotte’s credulity. Shortly before their departure for the colonies, for instance, Charlotte tells La Rue, “I have forgotten all that I ought to remember, in consenting to this intended elopement.” La Rue replies that Charlotte is a “strange girl” who does not “know her own mind” (44), and she is exactly right. Charlotte is not of one mind, or any mind at all, perhaps. She has been raised like her mother to yield up her intellect to parental impression, registering influence as authority without distinction.

The effects of La Rue’s influence on Charlotte are most visible in the letter scene. In this scene, Charlotte and La Rue return to their rooms at Madame Dupont’s boarding

school after meeting with Montraville and Belcour. Charlotte feels uncomfortable with the men's behavior and suggests that she and La Rue tell DuPont where they have been, a play from the Lucy Eldridge handbook of filial full disclosure. La Rue proceeds to shut her up with a series of strategies, not all of which work. When anger fails to produce results, La Rue tries guilt with more success: "perhaps it will give you pleasure to see me deprived of bread [ . . . ], lose my place and character, and be driven again into the world." The narrator writes that "this was touching Charlotte in the most vulnerable part." Charlotte "rises from her seat" and "take[s] Mademoiselle's hand": "I love you too well," she says, "to do anything that would injure you." The seduction at the heart of the novel is thus one between women, a moment of lesbian eroticism in which Charlotte rises in her seat at the touch of her "most vulnerable part," clasps hands with La Rue, utters a declaration of love. And all of this is being moderated by La Rue's queenly power to be more—and possibly less—than one thing at a time: narrator of and character in her own story, sovereign and sex object, crier of "hypocritical tears" (30).

Having won the advantage, La Rue moves to seal her claim by drawing Charlotte out on the subject of Montraville, correctly reasoning that Charlotte's complicity is the surest guarantee of her silence. Charlotte indicates that she has not read Montraville's letter, in remembrance of Lucy's command: "my mother has often told me, I should never read a letter given me by a young man, without first giving it to her" (31). Again, La Rue tests different strategies. She appeals first to Charlotte's reason—"judge for yourself"—which predictably goes nowhere. After that, curiosity ("he writes a good hand"), reverse psychology ("I think he is marked with the small pox")—and finally, memory.

Montraville might die in America, La Rue says, yet Charlotte will not alleviate his amorous suffering “by permitting him to think [she] would remember him when absent” (32). Eureka. Charlotte sheds a tear, and begins to read.

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The most obvious difference between the Lucy and Charlotte narratives is that Lucy never had to contend with La Rue. And one of the differences between *Charlotte Temple* and the 1770s civil war discourse of rebellion is that the shadowy minister at America’s side is not a Whig MP, as in “The Parricide,” or “Adams & his Posse,” as in Peter Oliver’s *Origin and Progress*. It’s France. La Rue’s presence thus appears to deplore the colonies’ wartime French alliance, without which they would almost certainly not have prevailed. When the novel was first published in Philadelphia in 1794, moreover, Louis Capet had been executed and the Reign of Terror was underway. France’s own benighted child, Haiti, was in the process of reinventing freedom, and France itself was in flames. Even at its first publication in 1791, but especially after 1794, Rowson’s text thus might also be taken anachronistically to deplore the American rebellion as the work of French and, possibly by extension, Haitian Revolutionary anarchy, and to defend British imperial arrangements in the process. The novel is peppered with Francophobic sentiment, from Eldridge’s chastisement of Du Pont for allowing Charlotte to go out “with no other company or protector than that French woman” (49) to the fact that every character in the novel who plays a direct part in Charlotte’s seduction also has a Francophone name: Belcour, Montraville, Du Pont, La

Rue.<sup>55</sup> This is so even though only Du Pont (the bridge) and La Rue (the road) are French nationals.

If we linger even with this rather pat schematic for a moment, then the grief unleashed by *Charlotte Temple* emerges not as a proto-U.S. national binding agent, but rather as an *unbinding* expression of colonial regret for Revolution as “revolt.” France seduced America away from her mother; it was a catastrophe, all are punished, THE END is near. This is extraordinary in the sense that it unclasps the ideological latch that fastens Revolutionary time to a U.S. nationalist historical telos, erupting the linear march of history with a vision of loss that loops backwards in an impossible longing for home. In this way, *Charlotte Temple* gives voice to a doomed epistemology of independence that was as dangerous in 1791-4 as it is now because it breaks faith with liberal constructions of the American Revolution as an absolute departure from the colonial past. If you leave, you must perish. *Charlotte Temple* reactivates the “strain of compunction” that runs through 1770s civil war discourse, remembering what Jefferson had so ineffectually endeavored to forget. On this accounting, Charlotte Temple dies because in the time of the novel (1780-2) and in the time of its publication (1791-4), it seemed *too late* to turn back: the damage had been done, the blow had been struck. But perhaps even more importantly, Charlotte Temple cannot go home because other interests are involved, as a 1782 print entitled “The Reconciliation” (fig. 4) makes clear. America tries to return

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<sup>55</sup> This by itself is not unusual for eighteenth-century seduction stories; it had been a convention as far back as the amatory fiction by Aphra Behn, Delarivier Manley, and Eliza Haywood in the 1680s-1720s.

to her mother's embrace, but—as for Charlotte—reconciliation is just out of reach.

Foreign powers pull her away. Rebellion is catching.

However, as in “The Parricide,” the politics of this allegory are still ambiguous. The inculpation of French infamy in *Charlotte Temple* raises more questions than it answers, and tells us nothing about *why* or *how* La Rue is able to breach Charlotte’s defenses, which is Rowson’s chief concern. We have to start again, cycling back, and what we find is that blame ricochets off La Rue in myriad directions. As Bowers puts it, “seduction” remain[s] ambidextrous, pointing in too many directions, meaning too much.<sup>56</sup> What was La Rue—or, for that matter, Charlotte—even doing at that school? Would things have played out differently if Montraville and Belcour had not been in Portsmouth, awaiting deployment to a piteous civil war? And the kicker: what kind of ideal can the Temples, and especially Lucy, be said to represent when it makes Charlotte so helpless? One of the startling effects of the linkage Rowson forges between parricidal allegory and gendered critique in *Charlotte Temple* is that it draws British imperial identity and patriarchal oppression simultaneously into question. While La Rue clearly plays a key role in Charlotte’s seduction, she is not ultimately responsible for it. The argument that works on Charlotte is the compulsion to remember that is the hallmark of her feminine virtue, as it was for her mother before her. In an important sense, then, Charlotte does not forget her duty to her parents when she reads Montraville’s letter; she remembers it too well. After all, La Rue is *in loco parentis*; the Temples have invested her with authority whether they know it or not. Charlotte’s seduction is the culmination

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<sup>56</sup> Toni Bowers, *Force or Fraud: British Seduction Stories and the Problem of Resistance, 1660-1760* (Oxford: OUP, 2011), 18.



Fig. 4. "The Reconciliation between Britania and her daughter America" (1782). America says, "Dear Mama say no more about it." Britannia says, "Be a good girl and give me a buss [kiss]." France and Spain pull America away. British Cartoon and Prints Collection, Library of Congress.

of her parents' values. She fails exactly as the perfect daughter of "perfect" people *would fail*, is doomed to fail—because, as a woman, she is not supposed to have a mind of her own. So if Charlotte's demise opens a portal in time for lost children's expression of regret, it likewise demands a reckoning from the parents who ordained their loss by requiring women to bear the burden of memory—the strain of compunction—at all costs.

And in fact that kind of soul-searching is in evidence all over 1770s-90s Britain. The mutual entailment of state-sponsored forms of extra-national oppression (imperial expansion, slavery, war) with persecutory domestic governance (especially around class and gender) is one of the foremost preoccupations of the British Romantic generation,

particularly in writings by women for whom this nexus of issues was arguably less of a surprise than it was for their male compatriots. Edmund Burke's career offers a useful example of how the imbrication of British imperial and domestic ideologies was negotiated in the specific case of the American colonies. In the 1770s, Burke had feverishly attempted to broker "the peace of the empire" in the language of parental forbearance, for instance in his "Address to the Colonies of North America" (1777): "[. . .] we conjure you [. . .] not [to] suffer yourselves to be persuaded, or provoked, into an opinion, that you are at war with this nation. [. . .] Much delusion has been practiced; much corrupt influence treacherously employed."<sup>57</sup> Later that year, the situation seemed to have become hopeless, and Burke reflected miserably in his "Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol" (1777) that "the American English [. . .] can, as things now stand, neither be provoked at our railing or bettered by our instruction. All communication is cut off between us."<sup>58</sup> Burke then turned inward, reasoning that—if nothing else—the deadlock was an opportunity for Britain to put her own house in order: "though we cannot reclaim them, we may reform ourselves" (283). What follows is a typically Burkean rumination on the nature of imperial power (is it *intrinsically* driven by cruelty and ambition?) that concludes, in a typically Burkean manner, with the affirmation that the "unsuspecting confidence" of colonies in the mother-country "is the true center of gravity amongst

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<sup>57</sup> Edmund Burke, "Address to the British Colonists in North America" (1777), *The Portable Edmund Burke*, Ed. Isaac Kramnick (New York: Penguin, 1999), 275.

<sup>58</sup> Edmund Burke, "A Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol on the Affairs of America" (1777), *The Portable Edmund Burke*, Ed. Isaac Kramnick (New York: Penguin, 1999), 283.

mankind.”<sup>59</sup> Writes Burke: “It is this *unsuspecting confidence* that removes all difficulties and reconciles contradictions which occur in the complexity of all ancient puzzled political establishments” (292). In sum, Burke reasons that the solution to Britain’s failure as an imperial parent lies in being a gentler parent, but *not* in dispensing with the normative expectation of infantile colonial—and indeed, female—dependence. In other words, he champions “unsuspecting confidence” as the power that will “reconcile contradiction” at the center of a reconsolidated liberal patriarchy *and* the empire under its thumb.<sup>60</sup>

I want to leave in play the possibility that *Charlotte Temple* calls for a reckoning with imperial identity—I think it *is* in play, along with a host of other interpretative possibilities, in the dense allegorical tangle of the text. That allegory sustains a multitudinous coexistence of interpretations that perhaps cannot be resolved along a single course is precisely what interests me about it. However, it seems to me that one thing *Charlotte Temple* does *not* advocate is a recommitment to “unsuspecting confidence” along the lines that Burke suggests. Indeed, Charlotte’s inability to forget her parents shows that this is precisely the problem; she is automatically unsuspecting, and it kills her. There is no point denying that the identification of La Rue with France allows for a reactionary reading (don’t send your kids to boarding school! remember

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<sup>59</sup> My reading of Burke’s liberal patriarchal thought is strongly indebted to Claudia Johnson’s masterful accounts of how women’s literature negotiates party debate in the Romantic period. See *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); and *Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender, and Sentimentality in the 1790s—Wollstonecraft, Radcliffe, Burney, Austen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

<sup>60</sup> As scholars of British empire have shown, this is precisely the ideology that would underwrite British abolitionist projects, as well as Britain’s imperial incursions into Africa, India, Australia, the Caribbean, and greater Asia, in the early decades of the nineteenth century and beyond. See n.51.

your parents! retreat into the bosom of the empire!). I suggest that this is a risk Rowson takes, and it is quite possible that it is also something she intended. However, in a careful reading of the text, such a reading becomes inadequate, for it requires that La Rue be only one thing at a time (France), when she is always more—and maybe less. In fact, there is a countervailing movement in *Charlotte Temple* against national prejudice that complicates the assignation of blame to La Rue as an allegorical figure for France. For instance, Eldridge recants his bias to Du Pont—“Pardon me, Madam, I mean no reflections on your country” (49)—and there is also a counter-instance to blanket Francophobia in the character of Mrs. Beauchamp, Colonel Crayton’s daughter, who has a French mother and a British father and is instrumental in helping Charlotte contact her parents from New York.

The key for Rowson is going to be that the empire and the patriarchy were both rigged for calamity because women’s (and colonies’) “unsuspecting confidence”—their inability to forget their parents—made them unable to deal with the problem La Rue represents, which cannot be nationally contained. Burke presents “unsuspecting confidence” as the salvation of British patriarchal and imperial power, the solution to the complexity of “ancient puzzled political establishments.” Rowson suggests the opposite. Indeed, the mechanism that gains La Rue access to Du Pont’s school is the influence of influence on “unsuspecting confidence.” La Rue is recommended to Du Pont by “a lady whose humanity overstepped the bounds of discretion” (26). Having heard and pitied La Rue’s tale of woe, she presents La Rue to Du Pont under the sign of her approval. The narrator hastens to add that Du Pont herself is “a woman in every way calculated to take the care of young ladies” (26). Du Pont just makes a bad call, and perhaps an inevitable

one, because what she responds to through La Rue's intermediary is the queenly power which is La Rue's exclusive preserve: having "insides" and "outsides" that do not match, telling stories whose appearance is different from reality. La Rue can part surfaces from depths, and she cannot therefore help but ruin and destroy women's acculturated "unsuspecting confidence" because what she reveals in their presence is a desire for narrative they never knew they had. In other words, La Rue represents symbolic representation, the splitting of the signifier from the signified. Consequently, she animates the desire for narrative that makes reading a pleasure and storytelling possible. La Rue is the reason Rowson's allegory is a novel.

To see how this works, we have to go back to the letter scene. Rowson's other feminist readers have identified the key scene of Charlotte's seduction at different points in the text. Stern, for instance, identifies it with Charlotte's birthday, when Charlotte—full of resolve to say good-bye to Montraville—instead faints into his arms in a chaise as it drives away. Writes Stern: "Charlotte is rendered passive at the crucial moment, since to assent to such brutal divorce from her family would be unthinkable."<sup>61</sup> I concur with Stern's reading of this moment, but I would add that part of what is important about the chaise scene is that it unsettles distinctions between abduction and elopement typically predicated on consent; it is very difficult to tell whether Charlotte gets into the chaise or is drawn into it.<sup>62</sup> But I shall insist that the letter scene is more important because it

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<sup>61</sup> Stern, *The Plight of Sympathy: Sympathy and Dissent in the Early American Novel* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1997), 52.

<sup>62</sup> Once again, I am indebted to Toni Bowers's work for this insight. "From the middle ages to the seventeenth century, 'rape' (*raptus*) could be used to denote what we now understand as two separate actions, neither of which would be called 'rape' today: abduction and elopement." Bowers notes that "rape" shifted meaning over the course of the eighteenth century to denote forced sexual intercourse, while

exposes a problematic of desire in the text, and in the colonies' rebellion, that La Rue brings into focus. Indeed, the narrator at one point proclaims: "it is now past the days of romance: no woman can be run away with contrary to her inclination" (29). In one way, this is obviously untrue in the world of the novel, which (much like our own) does not appear to have a concept of female consent by which the distinction between enthusiastic participation and coercion could be consistently or adequately adjudicated. But the narrator calls attention to a key word here—*inclination*—that Charlotte uses throughout the novel. Shortly before the chaise scene, for instance, Charlotte tells La Rue: "[. . .] while discretion points out the impropriety of my conduct, inclination urges me on to ruin" (44). Because Charlotte has been raised to be impressionable, she is constitutively unable to negotiate competing impressions. When challenged to do so, weighing La Rue against her parents, she responds by entering a sort of volitional mitosis, her will sundering in two parts ("discretion" and "inclination") which she cannot reconcile.

Here, at last, we encounter the critical point of divergence between Charlotte and Lucy's stories—the key to this plaguing question of Charlotte's inexorable doom—because Charlotte has something that her mother did not: "inclination," or desire. In many ways, La Rue is Desire itself; she sheds infrared light on inclination wherever she goes, and everywhere she goes, she finds it. The moment in which La Rue shines her beacon on Charlotte's inclination is in the letter scene, and more specifically, in the twinned seductions of La Rue's tears and Montraville's text. For if Charlotte and La

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"seduction" maintained the ambiguity that "rape" once carried. *Force or Fraud* (Oxford: OUP, 2011), 12-20.

Rue's exchange in the first instance of their lesbian encounter reveals Charlotte's desire for Desire, the second makes good on that revelation by calling forth Charlotte's desire for narrative. La Rue's successful appeal to Charlotte's memory is at the same time a powerful act of storytelling:

He [Montraville] is most probably going to America; and if ever you should hear any account of him, it may possibly be that he is killed; and though he loved you ever so fervently, though his last breath should be spent in a prayer for your happiness, it can be nothing to you: you can feel nothing for the fate of the man, whose letters you will not open, and whose sufferings you will not alleviate, by permitting him to think you would remember him when absent, and pray for his safety. (32)

Upon review, it seems that what La Rue has actually done here is to link an imperative Charlotte recognizes (remembrance) to something Charlotte's upbringing has conditioned her to want because it is denied to her. La Rue tells Charlotte a story about herself: a story of which Charlotte is the subject in more than one sense. In this story, Charlotte is the focus of Montraville's thoughts, but from a distance. This is of the utmost importance, because it means that in the story that seduces her, Charlotte's value to Montraville has been abstracted from her person; she doesn't need to be present in order for him to long for her. Another way of saying this is that she is a symbol in this story; her material presence and its abstract signification have been split from one another. To

restate in still another way, the narrative persona which La Rue conjures for Charlotte is a liberal subject: one with insides and outsides that do not line up, and which can therefore circulate somewhat autonomously from one another. Montraville is not what Charlotte desires. She desires Desire. She desires narrative. She wants to be the heroine of her own tale, to elope and not to be abducted, to bear something other than the strain of compunction by acceding to the power that La Rue flourishes so well: to wield authority as influence, to be representative. How could she not? She was born to want it—she just didn't know until now.

And so the American Revolution began in a women's bedroom with the awakening of desire for Desire. Or did it? Crucially important about the way that La Rue slips out of allegory (France) and into hyper-symbolic personification (Desire) is that her uncontainability exposes the givenness of rupture in the historical order from which Revolution claimed to have made its mad break. La Rue does not *produce* desire; she brings it forth from its hiding places by calling attention to the fact that it was already there. What Charlotte experiences as she fantasizes about being the heroine of her own tale is not precisely a splitting of discretion from inclination, therefore, but the *consciousness* of inclination as an energy that is separate from discretion. The narrator's statement that "no woman can be run away with contrary to her inclination" is in that sense a temporal paradox, because Charlotte's experience suggests that no woman can be run away with unless she is aware of her inclination as an appetite of its own: an awareness that seems to demand a spectral concept of consent by which the dictates of inclination can then be retrospectively evaluated. But what is really key about the

emergence of this consciousness of split forces in opposition (signifier/signified, insides/outsides, discretion/inclination) is that it cannot be satisfied by the very narrativity that it simultaneously seems to demand. Charlotte will never be the heroine of the story that La Rue tells about her, yet Charlotte's desires for that story and the version of herself that it represents will move her to pursue them in a manner that can only end in disaster because what she seeks does not exist. Its allure lies in its very ficticity. Desire instantiates a different modality of historical—and, indeed, sexual—experience called narrative that it seems to summon out of thin air. We can seek but never find the causes and origins of this modality because it simultaneously has none, and too many. And it is thrilling, but also sorrowful, because it is moved by the terminal non-coincidence of fantasy with fulfillment. One of its old names is Sin. Another is “modernity.”

*Charlotte Temple* usefully theorizes “modernity” as an experience of history that is activated by Desire: one that is inhabited by a split, aspirational subject who imagines herself in narrative form. La Rue is the closest thing in *Charlotte Temple* to modernity—the “impossible” breach in the temporal and semiotic order that rebellion represents—because she is the Desire that sets it in motion. As a result, she cannot be allegorized, by which I mean that she cannot be held or winnowed in form, not even by time, because she is the very force that cleaves truths from substances. *Charlotte Temple* identifies the emergence of modernity with a Revolutionary chronology, but La Rue reveals that the desire which set it off was there all along, nestled in the unbroken orb of Charlotte's mind and dispersed along the chain of her inheritances. In other words, La Rue reveals that there is no going back because there is nothing to go back to—the history that brought

Charlotte into being is also what makes her ruin inexorable. As Desire, La Rue therefore has an acutely destabilizing temporal effect that is captured in one of the meanings of “following”: to trail behind, to come after. La Rue sets the fashions. She produces temporal lag; everything in her wake feels old, slow, and outmoded. Desire is a force to contend with time itself because it is one of her courtiers. La Rue pulls time in her train.

The problem is that once history is driven by Desire, it is set on a linear course that feels unstoppable. La Rue is thus associated throughout the novel with her own temporality, figured most often as a rapidly spinning wheel: the encircling throng of the women who court her, for instance, or the wheels of the chaise that bear Charlotte away. At another moment, the narrator launches into one of her many exhortations to the reader: “Ye giddy flatterers in the fantastic round of dissipation, who eagerly seek pleasure in the lofty dome, rich treat, and midnight revel [ . . . ]” (34). Here La Rue’s influence is associated with a kind of merry-go-round of sensual indulgence, very much like Oliver’s invocation of the “Wheel of Enthusiasm.” The most significant example is the sole use of the word “revolution” in *Charlotte Temple*, which appears in conjunction with La Rue on the journey to New York: “[ . . . ] during the voyage a great revolution took place not only in the fortune of La Rue but in the bosom of Belcour” (59). What “revolution” seems to describe in this instance is an advance that actually goes nowhere; La Rue has exchanged one lover (Belcour) for another (Crayton), and Belcour has locked onto Charlotte as his next target. The quality connecting all of La Rue’s revolving temporal signifiers is a sense of hurried interchangeability, and I want to take seriously the possibility *Charlotte*

*Temple* ponders that for all La Rue's majesty, something is lost when she becomes the Queen of History.

What has been lost is difficult to describe, because La Rue's sparkling presence makes everything she displaces seem foolish and retrograde. Benjamin associates it in a muted form with emblems, which he discusses in conjunction with rebuses, or "thing-pictures" (*dingbilder*).<sup>63</sup> Heidegger calls it the "thingness" of things. Both of them use the word "thing" very specifically as a counterpoint to objects, which always exist in relation to subjects and are strongly identified with commoditization. What the "thing" resists, in Heidegger's words, is "the frantic abolition of all distances [that] brings no nearness."<sup>64</sup> Things are non-representationally identical to themselves; hence they do not bear value that is fully divestible from their material presence. According to the logic of capital, they are useless; their charm is only available in intimacies that unfold in the absence of awe or appropriative exchange (Heidegger's famous examples include a piece of chalk, a country bridge, and a jug).<sup>65</sup> When modernity splits the sign and peels meaning from substance, things are what suffer. In Rowson's terms, it might be possible to say that what is lost when Desire drives history forward (and trails time in her wake) is

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<sup>63</sup> See Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, Trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1999), 365-67; *Trauerspiel*, Trans. John Osborne, (London: Verso, 2009), esp. 162-63; 186-200.

<sup>64</sup> Martin Heidegger, "The Thing," *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper, 1971), 163. See also *What is a Thing?* 1935-36. Trans. W.B. Barton, Jr. and Vera Deutsch (South Bend, IN: Regnery/Gateway, 1967).

<sup>65</sup> My reading of "things" as being fundamentally useless is inflected by Bill Brown, who emphasizes this strand of Heidegger's thought and attends to the ways in which commodities can become things when they stop working properly, thus revealing our affective investments in them. See Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 28:1 (2001), 1-22.

a meaningful relationship to what symbolism calls “form” or “surface,” not as antitheses to content/depth, but as complex realities in their own right.<sup>66</sup> Rowson does not champion the reconsolidation of “unsuspecting confidence,” which she shows to be a profoundly compromised regime of oppressive power that unilaterally imposes the strain of compunction on women and condemns them to molder in their parents’ graves. But one of the problems with La Rue as an alternative is that the form of feminist resistance she represents is also one she necessitates by virtue of her symbolic function. The only way to survive La Rue is to become La Rue. Yet if we all became La Rues, the price we would pay is the price of liberal modernity. We would have to accept the logic of the commodity and become aware of insides and outsides as separate orders of meaning, and we would have to accept that history is a linear narrative through which we spin our wheels into nothing.

It has not been my purpose here to imply that Rowson is “anti-imperial” in the sense that we may now take that term to indicate a commitment to the abolition of the empire within a legible political platform or a project of reform. In the partisan terms of the Romantic period, *Charlotte Temple* expresses grief in a way could easily have been

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<sup>66</sup> The turn to “surface reading” represents a recent scholarly effort, inspired by Sedgwick’s “reparative reading,” to recapture “what is evident, perceptible, apprehensible in texts” (9), as Sharon Marcus and Stephen Best write in the influential special issue of *Representations*. Best and Marcus advance surface reading as a counterpoint to symptomatic reading. I am not sure I have fully worked out the extent to which my interest in “thingliness” and reading with the grain overlaps with what Best, Marcus, and others describe as “surface reading.” Certainly there is a kinship between us, particularly in the aversion we share to parsing latent from manifest meaning. I believe if I have reservations, they have to do first with my commitments to historicism and second, with the way in which “surface reading” has been defined in opposition to Marxist, feminist, and deconstructionist methodologies, when I tend instead to see high degrees of compatibility between reading “surfaces” and the resources afforded by these other major theoretical approaches—particularly through post-structuralism and historical materialism. See Sharon Marcus and Stephen Best, “Surface Reading: An Introduction,” Special Issue: “The Way We Read Now,” *Representations* 108:1 (2009): 1-21.

co-opted by reactionary interests of the British patriarchal/imperial establishments (and indeed those of the U.S.), particularly because it represents France as a villain. I have not meant to imply that this possibility is off the table. But I have tried to show that *Charlotte Temple*'s politics actually exceed national, ideological, and partisan explanations, and that the text reflects on empire in radically alienated terms. The allegorical reading I have been sketching goes something like this: empire was (and is) a doomed exercise, predicated on female (and colonial) erasure, whose failure in the form of America's rebellion was internally established long before it happened, not as a modality of triumphal, linear development but rather in the fatalities of systemic patriarchal corruption. The transgression that Charlotte—and America—committed was preordained by the injustice of the order that produced her, because that order had no mechanism for female (or colonial) desire. Empire was a field sown with error that sprung up as Sin. It was both doomed to fail and potentially not worth saving—but its failure came at an incalculable cost to all involved. We cannot go back to the way it was before, and we cannot go forward either; restoration is impossible, and Revolution has stripped away the meanings from things. The legacy of our parents has betrayed us. Likewise, modernity cannot be stopped once it is summoned into action. There is nothing to be done about Desire; she is inexorable, she cannot be taught away. We are too late, and we have always been too late. Our sorrow is boundless. What remains to us? Mortification, or allegory.

Indeed, the counter-measure that Rowson adopts in the midst of the historical impasse that civil war brings forth is allegory. In addition to structuring the novel around the allegory of parricide, Rowson thematizes emblematic and allegorical reading within

the text as a practice that involves non-appropriative intimate relations between surfaces (not as antitheses to contents/depths, but as complex realities in their own right). What Rowson will suggest is that if we cannot undo our undoing, we can endure it by learning how to remember differently—that is, *not* as a reflexive response—by re-learning how to read. What remains is mortification. But it just might put us back in touch with the world.

#### **IV. Revolutionizing Allegory**

One of the ways of talking about Charlotte's—and British colonial America's—seduction is as a crisis of reading brought about by modernity that may have occurred in her father's generation, or possibly before ("modernity" is not an isolable phenomenon in history). Many scholars have identified reading as a central concern of *Charlotte Temple*, usually by calling attention to Rowson's apparently contradictory use of fiction in order pedagogically to disclaim the dangers of fiction, a long-standing pattern in eighteenth-century Anglophone novels. What I want to propose in this section is a little bit different: Rowson uses narrative to recall the reader to allegory. This is a paradox, but not necessarily a contradiction, because (as I have attempted to suggest) in the allegorical paradigm with which Rowson is working, the pedagogy of avoidance might be out of the question: inclination cannot be taught away, the war has been fought, we are too late. While Rowson's narrator does interject to deliver moral lessons to her readers in the course of the narrative, I propose that *Charlotte Temple*'s most consistent pedagogical design is to re-sensitize its audience to allegorical reading practices. What thus plays out

across the generational saga of Lucy and Charlotte's stories is a drama of good and bad reading that revolves around emblems, symbols, and allegory.

We have to start over, cycle back to the Lucy narrative. When Henry Temple first lays eyes on Lucy, he sees "a lovely creature busied in painting a fan mount. She was fair as the lily, but sorrow had nipped the rose in her cheek before it was half blown" (13). In this scene, Lucy's physical presence is consistently associated with decorative or impressed "surfaces"—in this case, a fan mount, a lily, and a rose. But note that the rose in Lucy's cheek simultaneously has a kind of concrete materiality (it has been "nipped") as well as a more abstract set of associations. The rose is not a symbol of sorrow: sorrow is what has nipped it. The rose in Lucy's cheek is thus a place in her flesh that time has touched; it is an aesthetic mark of Lucy's positionality as *matter* that is in contact with historical pressure. The rose, therefore, is not a representation per se, because it comes into view as an effect of its nipping. It is incompletely available to transfiguration, potentially like Lucy herself, even though it registers the touch of time in beautiful terms, as a "flowering." The rose might therefore be described as an emblem, a highly specific aesthetic form that Benjamin associates with a metaphoric sensuality that "avoids constant emphasis of its basically metaphoric character."<sup>67</sup> Emblems are forms of abstract-concretion that cannot be fully vaporized into signification.

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<sup>67</sup> Benjamin, *Trauerspiel*, 198.

The narrator makes Lucy's emblematicity explicit in the text. Indeed, shortly after he first sees Lucy (and before she has uttered a single word), Temple witnesses her crying:

Temple cast his eye on Miss Eldridge: a pellucid drop had stolen from her eyes, and fallen upon a rose she was painting. It blotted and discoloured the flower. " 'Tis emblematic,' said he mentally: "the rose of youth and health soon fades when watered by the tear of affliction." (13-14)

Lucy is a rebus, or "thing-picture." She appears to Temple as a constellation of interacting emblems—a tear that falls on a rose and discolors it—which draws him into relation with her. By reading the emblems, he is able to tell a story about her in his mind. However, the story he tells is non-narrative; it is "emblematic." When affliction waters the rose of youth, the rose of youth soon fades. I want to make two points about this. The first is that neither Lucy nor Henry are constructed as "subjects" by virtue of the emblematic significance Henry draws from her tears, by which I mean that they do not relate as subjects do to objects, or subjects to subjects. This is not about sympathy, which fantasizes an affectively transparent relation between two entities who both have insides and outsides. Sympathy is about accessing another person's interior reality imaginatively, while emblematic reading has to do with the way time stamps itself on matter. This leads me to my second point, which is that the "story" Henry tells about Lucy's tears is not a story—it is non-linear. The crush of sorrow on youth is a

cosmological force that has been brought to bear on Lucy in her moment of grief. This is what the emblem tells Henry about Lucy: that they are both *subject to* time, that they are both at the mercy of forces beyond their control. Henry and Lucy are drawn into relation in the same way that the rose relates to time: as common matter.

As Benjamin points out, part of what is important about emblems is that they have a kind of inalienable noun-ness that is unavailable for wholesale metaphoric expropriation (they can be only partially metaphorized). Emblems thus hold something in reserve, not as a quantity they possess intrinsically (i.e. on the “inside”), but as a characteristic of their material life. As a result, emblematic reading tends to slow down time, as we see in the passage above, where Henry takes time to ponder the falling of a tear and generates out of what he has seen a story-that-is-not-one about the timeless force of suffering. While Henry and Lucy’s emblematic encounter is erotic, Desire is not what drives the history in which Henry’s love for her burgeons into being. More importantly for my purposes, Lucy is not used up in signification as a consequence of Henry’s emblematic reading of her body. As Henry’s friend had put it before introducing him to the Eldridges, Lucy is indeed “a fine subject to exercise the goodness of [his] heart upon” (12), but part of what this seems to involve is that Lucy pulls a part of Henry’s heart into herself—into her physical presence—as much as he draws meaning from her tears. Henry’s “heart” thus also becomes sensually metaphoric by virtue of his reading.

As I have already tried to show, however, the tipping point for Henry is Lucy’s expression of memorial devotion to her father: her desire to be buried with Eldridge’s body. It is this statement to which Henry most forcefully responds, setting off the

commoditizing process that results in Lucy's transfiguration from daughter to wife. She will be exchanged for money because she has no "insides." The moment in which Henry enters into a history that is activated by Desire, then, is also the one in which a surface/depth distinction takes hold of Lucy, or the moment in which she ceases to be "thingly" and becomes a hard surface: a mirror. Henry is impelled to take action, mortgage his fortune, etc. because he is enchanted with the image of her father that Lucy compulsively reflects. Henry thus falls in love with the image of his own power over Lucy as a man, one with insides, One Who May Forget. Even within the Lucy and Henry narrative, then, there is an internal loop of regret for what was forsaken when Lucy ceased to be emblematic.

Yet this does not mean that a return to Lucy's emblematicity is called for in *Charlotte Temple*. Benjamin links emblems to the partial deterioration of the commodity form, but he also argues that allegory looks back at emblems with complex grief. The emblem glimmers with salvation which allegory knows to be impossible. What the emblem held out was not just the partial survival of things within a commoditizing logic, but the promise that they could construct forms of time and relationality that were unmoved by modernity. As a rebus, Lucy emblematises a possibility that was lost with La Rue: value that cannot be fully abstracted, the umbilical linkage between things and metaphors. And indeed, these possibilities *are* realized when Henry reads Lucy emblematically—a stillness settles in time in which both Lucy and Henry become sensually metaphoric. The problem is that commodification turns out to have been not just a pre-existing condition for emblematic reading (which we already knew), but the

tide that overtook it in order for Lucy to have a future. Lucy's emblematicity was bound up with her automatized memory, and that is what saved her. The Charlotte narrative thus looks back to Lucy-as-emblem with longing, but also from the knowledge that the promise she embodied was hopeless. As in Benjamin's account, therefore, emblem gives birth to allegory in *Charlotte Temple*, where allegory might be described as a radical emblem in which time scours through the rose to the bone. The task of allegory, as Benjamin put it, is then to wrangle its vision of a "home in the Fall" from the clutches of a kind of *mise en abime* that is still secretly actuated by the hope of redemption: falling "from emblem to emblem down into the dizziness of its bottomless depths."<sup>68</sup>

If Charlotte's seduction occurred before her birth in the moment that her father saw his power reflected in Lucy, it also transpired when Montraville received his paternal marching orders. Both Temple and Montraville disobey their fathers, but they do so in different ways, and with seemingly opposite results. Temple Sr. is an aristocratic boor, concerned with title, honor, and fossilized notions of tradition—he is thus legible as a Tory caricature. Henry's disobedience seems dignified because it entails an explicit refusal to subscribe to his father's view of women exclusively in terms of money or sex (though of course Henry does not eschew this view either). Montraville Sr. is a different case. His express reason for enjoining Montraville to marry well is that he, Montraville Sr., cannot provide wealth for his son, who must make his fortune on his own. If Montraville marries poorly, therefore, he will implicate "a deserving woman into scenes

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<sup>68</sup> Benjamin, *Trauerspiel*, 232-34.

of poverty and distress" (40) and incur his father's displeasure. Montraville Sr.'s rationale is thus superficially humanitarian but subtended by economic imperatives of male self-possession (make it on your own) and female commoditization (marry a wealthy wife) that end up licensing the very "poverty and distress" which he disclaims. Montraville Sr. is legible as a whiggish figure identified with a cluster of liberal values including thrift, acquisitive ambition, pious morality, and filial self-fashioning. I have already suggested that the "choice" between Temple and Montraville is not one—they are both implicated negatively in differential gendered expectations around memory, and they both ultimately exchange women for money. However, the liberal patriarchal line that gives rise to Montraville appears to have already been visited by modernity. Montraville Sr. is insidious because what he says and what he means do not line up. He says: do not cause women distress. He means: do not marry a poor woman and make yourself poor. His paternal law includes no provision for women Montraville might seduce but *not* marry, because he, like Temple Sr., only thinks about women in terms of property. The difference between Temple Sr. and Montraville Sr. is that the former openly signifies his avarice, while the latter does not. This means that Montraville's disobedience only seemed to be one: he is able to *obey* his father and seduce Charlotte at the same time. Where Montraville is concerned, then, Charlotte's seduction occurs in the vicious gap between the letter and the spirit of liberal patriarchy.

Montraville thus appears to have been pre-seduced by Desire because he has been taught to split signifiers from signifieds by his father. As a reader of signs, he habitually discards the apparent as superfluous, or addresses it only in fleeting, narcissistic fashion

as it pertains to himself. When he sees Charlotte in the first chapter, for instance, the narrator writes:

[. . .] the blush of recollection which suffused her cheeks as she passed, awakened in his bosom new and pleasing ideas.

Vanity led him to think that pleasure at again beholding him might have occasioned the emotion he had witnessed, and the same vanity led him to wish to see her again. (10)

There is no rose in Charlotte's cheek. She flushes with memory (they have met once before), and he reads it as "emotion," thus attributing it to an interior space in which he imagines her "pleasure" to dwell. Montraville automatically reads Charlotte's blush, then, as a physical symptom of deeper significance. He interprets her involuntary response as a symbol of her availability to his sexual prerogative, thus affirming his preconceived fantasy of himself as a sight to behold that produces delight in feminine interiors. In other words, in the story Montraville tells, Charlotte is made to have surfaces and depths insofar as this supports what Montraville already believes to be true about his own desirability. The blush itself is dismissed almost as quickly as it appears, a flash of color brushed aside in Montraville's haste to make meaning his own.

Montraville speculates on the flesh; it does not abide with other things in the pressure of history. As a result, Montraville cannot find meaning that is held in common, but hoards it away in the lordly domain of subjectivity. Born into the court of Desire, he is always in a hurry, and is therefore strongly associated with what I will call "bad allegory." In a key scene, for instance, Belcour stages a tableau to make it look as though

he and Charlotte have been sleeping together. When Montraville enters the room, “the first object that met his eyes was Charlotte asleep on the bed, and Belcour by her side” (84). He immediately flies into a rage, refuses to listen to Charlotte, and declares their connection to be over. The reason I call this “bad allegory” is that it is a hideous miscarriage of non-narrative, non-symbolic reading practice that petrifies its objects as “objects,” that is, the lifeless opposite of subjects. Bad allegory is allegory as it is construed from the point of view of symbolism, which does not assume that surfaces can be complicated and worthy of detailed consideration. Such being the case, bad allegorical reading strips meaning away from “objects” except down a single preconceived channel, in this case: “Treacherous, infamous girl” (84). Indeed, Belcour fed this reading to Montraville in advance by claiming that she has been “false” to Montraville with him (83). Montraville only sees what he is *inclined* to see, and what is closest at hand. His reading is governed by Desire.

Allegory appears to offer an alternative way of approaching shame and ruin for Rowson that does not rest on the parting of surface from depth. Part of what interests me about this is that it also—and for the same reason—recalibrates personhood and collectivity away from the individual, desiring subject. Rowson’s narrator quite often seems deeply invested in safeguarding Charlotte from personal rebuke, holding her in reserve of judgment as a thing of compassion. In one interjection, she addresses a matronly imaginary reader:

My dear Madam, [ . . . ] I mean not to extenuate the faults of those unhappy women who fall victims to guilt and folly; but surely, when we reflect how many errors we are ourselves subject to, how many secret faults lie hid in the recesses of our hearts, which we should blush to have brought into open day (and yet those faults require the lenity and pity of a benevolent judge, or awful would be our prospect of futurity) I say, my dear Madam, when we consider this, we surely may pity the faults of others. (68)

Charlotte appears here as an “unhappy victim” of vice and folly rather than as a woman who has chosen them for herself—she is presented in passive relation to the reader.

However, by envisioning Charlotte as a woman on the receiving end of not-fully-conscious, disembodied forces, the narrator invokes the reader’s kinship with Charlotte rather than installing a specular, dialectical relationship between them. Indeed, Charlotte is not a consolidated object, but a thing that draws out the faults in the “recesses of our hearts.” The narrator appears to be using narrative allegorically to undo the integrity of subjects who rest within their interiors; this involves a kind of disembowelment that hauls error into the open. Dislodged from its presumptive roost in the “recesses” of individual being, error is now set loose into the world as a common force of abjection. The “blush” of the reader is no longer an incentive to appropriation, a badge of Desire, but the mark of Fortune. Cast off is the sense that we are the proprietors of guilt in a history of which we are the protagonists; instead, history ruins us all. In allegorical time, the strain of

compunction inscribed in “womanhood” may therefore take on a different drift as a cosmological and *truly* comprehensive principle of relation—feminine but not female—that is richly ethical in its outlines. We can dwell together in common mortification.

The kinship thus established is organic, but in the precise sense that creaturely life shares a common destiny with matter to be arbitrarily dispersed and destroyed. This experience of time recalls a very old revolutionary image from the Medieval and Renaissance periods: the Wheel of Fortune, or Fortuna.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, the narrator invokes this image herself in the same chapter that she describes La Rue’s “followings”:

But fortune is blind, and so are those too frequently who  
have power dispensing her favours: else why do we see  
fools and knaves at the very top of the wheel, while patient  
merit sinks to the extreme opposite abyss. But we may  
form a thousand conjectures on this subject, and yet never  
hit on the right. Let us therefore endeavor to deserve her  
smiles, [ . . . ] whether we succeed or not. (100)

This, then, is the allegorical revolution which counteracts Desire’s rapidly spinning wheels, and it does so by absorbing them as epiphenomena within the slow grind of time

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<sup>69</sup> C.S. Lewis famously identifies the Wheel of Fortune as being “hostile” to dialectic historicism: “the medieval conception of Fortune tends to discourage attempts at a ‘philosophy of history.’ If most events happen because Fortune is turning her wheel, ‘rejoicing in her bliss,’ and giving everyone his turn, the ground is cut from under the feet of a Hegel, a Carlyle, a Spengler, a Marxist, and even a Macaulay” (176–77). E.M.W. Tillyard also notes that into the Renaissance, the concept of fortune was linked with the humiliations of arbitrariness: “There are those grossly physical pictures of human beings, realistically dressed, clinging or tied to what seems a large cart wheel, in process of being turned aloft or hurled in undignified somersault on the ground” (53). C.S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2013); E.M.W. Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture* (New York: Vintage, 1959).

that takes all in its turn. The image of justice here is not one that rests on the entitled promise of symmetry, as in the image of scales, but rather in the humility (*humilis*- low, lowly; *humus*- earth, dirt) of common subjection. This vision characteristically emphasizes patience as the basis for inter-relation—"patient merit sinks"—and makes no guarantees: "whether we succeed or not." On the Wheel of Fortune, we are trying but unexpectant, we are waiting together, waiting on one another. When labor takes the form of service, we are at home in the Fall.

In a fascinating twist, moreover, to wait in the allegorical time of the Wheel of Fortune is also to move *away* from transparency and clarity. In the passage above, the narrator notes that fortune is "blind" and that merit sinks into an "abyss." She also summons the cognitive connotation of opacity by invoking dubiety: "we may form a thousand conjectures on this subject, and yet never hit on the right." Allegory seems to consist not in removing the scales from our eyes, but in some sense putting them back. A word that appears in the context of both emblematic and allegorical reading in *Charlotte Temple* is "blotting," which suggests ink spilled on paper, a dark mark, stain, tarnish, or dirt. When Henry sees Lucy's emblematic tear, for instance, he notes that it "blotted and discoloured the flower." However, the tear which produces the discoloration is "pellucid," from *perlucere*, "to shine through," meaning translucent or clear. The scopic metaphorics here are of something clear, white, or shining becoming black or stained: un-Enlightenment. The emblem produces relation as something clear becomes less so, as ideals are subjected to force and the common suffering of things blasts the rose on the

page. Likewise, as Charlotte is overtaken by allegory she expresses her fear that Lucy has “has blotted the ungrateful Charlotte from her remembrance” (78). Charlotte believes she has been “blacked” out of existence. The metaphorics of blotting help to feel out the different degrees of intensity that are entailed in Charlotte’s allegorical experience and Lucy emblematic one. Charlotte’s total material subjection to history will not be a “flowering”; where emblem is a discolored rose, allegory is a death’s head. But Charlotte’s blotting also recalls America’s “blackened” face in “The Parricide” (fig. 2) in another key. In “Why Daughters Die,” Nancy Armstrong contends that in a U.S. context in which “the American family was a racial formulation from the start,” American daughters die in sentimental literature when they become “ethnically impure.”<sup>70</sup> While I have argued that *Charlotte Temple* seems more directly concerned with British imperial formations than it does with U.S. national identity per se, certainly the logic of “The Parricide” seems to conscript America’s (and Discord’s) “blackness” pejoratively as the stigma of lawless crime.

However, in the allegorical time of the Wheel of Fortune, blackness signifies differently as “the infinity of a world without hope.”<sup>71</sup> Allegorical blackness may still be the mark of inevitable destruction, but it is not just fatality, it is not nothing. In allegory, matter is completely absorbed in the world’s affliction. The allegory is so over-inscribed

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<sup>70</sup> Nancy Armstrong, “Why Daughters Die: The Racial Logic of American Sentimentalism,” *Yale Journal of Criticism* 7 (1994): 8, 12.

<sup>71</sup> Benjamin, *Trauerspiel*, 232.

that it is illegible as other than what it endures, which in Charlotte's case is ruin and shame. This is what can make allegory seem "flat," but the blotting of allegory is in fact super-abundant, super-absorbing, bursting with meaning from which it cannot be parted. Even more significantly, it is in the blackness of allegory that we join in fellowship as we (re)turn to the anoriginal beginning of things at the hands of destruction. Charlotte's allegorical blotting is not a racialization that compartmentalizes and disposes of what it touches, but the blackness in which Desire is reborn as compassion, as love with no outsides. Emblem forms relation in the stain or the discoloration. Allegory brings us together in the dark.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> I would like to acknowledge that all my thinking about the relationship of blackness to the common(s) has been transformed by Fred Moten's extraordinary work, both individual and in collaboration with Stefano Harney. I am indebted to Fred for the insight that nothing can speak. I would also like to acknowledge that I developed some of my thinking about the politics of radical humility on the Wheel of Fortune in conversation with Ashon Crawley, whose thought and writing about the "otherwise" has shaped my approach to this question. I believe I can safely say that if all of us think about the common(s) as a full and meaningful space/time that is both black and feminine, we are collectively indebted to the work of Toni Morrison, Sylvia Wynter, and especially Hortense J. Spillers, who I read as arguing for the flesh in these terms. Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (New York: Minor Compositions, 2013); Fred Moten, "Knowledge of Freedom," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 4.2 (2004): 269-310; Ashon Crawley, "Otherwise Movements," *The New Inquiry*, 19 Jan. 2015, Web. <<http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/otherwise-movements/>>. Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Vintage, 1993); Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003. 203-229; Sylvia Wynter, *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, Ed. Katherine McKittrick (Durham: Duke UP, 2015).

## CHAPTER 2

### Time-Lines: Revolutionary History and the Space of the Frontier, 1782-1794

“[. . .] spatial form is the perceptual basis of our notion of time, we literally cannot ‘tell time’ without the mediation of space.”

—W.J.T. Mitchell<sup>1</sup>

#### I. Time-Lines

Today, the time of the American Revolution and the space of the frontier do not seem to overlap. U.S. national mythology constructs the Revolution a war fought across an ocean, between British and American “sides,” in which most everything of note is thought to have happened in New England. This view crops out major scenes of conflict within the thirteen colonies—the campaigns in the south, or British-occupied Philadelphia and New York—and presses the Revolution’s international dimensions to the margins. It is easy to forget, for instance, that there was a gap between Cornwallis’s surrender at Yorktown (1781) and the Treaty of Paris (1783) because Britain fought a naval war with the colonies’ international allies for possessions in the Caribbean during those years. But where U.S. nationalist memory is neglectful of the Revolution’s messier European embroilments, it consigns Indian country to oblivion. If W.J.T. Mitchell is right that space “forms the perceptual basis” of time, then the persistence with which the Revolution takes transatlantic coordinates sediments a version of Revolutionary history with little or no time for the worlds to the west of white settlement in the thirteen seceding colonies.

In fact, Indian country was a major theatre of the Revolution, which had devastating implications for Native people that lasted long after the continental war came

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<sup>1</sup> “Spatial Form in Literature: Toward a General Theory,” *Critical Inquiry* 6.3 (1980): 539-567.

to an official conclusion. Native communities to the west, south, and north of the thirteen colonies were wracked by violence more or less continuously from the late 1760s to the mid-1790s, has led Colin G. Calloway to observe that for many Native peoples, the Treaty of Paris (1783) merely marked “one phase of a Twenty Years’ War that continued at least until the Treaty of Greenville in 1795.”<sup>2</sup> Calloway characterizes the American Revolution as “a civil war for Indian people” as well as a “world war in Indian country, with surrounding nations, Indian and non-Indian, at war, on the brink of war, or arranging alliances in expectation of war.”<sup>3</sup> To the extent that Native peoples’ participation in the Revolution has been acknowledged, they are thought to have “sided” with the British. But Native engagements with Britain’s imperial crisis were enormously complex, as every group attempted to safeguard its interests through a morass of internal, intertribal, and international tensions. Native alliances could (and did) change rapidly in a shifting field of contention that included Continental and British forces as well as colonial militia, Spain and France, and other tribal groups. Some tribes were split generationally (as in the case of the Cherokee), or attempted to maintain embattled positions of neutrality (as in the cases of the Delaware and Shawnee). Others were riven by factional allegiances to competing European powers (Creek and Choctaw).<sup>4</sup> Regardless of how they shaped their alliances, Native communities faced recrimination, famine, and disease in the 1770s-80s,

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<sup>2</sup> Colin G. Calloway, “The Continuing Revolution in Indian Country,” Frederick E. Hoxie, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert, eds., *Native Americans and the Early Republic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999), 3. I cite extensively from Calloway because he specializes in indigenous history in the period between 1763-1795 that is my focus here. See also Colin G. Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country: Crisis and Diversity in Native American Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 5-12.

particularly in borderland areas where militia often destroyed seasonal crops and villages on which they depended for survival.

The conclusion of hostilities between Britain and the colonies only metastasized the threats to Native life that the Revolution had carried into Indian country. Calloway writes that the 1783 Treaty of Paris represented a particularly acute catastrophe for Native peoples, as it included no mention of the tribes and opened the way for “a renewed invasion of Indian lands by a flood of backcountry settlers.”<sup>5</sup> Writing a year after the Treaty was signed, Samson Occom observed that “This Family Contention of the English, has been & is the most undoing war to the poor Indians that ever happen among them it has Stript them of every thing, both their Temporal and Spiritual Injoyments—It Seems to me at Times that there is nothing but Wo, Wo, Wo, Written in every Turn of the Wheel of God’s providence against us, I am afraid we are Devoted to Destruction and Misery.”<sup>6</sup> Just as Indian country tends to disappear from the Revolution’s mythic geography, what happened in Indian country roughly between 1775-1795 does not conform to Revolutionary timelines that conclude triumphantly with US national independence.

This chapter concerns a development that Calloway and other historians identify as a legacy of the Revolutionary period’s official outcome: the congealment of “the frontier” in US imaginaries into a binary configuration separating Indians from the advancing cause of American settlement. My focus here is on the role that literary production played in constructing this imagining of the frontier in the decade

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>6</sup> Samson Occom, Letter to John Bailey (1784), *The Collected Writings of Samson Occom, Mohegan: Leadership and Literature in Eighteenth-Century America*, Ed. Joanna Brooks (Oxford: OUP, 2006), 121.

immediately following the Treaty of Paris (1783), taking two anthologies of captivity narratives published in that period as my frame of reference. Indeed, between 1783-93, captivity narratives were anthologized in the former colonies for the first time since Cotton Mather's compilations of the early eighteenth century.<sup>7</sup> Hugh Henry Brackenridge published a group of materials about William Crawford's disastrous 1782 campaign against the Wyandot entitled *Narratives of a Late Expedition Against the Indians* (1783), while Matthew Carey's *History of the Dreadful Distresses of Frederick Mannheim's Family* (1794) of ten years later comprises a more eclectic selection of captivity narratives. These two volumes merit attention on the grounds that they were the first captivity anthologies to be published in the colonies in almost a century, but they are noteworthy for several other reasons. Both had influential literary custodians with strong party agendas.<sup>8</sup> Both seem to have enjoyed wide cross-market appeal for urban as well as more rural, or "backcountry," audiences.<sup>9</sup> And they were both reprinted in whole or part—especially in the case of *Mannheim*, which appeared in at least six editions between 1793-1800. While neither *Narratives* nor *Mannheim* was reprinted with its original title after 1800, they both recycled wholesale by early 19<sup>th</sup>-century anthologists Archibald

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<sup>7</sup> Mather had published two such collections, *Humiliations Follow'd with Deliverances* (Boston, 1697); and *Good Fetched out of Evil: A Collection of Memorables Relating to our Captives* (Boston, 1706).

<sup>8</sup> Brackenridge and Carey were strongly identified with Federalism into the early 1790s, and it may be possible to read their investments in frontier imaginaries in connection with Federalism's emphasis on national centralization. Their party affiliations are less important to me than the fact that they turned to anthology when they did, and produced collections that were highly influential into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. While Brackenridge was the sole editor and publisher of *Narratives of a Late Expedition*, Carey was only one of several publishers for the *Mannheim* anthology, which was first published in Exeter, New Hampshire, in 1793. I identify *Mannheim* with Carey, however, on the grounds that he was clearly the most influential of *Mannheim*'s publishers, and the only one to produce two editions: the second edition of 1794, as well as another in 1800. He was also the first to add an illustrated frontispiece, and the only person to publish *Mannheim* in octavo rather than duodecimo format.

<sup>9</sup> Brackenridge and Carey's compilations were published and republished in several major U.S. cities—Boston, Philadelphia, New York—as well as more rural locations like Lexington, Leominster, Exeter, and Andover.

Loudon and Samuel Metcalf, in which capacity Brackenridge and Carey's editorial labors supported increasingly antiquarian iterations of U.S. frontier history into the 1820s.<sup>10</sup> By 1821, Metcalf was presenting his reprocessed materials as though they were artifacts of far-distant days of yore: "They [these narratives] make us in some measure acquainted with the dangers and difficulties which our fathers underwent in penetrating and settling a vast wilderness. They were continually harassed by a treacherous and unrelenting foe. They fought in the defence [sic] of a country whose plains were drenched with the blood of their fellow citizens."<sup>11</sup> In short, these were widely disseminated publications that bore influence into the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

While they have been overlooked by literary scholars, Brackenridge and Carey's anthologies provide apertures on the processes by which nationalist epistemologies of Revolutionary history were deployed to support settler-colonial agendas in the trans-Appalachian west during the first decade of US independence. They are particularly important given that very little literary scholarship exists on Indian captivity narratives, and indeed "frontier" literatures more generally, in the 1770s-90s.<sup>12</sup> Jill Lepore and Greg

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<sup>10</sup> See Archibald Loudon's *A Selection, of some of the most interesting narratives, of outrages, committed by the Indians, in their wars, with the white people* (Carlisle, PA; 1808-11) and Samuel Metcalf's *A Collection of some of the Most Interesting Narratives of Indian Warfare in the West* (Lexington 1821). As its title suggests, Loudon's two-volume anthology remains quite sensationalist in tone, though its tremendous length (it is over 600 pages long) and ethnographic pretensions clearly suggest that it was not designed for a popular audience. Metcalf's 1821 anthology reuses the ethnographic material from Loudon, and it tends to be more reminiscent of what Renato Rosaldo calls "imperialist nostalgia": a memorial structure in which "agents of colonialism long for the very forms of life they intentionally altered or destroyed." Rosaldo, "Imperialist Nostalgia," *Representations* 26 (1989): 107-22.

<sup>11</sup> Samuel Metcalf, *A Collection of some of the Most Interesting Narratives of Indian Warfare in the West* (Lexington 1821), i.

<sup>12</sup> Literary scholarship on captivity narratives in the 1780s-90s is quite thin. Richard Slotkin's analyzes the Boone narrative (1786) and Annette Kolodny has done some work on the Panther captivity (1787). See Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1800*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973) and Annette Kolodny, "Turning the Lens on 'The Panther Captivity': A Feminist Exercise in Practical Criticism," *Critical Inquiry* 8:2 (1981): 329-345.

Sieminski's work on reprints of Rowlandson's narrative in 1770s is a striking exception. Lepore and Sieminski show how Bostonian printers used Mary Rowlandson's narrative to phrase a historical analogy between the Puritan errand in the wilderness and colonial resistance to the blockade and siege of Boston (1774-1776). And as they point out, part of what this entailed was an elision of British imperial policy with the supposed menace posed by Native peoples (in one 1773 frontispiece, for instance, Rowlandson levels a shotgun at a group of ethnically ambiguous marauders from the threshold of her house).<sup>13</sup>

By contrast, Brackenridge and Carey's anthologies span a broad geographical range that extends beyond the urban (and specifically Bostonian) scope of Rowlandson's eighteenth-century republication. Moreover, their volumes are *collections* rather than single-author texts. I am interested in Brackenridge and Carey's turn to anthology because it suggests that they were using the properties of this format in order to synthesize a capacious vision of the frontier during 1780s-90s. The anthology format permits the grouping of materials out of context; what binds anthologized materials together is the hermeneutic prerogative of the editor who draws them into relation. Yet the editor need not show his hand. The conceit of anthology (that it represents a mere gathering of evidence) can thus imbue the editorial function with signifying power that is unchecked and disavowed. For this reason, anthologies can be useful tools if one's purpose is to produce the impression of a master narrative without having to write one. As Mather had realized almost a century earlier, anthology is a particularly potent vehicle

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<sup>13</sup> See Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York: Vintage, 1999); Greg Sieminski, "The Puritan Captivity Narrative and the Politics of the American Revolution," *American Quarterly* 42.1 (1990): 35-56. For the frontispiece I mention here, see *A Narrative of the Captivity, Sufferings, and Removes of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* (Boston: John Bayley, 1773).

for doctrinal historiography because its organizational structure—the collection of disparate artifacts—embeds editorial perspective as both a reflection of reality and a pedagogical principle. Anthologies are not necessarily historiographic in the sense that they generate sequential narrative (the classic sense of “historiography” from *historia*-narrative, history; *graphia*-writing). Rather, anthologies can become historiographic insofar as they can be used as technologies for interpreting evidence in the light of a particular destiny, which may simply be a way of saying that anthologies can arrange evidence in a manner that is ideological in its effects. They can be used to teach their readers to draw predictable historical conclusions from the juxtaposition of fragmentary historical proofs. For Mather, anthologization supported typological reading projects, as it provided a format in which signs could be interpreted exegetically (in Mather’s phrase) as “wonders of the invisible world.” For Brackenridge and Carey, anthologization seems to build a kind of statistical case for the frontier as a binary racial line separating U.S. subjects from merciless Indian savages: an arrangement each volume presents implicitly and explicitly as a timeless reality.

I contend that Brackenridge and Carey’s anthologies link the frontier to Revolutionary-era politics not by drawing colonial history into the present (as in the case of 1770s reprints of Rowlandson), but by *severing* the connection of U.S. national history to its pre- and/or transnational pasts. As Metcalf’s 1821 comments on the timeless significance of Brackenridge and Carey’s materials show, the fact that most of the contents of *Narratives* and *Mannheim* do not seem to have existed in print—or perhaps at all—prior to their anthologization in the 1780s-90s did nothing to prevent them from being gathered into transhistorical evocations of the frontier after 1800. On the contrary,

if Metcalf and Loudon appropriated recently devised fictions in the name of time immemorial, they were merely reproducing a principle that had structured Brackenridge and Carey's collections from the outset. The materials in both *Narratives* and *Mannheim* infer that the racial antagonism between "Americans" and "Indians" at the frontier is an ageless struggle. Yet the narratives comprised by these anthologies are set exclusively after 1779. *Narratives of a Late Expedition against the Indians* gathers materials pertaining to a single episode in 1782, while *Mannheim* produces a rough chronicle of Indian "cruelties" spanning the period from 1779 to the early 1790s. In both cases, then, these anthologies generate ostensibly transhistorical accounts of a geographical location—"the frontier"—that are silently structured by chronologies of the very recent past. Metcalf's teleology of "fellow citizens" defending their "country" against an "unrelenting foe" thus makes manifest the temporal distortion of his source texts, which deliberately mistake a recognizably U.S. nationalist chronology, beginning in the 1770s, for History writ large.

This chapter argues that the conceptual congealment of the frontier into a binary racial and geographic line after 1783 is a Revolutionary invention, by which I mean that it is one mediated by reductive understandings of the significance and extent of the Revolutionary war only conceivable from a US nationalist position of retrospect. While this was not the first time that the frontier had appeared as a binary configuration, what is different about the 1780s-90s is that, in the official aftermath of the war, it was suddenly possible for colonial culture-makers to use nationalist deployments of Revolutionary history in order to shore up settler-colonial agendas in the west. Turning W.J.T. Mitchell's formulation on its head, I argue that national *time* forms the perceptual and

political basis of imperial space in captivity anthologies (re)published in the former colonies between 1783-1821. Brackenridge and Carey's anthologies construct a vision the frontier as a Revolutionary "time line," I suggest, in the sense that they only represent it within a precise set of temporal coordinates after 1779. This means that *Narratives* and *Mannheim* implicitly identify the conquest of western lands with the defense and perpetuation of nationalist Revolutionary struggle. Yet, paradoxically, what may be historically specific about "the frontier" as it is conceived in these anthologies is the consistency with which its constitutive dependence on extreme chronological myopia is obscured. Brackenridge and Carey do not announce the recent provenance of their selected materials; in fact the success of their polemics depends considerably on their readers' misprision of the supposed threat that Indians pose to American freedom as a timeless truth. In that sense, anthology constructs the frontier as a "time line" by organizing—or aspiring to organize—the perception of history. It represents an attempt, in the words of Svetlana Boym, "to conquer and spatialize time," cleaving the messy historical realities of Indian country and the borderlands into a dichotomous landscape of sides where only Americans (can) have a relatable past.<sup>14</sup> The frontier comes to mark the edge of history; to cross it from east to west is to move from the thinkable to the unthinkable, from a domain of memory to one of forgetting.

One of the striking features of Brackenridge and Carey's captivity anthologies is that their editorial principles of selection simultaneously identify the frontier as a scene of Revolutionary struggle and evacuate it of real historical conflict (i.e. specific reference to

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<sup>14</sup> Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 49.

actual events that took place in the trans-Appalachian west during the official phase of the Revolutionary war). As a result, the British are conspicuously absent from these collections, which is remarkable given that captivity narratives first published in the 1770s are almost always about white male POWs captured either by the British or their Indian allies. The two most famous captives of the war, Ethan Allen and John André, were both taken (and in the latter instance, executed) by white armies, and Allen's 1779 account of his widely publicized three-year internment by the British is dominated by memories of the “barbary, fraud, and deceit which [Tories] exercise towards the whigs.”<sup>15</sup> Allen is among the first commentators openly to champion an “American empire,” and his narrative is somewhat unusual for the 1770s in that his vitriolic scorn for “cruel and bloodthirsty savages” (7) at times overtops even his contempt for the British. For the most part, however, colonial wartime captivities were so preoccupied with Anglo-colonial dimensions of the conflict that they portray Native peoples as secondary threats in a struggle that does not fundamentally concern them. Between 1770-82, “Indian savagery” is often couched as an extension or amplification of British malevolence, and at points male Indian and British bodies even appear to merge, as in Wheeler Case’s wartime propaganda poem on the death of Jane McCrea:

Some *British* troops, combin’d with *Indian* bands,  
With swords with knives, and tom’hawks in their hands,  
They have a shout, and pass’d along the wood,

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<sup>15</sup> Ethan Allen, *A narrative of Colonel Ethan Allen's captivity, from the time of his being taken by the British, near Montreal, on the 25th day of September, 1775, to the time of his exchange on the sixth day of May, 1778 [ . . . ]* (Philadelphia: Robert Bell, 1779), 17. The text was published in Boston and Philadelphia in at least three editions, all in 1779.

Like beasts of prey, in quest of human blood.<sup>16</sup>

It becomes impossible to tell “British troops” from “Indian bands”; Case’s polemic turns precisely on their indistinguishability as they whoop through the woods “like beasts of prey.”

In stark contrast, the captivity anthologies of the 1780s-90s (indeed these decades’ popular frontier literatures more generally) seek to maximize the distance between “Americans” and “Indians” within a U.S. nationalist chronology of the west, and one of the more stunning effects of this development is that the British swiftly, and almost completely, vanish from the record. It is worth emphasizing this point because it sheds light on the tremendous amnesiac imperative entailed in Brackenridge and Carey’s interventions. *Narratives* and *Mannheim* largely gloss over the roiling histories of Anglo-Native and Anglo-colonial struggle in the borderlands during the 1770s despite the fact that these had been the focus of captivity literatures published during that decade; Brackenridge and Carey elect *not* to collect materials that were widely available to them. Their anthologies thus demand the ruthless expunction of events that transpired within the living memory of their readers—in Brackenridge’s case, only a few years before. Instead of perpetuating the wartime convention of identifying Indians with British tyranny (a method they might have adopted for justifying the murder and deracination of Native peoples), Brackenridge and Carey recast the Revolution as a race war that has been fought between only two parties—Americans and Indians—for all of time. As the

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<sup>16</sup> When John Vanderlyn painted a sensationalized rendition of this episode, *The Murder of Jane McRea* (1803-04), he completely left out the British troops and emphasized McRea’s sexual vulnerability to two hyper-masculinized Indian warriors. For Case, however, the British and Indians almost seem to compose a kind of hybrid body. Wheeler Case, *Poems Occasioned by Several Circumstances and Occurrences, in the Present grand Contest of America for Liberty* (New Haven: Thomas and Samuel Green, 1778), 18.

frontier becomes identified with the leading edge of Revolutionary struggle, it also curdles into an *absolute* racial boundary in which “whiteness” and “Americanness” become co-extensive values, opposed from the other side of history by “Indian” savagery.

My contention that the frontier emerges in 1780s-90s captivity anthologies as a time-line that takes Revolutionary chronology as both a structuring principle and repressed term differs from critical accounts of the frontier that have construed it either as a foundational myth or empirical fact of American history. Of course, the distinction between these accounts has not always been easy to discern. As generations of scholars have noted, Frederick Jackson Turner’s (in)famous historical thesis that the development of U.S. American social and democratic institutions took shape through their “perennial rebirth” along an advancing frontier is exceptionalist high fantasy at its most pernicious, though for this very reason it has exerted enormous influence on US imperial projects.<sup>17</sup> “Myth-and-symbol” accounts of the frontier after Turner suspended the question of historical reality, addressing instead how the “myth” of the frontier lends force to concrete political and economic realities.<sup>18</sup> The best known of these approaches is Richard Slotkin’s argument that “the myth of regeneration through violence became the

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<sup>17</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Holt, 1921), 2-3. First presented as “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” before the American Historical Association in Chicago in 1893. For the influence of the Turner Thesis on 20<sup>th</sup>-century US politics, see William Appleman Williams, “The Frontier Thesis and American Foreign Policy,” *Pacific Historical Review* 24 (November 1955): 379-95. Williams also offers a cogent analysis of the underlying anxiety in Turner’s text that gets recast as triumphalism. See also Amy Kaplan, “Left Alone with America,” *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 3-21.

<sup>18</sup> See for example Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1950). For an overview of this approach that addresses Smith, see Bruce Kuklick, “Myth and Symbol in American Studies” [1792], Ed. Lucy Maddox, *Locating American Studies: The Evolution of a Discipline* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1999), 71-86.

structuring metaphor of the American experience.”<sup>19</sup> A kind of gothic reversal of the Turner Thesis, Slotkin’s claims are rousing in their unambiguous rejection of triumphalist frontier history, but his “mytho-genetic” approach maintains a dialectical view of the frontier across three centuries of evidence and tends, as a result, to gloss over period-specific change with a characteristic psychosocial flourish that takes “American experience” as a tranhistorical baseline. For Slotkin, “the American myth was a synthetic process of reconciling the romantic-conventional myths of Europe to American experience—a process which [ . . . ] became an analytical attempt to get back to the primary source of blood-knowledge of the wilderness, the ‘Indian’ mind, the basic, Moiratic, myth-generating psychology of man.”<sup>20</sup>

On the other end of the methodological spectrum, historians of eighteenth-century Native North America identify the emergence of the frontier as a racialized boundary between peoples with the conclusion of the French and Indian War in 1763.<sup>21</sup> In that

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<sup>19</sup> Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1800* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973), 5, 17.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>21</sup> As I focus on developments in the eastern and Midwestern regions of what is now the United States and lower Canada, I draw on a historical bibliography focused on settler-Indian relations in these areas, particularly in the long eighteenth century: Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991); Colin G. Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country: Crisis and Diversity in Native American Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995); Frederick E. Hoxie, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert, eds., *Native Americans and the Early Republic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999); Daniel Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of North America* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2001); Alan Taylor, *The Divided Ground: Indians, Settlers, and the Northern Borderland of the American Revolution* (New York: Knopf, 2006). There is, of course, a rich bibliography on indigenous history in other parts of the North Americas that covers the period I am examining. See David J. Weber, *Barbaros: Spaniards and their Savages in the Age of Enlightenment* (New Haven: Yale, 2006); James F. Brooks, *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: UNC P, 2001); Kathleen Duval, *The Native Ground: Indians and Colonists in the Heart of the Continent* (Philadelphia: U Penn P, 2007); and Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale, 2008). Hämäläinen and Duval’s books also represent major efforts to move away from emphases on Euro-Indian relations in the writing of native history.

year, having forced France to withdraw from the upper Ohio and Great Lakes region, Britain issued a Royal Proclamation that set the western limit of colonial settlement at the Appalachians. Whereas Indian country had previously existed in what Richard White called a “middle ground” circled by French, Spanish, and British interests, the Proclamation line instantiated a newly assertive binary configuration of power at its threshold. Writes Daniel K. Richter:

The ring of competing imperial powers that had provided an odd kind of security to the Indian country it surrounded suddenly collapsed, replaced by a novel advancing frontier line—Reds defending the west, Whites pushing relentlessly across it from the east—that later generations of Americans would incorrectly define as the historic norm.<sup>22</sup>

The “middle ground” argument that Richter traces here is important because it reveals that settler desires for Native land shaped colonial dissent moving into the Revolutionary era. This serves as a critical reminder that aggressively racist territoriality was a key vector of whiggish Revolutionary politics, though prevailing ideological interpretations of the Revolution tend to suggest otherwise.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, Richter goes on to point out that

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<sup>22</sup> Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2001), 187. The view Richter expresses here is consonant with Richard White’s seminal claims in *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991). See also Alan Taylor, *The Divided Ground: Indians, Settlers, and the Northern Borderland of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 2006).

<sup>23</sup> I read White and Richter’s work here as a challenge to historical interpretations of the Revolution as a war of ideas. The most famous of these are Bernard Bailyn’s *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Belknap, 1968) and Gordon S. Wood’s *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1993). Reacting against an earlier school of historical thought that identified the roots of the Revolution with class struggle, these historians champion an alternative view in which commitments to freedom and equality form the central stakes of colonial dissent. In this account, the

many of the landmark documents of the 1760s-70s express “conspiratorial fears rooted in the assumption that the crown and the Indians were natural allies.”<sup>24</sup> The final draft of the Declaration of Independence, for instance, includes a clause to this day which indict George III for stirring “the merciless Indian savages” to war.<sup>25</sup> As Richter shows, such rhetoric helped to fuel devastating campaigns of terror in the borderlands during and after the 1770s.

However, where Slotkin’s argument may be said to understate historical distinctions, the “middle ground” argument cleaves so faithfully to a principle of historical causality that it presents the frontier as a matter of fact whose existence is a foregone conclusion after a certain point in time (1763). What goes missing in both cases is the sense that “the frontier” is a contested and provisional arrangement whose terms of expression are continually modulated through cultural form. As a “time-line” in 1780s-90s captivity anthologies, the frontier is neither precisely myth nor fact (though it masquerades as both)—it is a messy, highly contingent historiographic function that is difficult for its spokespersons to sustain. “The frontier” works by re-signifying the Revolution as a perennial racial conflict between Americans and Indians in which what is at stake is History itself: the triumph of order over chaos, progress over degeneration, possessive individualism over “beastly” collectivity. But imagining the frontier in these

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entanglements of Revolutionary politics with chattel slavery and settler colonialism appear as ancillary concerns inherited from the colonial period: a claim that powerfully supports U.S. exceptionalist identifications of the Revolution with “progress.” For a detailed critique of Bailyn, see the Introduction to David Kazanjian’s *The Colonizing Trick: National Culture and Imperial Citizenship in Early America* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 2003).

<sup>24</sup> Richter, 217.

<sup>25</sup> “A Declaration by the Representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress Assembled,” *Thomas Jefferson: Writings*, Ed. Merrill D. Peterson (New York: Library of America, 1984), 21.

terms is a *tenuous* exercise: it demands administrations of historical memory that are easily unsettled by the counter-evidence afforded by the more complex political realities of the Revolutionary period. The scholarly accounts that I have been discussing here can sometimes give the impression that the frontier was unilaterally imposed on Native peoples, or imagined hermetically within the confines of U.S. culture, without being shaped in turn by Native political agencies. The “middle ground” argument, for instance, characterizes the frontier as a historical reality that is brought into being by tectonic shifts in organizations of European power. While it is neither my business nor desire to dispute White and Richter’s core contention that the Proclamation line transformed settler-Indian relations after 1763, their argument risks downplaying the ways in which Native actors have challenged the terms on which the frontier has been represented in, and weaponized by, the U.S. since that time.

And this is precisely what happened—on a spectacular scale—in the intervening decade between Brackenridge and Carey’s publications. In the mid-1780s, a pan-tribal alliance took shape in Indian country that was spearheaded by Mohawk chief Thayendanegea, or Joseph Brant, and included Iroquois, Kickapoo, Kaskaskia, Miami, Chickamauga, Wyandot, Lenape, Mississauga, and Shawnee memberships.<sup>26</sup> Sometimes known as the “Western Confederacy,” the alliance campaigned against U.S. forces between 1785-1795 for control of the Northwest Territory, which had been ceded to the U.S. by Britain in the Treaty of Paris. The Western Confederacy was extraordinarily successful. They routed large U.S. forces led by Josiah Harmar in 1790 and Arthur St.

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<sup>26</sup> See Colin G. Calloway, *The Victory with No Name: The Native American Defeat of the First American Army* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); and Alan Taylor, *The Divided Ground: Indians, Settlers, and the Northern Borderland of the American Revolution* (New York: Knopf, 2006).

Clair in 1791, catalyzing waves of panic in the U.S. that left many literary traces. “St. Clair’s Defeat” is a hugely significant historical watershed: proportionally, it is the most catastrophic military defeat that the United States has ever suffered. Materials published in its aftermath suggest that it constituted a crisis for U.S. masculinity, throwing anxieties about male embodiments of the Revolution’s legacies into high gear. So while Brackenridge’s *Narratives* develops an eschatological vision of Revolutionary time along the frontier that is sustained by men’s heroic forbearance under torture at Indian hands, the Western Confederacy’s successes in the early 1790s made the mass vulnerability of white men’s bodies to Native forces difficult to leverage for propagandistic ends. As a result, I argue, Brackenridge’s 1793 anthology evinces a shift in U.S. frontier imaginaries toward the spectacle of the female body in pain.

## **II. Frontier Eschatology: Brackenridge and the Crawford Campaign (1782)**

In his preface to *Narratives of a Late Expedition*, Hugh Henry Brackenridge appears to endorse what historians of eighteenth-century Native America refer to as “conquest theory:” the notion that, as allies of a vanquished enemy, Native peoples had forfeited their natural rights to life, liberty, and property. Though he writes that he intends for *Narratives* to “[show] America what have been the sufferings of some of her citizens by the hands of the Indian allies of Britain,” he quickly abandons this line and spends most of his editorial commentary furnishing an account of ineradicable Indian barbarity which undermines conquest theory’s basic presupposition that Native peoples are political persons who have natural rights to lose. That “the nature of an Indian is fierce and cruel” is, Brackenridge suggests, an incontrovertible fact borne out by the evidence of Biblical and classical precedent. In this way, Brackenridge situates his

materials as though they were comparatively recent entries in an enormous body of evidence that justifies the “abolition” of the tribes: “an extirpation of them would be useful to the world, and honourable [sic] to those who can effect it.”<sup>27</sup> Brackenridge thus abandons conquest theory’s contractual symmetry in favor of racial ideology. As a result, he shifts the historical terrain of the frontier from the scene of recent political conflict (in which Native alliances with Britain are the focus) to one of boundless “natural” duration.

This sets the stage for Brackenridge’s nationalist resignification of the Revolution as a war between Americans and Indians, which he accomplishes in part by taking advantage of anthology’s formal properties. Indeed, the universal prescriptions of Brackenridge’s editorial commentary belie the intense particularity of the narratives he actually gathers in *Narratives of a Late Expedition*. The volume includes only two captivity narratives, one by John Knight and one by John Slover, who were taken in the Continental Army’s Sandusky campaign of 1782.<sup>28</sup> These are separated by a short “Memoir” of Colonel William Crawford, commander of that expedition before he was captured, ritually tortured, and burned to death by the Wyandot on June 11<sup>th</sup> of the same year. The collection concludes with an epistle addressed to the printer in which Brackenridge expresses his genocidal wish that “they [Indians] may be reduced to more distant bounds, until driven to the cold snows of the north west [. . .where] their practices shall be obscured, and the tribes gradually abolished” (38). Framed by epic gestures

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<sup>27</sup> Hugh Henry Brackenridge, ed., *Narratives of a Late Expedition against the Indians; with an Account of the Barbarous Execution of Col. Crawford, and the Wonderful Escape of Dr. Knight and John Slover from Captivity, in 1782* (Philadelphia: Printed by Francis Bailey, 1783), 2.

<sup>28</sup> I will continue to refer to these two texts as Knight’s and Slover’s, suspending the questions of authenticity and authorship, though Brackenridge clearly had a heavy hand in writing both narratives.

towards ancient and natural history on the one hand, and a sweeping final call for extermination on the other, *Narratives* exudes a sense of historical grandiosity utterly out of proportion with the fact that its advertised content concerns only a single incident. Indeed, even Brackenridge's title page may be said to capitalize on paratactic imprecision to generate the illusion of breadth (fig. 1). The titular headings of Brackenridge's collection—"Narratives of a Late Expedition," "Account of the Barbarous Execution of Col. Crawford," and "The Wonderful Escape of Dr. Knight and John Slover from Captivity"—all describe only two texts, but the connective words "with...and" create the impression that the subtitles name only two among unnamed other narratives.

Anthologization thus seems to be doing something for Brackenridge in function if not precisely in fact. I suggest that he is invested in the capacity of anthology to present decontextualized materials as episodic illuminations of given order of things. As Brackenridge is well aware, Crawford's execution by the Wyandot was widely understood in its time to be a reprisal for the Moravian massacre (sometimes Moravian slaughter or Gnadenhütten massacre) of March 1782, when Pennsylvania militia had murdered one hundred Christian Delawares at a mission in the Ohio country. Men, women, and children were killed indiscriminately, many of them by scalping. The Wyandot were also possibly responding to the Crawford expedition itself as part of a broader colonial initiative systematically to deracinate Native peoples in the Ohio region. Brackenridge, however, appears to have reached the insight that the anthology format allows a single episode to be refracted through multiple perspectives, which in this case gives a singular historical event the appearance of a serial historical offense. Crawford dies three different times in *Narratives*; the total body count (whatever it may have been)

# NARRATIVE

OF A LATE

## EXPEDITION

AGAINST THE

INDIANS;

WITH

An ACCOUNT of the BARBAROUS  
EXECUTION of Col. CRAWFORD;

AND

The WONDERFUL ESCAPE of Dr. Knight and  
*John Slover* from CAPTIVITY, in 1782.

PHILADELPHIA:

Printed by FRANCIS BAILEY, in Market Street.

M,DCC,LXXIII.

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Fig. 1. Title page to the first edition of *Narratives of a Late Expedition Against the Indians* (1783). Evans.

multiplies where Knight's and Slover's observations overlap, while the range of tortures and mutilations witnessed and described in the course of the collection broadens where they do not. Anthologization thus allows the casualties of the Crawford campaign to be told and re-told in *Narratives* in a manner that invites Brackenridge's readers to identify it with repetitive patterns of unaccountable cruelty that he ascribes to "Indian nature." The radical decontextualization of Crawford's execution is in this way supported by its anthologized presentation as a *repeated* outrage.

Brackenridge thus mines the dehistoricizing effects of anthologization to cast the proceedings of one day in 1782 as evidence of time immemorial. However, he is not fully able to maintain the erasures required for this trick of memory. At several points, he attempts to reinforce his reading of the Crawford campaign in editorial footnotes, but this miscarries when he loses an argument with himself in a long, preemptive note on the Moravian Massacre at the end of Slover's narrative. Writes Brackenridge:

It has been said that the putting to death of the Moravian Indians has been the cause of the cruelties practiced on the prisoners at Sandusky. But though this has been made an excuse by the refugees amongst the savages, and by the British, yet it must be well known, that it has been the custom of the savages at all times. [ . . . ] At the same time, though I would strike away this excuse which is urged for the savages, I am far from approving the Moravian slaughter. [ . . . ] I am also disposed to believe, that the greater part of the men put to death were warriors [ . . . ] But

the putting to death of women and children, who sang  
hymns at their execution, must be considered as  
unjustifiable inexcusable homicide. (30)

Many of Brackenridge's statements in this passage directly contradict his ostensible goal of demonstrating that Indians have no rights to life or property. In fact, Brackenridge goes on to expostulate at length against Native peoples' rights to soil; refers to Indians as "animals," "spotted cattle," and "Devils"; and dismisses assimilationist arguments out of hand.<sup>29</sup> He writes: "several of these creatures have been taken young from the woods, and put to public schools; I do not know one who has even by these means been rendered a useful member of society: They retain the temper of their race" (37). But his very attempt to cement a reading of Crawford's execution as a barbarous "custom of the savages at all times" in the note above leads him to acknowledge counter-arguments (made by "refugees" and "the British") which reveal Indian country's complex political embroilments. Most extraordinary of all is Brackenridge's concluding remark that "the putting to death of women and children [...] must be considered as unjustifiable inexcusable homicide." Here, against his stated purpose and over his own objections, Brackenridge affirms the humanity of the Moravian victims and concedes that the murder of women and children (at least) was an unpardonable offense and "a disgrace to the state of Pennsylvania."

Brackenridge seems unable to overcome what he experiences as the singularity of the Moravian slaughter; the victims are not inert examples of "Indian cruelty," but

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 34-36.

women and children who sang hymns at their deaths. Crossing over into memory, the Delaware demand a reckoning which overturns the racialist logic on which Brackenridge bases most of his claims. Indeed, by the ethical terms he himself sets in this footnote, Brackenridge's call to "extirpate" Native people becomes unrealizable, as genocide would of course entail unforgivable murders of women and children. Likewise, Brackenridge's assertions that the wars in the west consist entirely of white men "defending the frontiers" against Indian "incursions" and "predatory invasions" gives way to a more complicated view in which white men can—and do—play a savage part (4).

Though the ghostly voices of Delaware women and children sing in its margins, *Narratives of a Late Expedition* is primarily absorbed in the contestative drama between "Indian" and "American" men. Brackenridge situates their antagonism across a racialized boundary that draws definitional power from a recognizably U.S. nationalist account of Revolutionary politics. The frontier itself appears a partisan division between those who are "for" the Revolution (American soldiers and citizens) and those who are "against" it (Indians). But in order to define this binary, Brackenridge acknowledges troubling exceptions to the rule. When John Slover describes seeing two white civilians in the Indian camp, for instance, Brackenridge writes in a footnote that:

These men, [Matthew] Elliot and [John] Girty were inhabitants of the western country and since the commencement of the war, having for some time professed an attachment to America, went off to the Indians. They

are of that horrid brood called Refugees, and whom the Devil has long since marked for his own Property. (23)

According to Brackenridge, those who are not recognizably on the side of America, or who—as “refugees”—occupy a position that does not fit into a for/against dichotomy of Revolutionary partisanship, are necessarily on the *wrong* side and therefore damned. In a vision of the frontier from which the British have been largely evacuated, “going off to the Indians” is what constitutes political betrayal in this passage (and not Loyalism per se). As a result, Revolutionary partisan affiliation become syllogistically nationalized and racialized: to be Indian is to be on the wrong side of Revolution; hence to forfeit “attachment to America” is to be “Indian.” Americanness is thus implicitly encoded with whiteness, and strongly associated with the supposed blessings of possessive individualism and relatable history. Hence Brackenridge brands Girty and Elliot’s voluntary association with Indians as an abdication from proprietary subjectivity—Elliot and Girty become the “Devil’s Property”—which necessitates banishment from memory.

Interesting about Brackenridge’s racial logic in the passage above is that it does not necessarily appear to be consistently grounded in essentialist physiological discourses of blood or skin. Because the link between U.S. national identity (Americanness) and whiteness is held in place by proper Revolutionary allegiance, phenotypically white men like Girty and Elliot can become un-white/American by virtue of being on the wrong “side” of history. In other words, while Brackenridge presents Indianness as an immutable expression of savagery, the ascription of its opposing qualities (Americanness, whiteness) turns on the nationalist purity of Revolutionary time for which the frontier provides a spatialized accounting. Whiteness is not genetically assured; it has no positive

value—it is a kind of vapor given off by abstract possessions (of national attachment, of oneself, of historical representability). Whiteness is heavily contingent on being in the right place in the right way at the right time. It can therefore be lost or forfeited, and rather easily, too, simply by passing into Indian country.

This becomes extremely important in *Narratives*, which binds the frontier to the security of national history primarily through the spectacle of white men's torture at Indian hands. Capture itself seems to pose a horrifying threat to U.S. masculinity for both Knight and Slover, whose narratives return obsessively to images of bodies "mangled cruelly [ . . . ] black, bloody, burnt with powder" (22). "Black" is among the most common adjectives Knight and Slover use to describe what happens to male Indian captives. For instance, Knight writes that the prisoners' faces were painted black and that Crawford's naked body was "burnt black with powder" (10-11). Slover describes how a prisoner was stripped and "blacked [ . . . ] with coal and water" (21) before being burned at the stake. When Slover sees this man's corpse later, he remarks that "the blood mingled with the powder was rendered black" (22). The implied horrors of Indian captivity constellate in such moments around a neurotic obsession with the racial purity of white male bodies whose articulation with "blackness" reveals its intimate association with the legacies of U.S. chattel slavery. As Amy Kaplan argues, "issues of slavery and emancipation and relations between blacks and whites were intertwined with each stage of U.S. imperial expansion. [ . . . ] the representations of U.S. imperialism were mapped

not through a West/East axis of frontier symbols and politics, but instead through a North/South axis.”<sup>30</sup>

Just as Knight and Slover’s evocations of “blackness” collocate the scene of slavery with the site of the frontier, their descriptions of racial identity seem to be arbitrated by sexuality. Their anxieties about racial purity are phrased as anxieties about the maintenance of male reproductive sexual identities in homoerotic scenes of violent exchange. The stripping of clothes, “blackening” of skin, and mingling of blood with gunpowder suggest mixed racial issue—as though even death at Indian hands could constitute a form of miscegenation. Knight thus seems initially to describe a different kind of encounter between American and Native men in his account than what Slotkin describes as the “regenerative violence” of the Boone narrative (1786). This does not appear to be an ecstatic violence, a “rhythmic cycle of immersion and emergence” through which white men achieve mastery over themselves and their surroundings.<sup>31</sup> The suffusion of Knight and Slover’s narratives with sexual panic suggests, rather, a profound anxiety in *Narratives* that has to do with the conservation of masculine self-possession under torture, which casts American men into necessarily passive or receptive roles for male Indian penetration. Part of what it means for men to be American—and therefore “white”—in Brackenridge’s anthology is that they can have no contact with Indians that is not homicidal; they must be *actively* opposed to Native being. But what happens when American bodies receive Indian violence without returning it?

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<sup>30</sup> Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2002), 18.

<sup>31</sup> Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1800* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973), 278.

The heavily sexualized metaphors of the Knight and Slover narratives indicate that the linchpin holding the racial, national, and memorial politics of U.S. identity together in these accounts is proprietary subjectivity. In a proprietary logic that conflates the human with the possessive individual and freedom with agency, to be penetrated by another man is to be stripped of possessive power: to become passive, un-free, un-individual, un-self-possessed (“the Devil’s property”—and therefore “black.” This is not quite the same thing as saying that Indian torture turns men into women in these accounts. The structuring binary that subtends the scene of torture is white/black rather than male/female *per se*, the difference being that the former dichotomy is underwritten by a distinction between the human and non-human in which humanity is always-already understood to be a quality of male reproductive authority. What is at issue is the freedom and autonomy of a male human subject who is normatively identified with seminal power (male) rather than with the labor that brings that power to fruition (female). Accordingly, for men to be stripped of their reproductive power by other men is not just to move transgressively to the “wrong” end of the gender binary, but to be stripped of what makes them recognizably human—they do not simply die, but cease to *be*. “Blackness” is thus deployed in Knight and Slover’s narratives as a name for an aberrant condition which black feminist thinker Hortense Spillers has identified with the “American grammar” of slavery: heavily sexualized but non-reproductive enfleshment in the presumed absence of gender.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Hortense J. Spillers, “‘Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book.’ *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 203-229.

At first glance, then, the situation in which Crawford and many of his troops find themselves is one in which there is no possibility of ecstatic re-emergence; the total foreclosure of masculine regeneration is exactly what is at stake. But Knight and Slover hold out a sliver of hope for the preservation of manliness that is measured through men's ability to endure terminal suffering. Only Crawford appears to achieve the requisite heroic forbearance by receiving violence on his body without being rendered fully passive (i.e. unmanned) by it. Knight describes Crawford's final moments in gruesome detail:

Col. Crawford at this period of his sufferings besought the Almighty to have mercy on his soul, spoke very low, and bore his torments with the most manly fortitude. He continued in all the extremities of pain [ . . . ] when at last being almost spent, he lay down on his belly: they then scalped him and repeatedly threw the scalp in my face, telling me 'that was my great captain.'—An old squaw (whose appearance every way answered the ideas people entertain of the Devil) got a board, took a parcel of coals and ashes and laid them on his back and head after he had been scalped: he then raised himself upon his feet and began to walk round the post [ . . . ] he seemed more insensible of pain than before. (12)

This passage is the last of a description that continues for more than two closely printed pages, during the course of which Crawford is repeatedly shot, beaten, and branded. Like

some sort of republican Rasputin, Crawford's ability to maintain consciousness and stand up after these assaults borders on the absurd, but it strikes me as being significant that Knight claims to have last seen Crawford on his feet, apparently beyond pain. There is no mangled, "blackened" corpse: at least not one that the reader is permitted to remember. Instead, as the 1994 monument to Crawford's burning makes abundantly clear, Knight leaves off his account with the image of a white erection (fig. 2).

Crawford thus assumes the aura of a martyr, and as a result his body appears to acquire transcendent reproductive power by virtue of its having been broken. This installs Crawford's death in at the center of an eschatological economy of memorialization in *Narratives*. I invoke eschatology (*eschatos*, last; *-logy*, study) here as it appears within a Judeo-Christian prophetic tradition that typically couples visions of impending doom with last-minute promises of redemption. Prophetic eschatology is distinct from its apocalyptic counterpart because it limns a conditional possibility of futurity that can be achieved by the renewal of faith. Classically, it prescribes such renewal through the memorial re-activation of remains. The prophet excoriates the people for forgetting the covenant, foretells the reduction of the nation to a "remnant," and finally holds out the promise of recovery through God's memory.

In the book of Jeremiah, for instance, God says: "I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all countries whither I have driven them, and will bring them again to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase" (Jer. 23:3).<sup>33</sup> There are two entwined features of this eschatological script that are relevant to *Narratives*. The first is that, in a prophetic

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<sup>33</sup> *The Holy Bible*, King James Version (New York: Meridian, 1974).



Fig. 2. Burn Site Memorial to William Crawford, Crawford County, Ohio (1994).

eschatological vision, the proper observance of memory (recalling one's sins, recalling one's God) is coextensive with national re-membering, or reconsolidation. The second—which may just be a restatement on the first in a different register—is that failure, breakdown, and fracture form the precondition for the resumption of sexual increase.

The sorcery of eschatology is that it fashions calamity as a nationally reproductive principle, as many scholars of U.S. American culture have noted.<sup>34</sup>

So it turns out that Brackenridge's *Narratives* does turn to "regenerative violence" after all, not for the Crawford and his troops, but for the nation that is called to remember their demise as a precondition for re-memberings to come. The body that is being regenerated here (or promised regeneration) is a *national* one, "American" not in the transhistorical or mythic sense but as a function of nationalist Revolutionary history. Indeed, Brackenridge specifically binds the conditional promise extended by Crawford's death to the observance of his memory as a representative of Revolutionary valor. Brackenridge inserts a short "Memorial" into *Narratives* between Knight and Slover's accounts in which Crawford's memory is hitched to the progress of Revolutionary time:

Col. Crawford, was about 50 years of age, had been an old warrior against the savages. He distinguished himself early as a volunteer in the last war, and was taken notice of by colonel (now general) Washington, who procured for him the commission of ensign. As a partisan he showed himself very active, and was greatly successful: He took several Indian towns, and did great service in scouting, patrolling, and defending the frontiers. (16)

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<sup>34</sup> I refer to highly influential critical accounts that have identified prophetic eschatology as an organizing principle of American political and literary culture, quite often by taking the Massachusetts Puritans as a point of origin. While I do not dispute that eschatology has been an important touchstone for various Anglo-colonial and U.S. constituencies, I am uncomfortable with these accounts because they are often teleological and exceptionalist, presuming the existence of a transhistorical "American experience" or "American mind" which is structured by U.S. nationalist assumptions. See for instance Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1978) and Greil Marcus, *The Shape of Things to Come: Prophecy and the American Voice* (New York: Picador, 2006).

What are we to make of the consecutive pieces of information: “warrior against the savages” and “volunteer in the last war?” The memorial suggests that they are equivalent values, or perhaps extensions of one another. Brackenridge is careful to note that Crawford “acted bravely on several occasions in the years 1776, 1777, and at other times,” clearly measuring his life on a Revolutionary chronology, but it declines to specify what the “several occasions” actually were. It omits any mention of Crawford’s first years of military service, during which he fought in several famous battles (Long Island, Trenton, Princeton). As a result, Crawford’s entire career in the war looks as though it was spent taking Indian towns and “defending the frontiers”—in fact, the Crawford campaign itself appears in this account as an unjustly forgotten campaign of “the late war.” The referent for the word “savages” in the first line is ambiguous (it may include the British but seems more obviously intended to describe Native people). This is a nationalist account of Revolution, then, from which the British are effaced and in which Americans’ common enemy starts to look as though it has always been, and continues to be, Indians. Brackenridge presses the issue by relating that Crawford “held his commission at the time he took command of the militia, in the aforesaid expedition against the Indians: most probably he had it with him when he was taken [ . . . ]” (16). When Crawford was captured and violated, so was the physical record of his Revolutionary service (his commission)—and so, perhaps, were the values of the Revolution itself. To mourn Crawford’s death is therefore to identify the frontier as a space in which U.S. freedom and its relics may be lost, but only for as long as the nation forgets its duty to press Revolutionary time forward along the frontier. Where the conquest of Native peoples appears as an honor owed by the nation to its glorious dead,

white men's broken bodies foretell empire as the shape of the Revolution to come. As a consequence, to use Jodi A. Byrd's words, "In the United States, the Indian is the original enemy combatant who cannot be grieved."<sup>35</sup>

### III. "St. Clair's Defeat"

The recuperative potential of male martyrdom may have reached its limits in November of 1791, when confederated tribal forces decimated General Arthur St. Clair's army near the present-day Wabash River in what is still "the greatest single defeat inflicted by Indians on Americans in their long history of conflict."<sup>36</sup> As Alan Taylor notes, "three times as many Americans died in St. Clair's defeat as at George Custer's more famous 'last stand' in 1876."<sup>37</sup> Only the year before, in 1790, General Josiah Harmar had lost over 1,000 men in a conspicuously ineffective campaign of only three battles. Yet "Harmar's Defeat" does not seem to have had the same impact of "St. Clair's Defeat," which triggered an instant response in the popular press and prompted a Congressional inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the expedition. Several broadside elegies, ballads, and news reports survive from the battle's immediate aftermath. The campaign also makes appearances in a captivity narrative, *The Remarkable Adventures of Jackson Johonnet* (1793), and an anonymous novel, *The Hapless Orphan* (1793), both of which I discuss below. St. Clair's defeat is striking not only for the range of responses it elicited, but also because it seems to have provoked an urgent need for explanation that consistently goes unmet. How was it possible that so

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<sup>35</sup> Jodi A. Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), xviii.

<sup>36</sup> Alan Taylor, *The Divided Ground: Indians, Settlers, and the Northern Borderlands of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage: 2006), 259.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

many American men—several of them, including St. Clair, prominent Revolutionary veterans—were so spectacularly overwhelmed by supposedly undisciplined “savages”? The scale of the defeat was worrying. But so, too, was its repetitive quality. How did this happen *again*?

What does not fill the semantic deficit occasioned by the defeat is any acknowledgement of the power of Native military organization, or of the Native political grievances driving the war in the first place. The victors were, however, part of a powerful pan-tribal alliance sometimes known as the Western Confederacy whose formation was galvanized by (though not strictly a consequence of) Britain’s cession of the Northwest Territory to the U.S. in 1783. For roughly a decade between 1785 and the Treaty of Greenville (1795), the Western Confederacy waged a series of successful campaigns for control of the upper Ohio and Great Lakes region. This history ought to challenge the way that we think about the chronology and geographical reach of the American Revolution given that it directly contradicts the widely-held belief that The War ended in 1783. But U.S. nationalist accounts of the Revolution’s scope and duration are so entrenched as temporal markers in this period—dividing colonial from “early republican” time—that histories which do not conform to its compartmentalizations tend to fall by the wayside or vanish altogether.

Compounding this problem of dates that do not line up is the problem of ill-fitting names. Jill Lepore describes the ways in which European notions of war have not and still do not necessarily apply to indigenous forms of combat, with the result that they have been misunderstood, discounted, or entirely disregarded by western

historiography.<sup>38</sup> In the context of the 1780s-90s, the word Revolution presents similar dilemmas. The Western Confederacy was in many ways challenging the threat to Native sovereignty in the upper Ohio region that U.S. independence represented; if it was revolutionary in nature, therefore, its insurgent energies cannot be accommodated by accounts of Revolutionary history presided over by the sovereignty of the U.S. nation-state. Likewise, it is inappropriate and inaccurate to describe the Western Confederacy as a “post-Revolutionary” formation, since this plots late-century indigenous politics into a chronology defined by U.S. independence. “Counter-Revolutionary” might come a little closer (if we understand that term to denote the subversion of U.S. nationalist orders of meaning), though it still bears within it a connotation of resistance which re-inscribes indigenous political actions as mere *reactions* to implicitly inexorable and superior European technologies of power.

The activities of the Western Confederacy have an unsettled and unsettling relationship to the history of the conflict known as the American Revolution. They exceed logics of reaction, resistance, and causality founded in assumptions of the Revolution’s inexorable, linear advance to independence. It may therefore be impossible to say with any confidence in what period of time the “Battle of Wabash” occurred. As it so happens, each one of these statements has some bearing on the kinds of responses St. Clair’s defeat elicited after the fact, which tend to speak in the register of acute historical crisis. The defeat blasted a hole in the temporal continuum; it was felt to be exceptional.

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<sup>38</sup> Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip’s War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York: Knopf, 1998). In other words, the continuing war(s) in and around Indian country have (in a generous reading) not been recognized as such partly because these wars do not conform to a pattern—clear adversaries, declarations, pitched battles, continuous fighting until settlement, etc., that European history identifies as a norm.

One broadside describes it as an “Ever Memorable and Bloody Indian Battle, Perhaps the most shocking that has happened in America since its first Discovery.”<sup>39</sup> But by “historical crisis” I also mean to indicate that St. Clair’s defeat exposed serious doubts about the nature and experience of history—and about Revolutionary historical experience in particular. St. Clair’s losses were difficult to recuperate; they were not available to the kind of eschatology that Brackenridge built around Crawford nine years earlier, as they no longer seemed like prophecies of redemption to come. Even the most sympathetic accounts are constrained by the fact that this battle was a total loss from the perspective of the U.S. St. Clair himself admitted that it was “as unfortunate an action as almost any that has been fought, in which every corps was engaged and worsted, except the first regiment, that had been detached upon a service.”<sup>40</sup> If Brackenridge’s *Narratives* is buoyed by a kind of messianic faith in the progress of Revolution and the vigor of U.S. masculinity, St. Clair’s defeat seems by contrast to evince the perversity of history and to confirm the piteous vulnerability of the US national male body and its heirs.

Efforts to memorialize the fallen in the heroic mode are stretched to the breaking point. Take, for example, a stanza from a broadside ballad entitled “St. Clair’s Defeat: A New Song” (1791):

Says Colonel Gibson to his men, Brave boys, be not dismay’d,  
For sure brave Pennsylvanians were never yet afraid,

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<sup>39</sup> “The Columbian Tragedy: Containing a particular and official account of the brave and unfortunate officers and soldiers, who were slain and wounded in the ever-memorable and bloody Indian battle [ . . . ] Nov. 4, 1791 between two thousand Americans, belong to the united army, and near five thousand wild Indian savages, at Miami Village, near Fort Washington, in the Ohio-country,” (Hartford: s.n., 1791).

<sup>40</sup> Letter from St. Clair to Secretary for the Department of War [Henry Knox], Nov. 9, 1791. Reprinted in “Boston, December 19. Melancholly [sic] Account respecting the Western Army.” (Boston: B. Eedes and Son, [December 19] 1791).

Ten thousand deaths I'd rather die than they should win the field;

With that there came a fatal shot, which caus'd him for to yield.<sup>41</sup>

Reinforced by the rollicking meter of the ballad form, the sense here is of an almost comic futility. Gibson scarcely finishes his speech before it is answered with a bullet; there will not be “ten thousand deaths”—only a rather anticlimactic one, and there is little time to dwell on it because other officers are dropping like flies all over the battlefield. Brave words and deeds repeatedly come to nothing, and a few soldiers lose faith before the retreat begins in earnest. The dying General Butler exclaims, “what shall we do? We’re murdered every man,” just before giving his troops the half-hearted order to “beat them *if you can*” (my emphasis)—a phrase whose conditional clause accents it with the prospect of failure. Meanwhile, Ferguson’s men stop to weep over his body in the midst of the chaos, and when Major Clarke finally gives the command to “form in order, and retreat the best we can,” it results total confusion: “helter skelter through the woods like lost sheep we did fly.”

The balladeer emphasizes “veterans” specifically (“many a noble veteran lay scatter’d over the field”), and he is quick to mark a discrepancy between the kind of military heroism associated with the Revolutionary war and the scene he imagines unfolding in the Ohio country:

At Bunker’s Hill and Quebec many a hero fell,

Likewise at Long Island, as I the truth can tell;

But such a heavy carnage sure never did I see,

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<sup>41</sup> “St. Clair’s Defeat: A New Song” [United States: s.n., 1791?]. Held at the American Antiquarian Society, BDSDS.1791.

As happen'd on the plains near the river St. Mary.

By placing it on a continuum with major Patriot losses of the Revolution, the lyricist suggests that St. Clair's defeat can be recuperated as a kind of noble sacrifice in the cause of freedom. But the qualification of the third line—"such a heavy carnage sure never did I see"—interrupts this historical trajectory, setting St. Clair's defeat apart on the order of magnitude. What this says about the relationship of the present to the Revolutionary past is somewhat unclear, however. Does the scale of St. Clair's losses make them especially well qualified for inclusion in the nation's pantheon of heroic defeats (thus maintaining the conceit that this is only a setback in the forward march of Revolutionary history)? Or does it signal, on the contrary, a semantic dearth that confounds the explanatory power of Revolutionary "sacrifice"?

The fact that the battle does not take a proper place name anywhere in the ballad is significant. In fact no contemporary observers seem to know the battle's precise location, since it occurred in a geographical area whose cartographies were not readily assimilable to colonial epistemologies of space. Instead we get loose approximations based around landmarks that U.S. Americans could identify: "at Miami, near Fort-Washington, in the *Ohio Country*."<sup>42</sup> The moniker by which the battle was most commonly described—"St. Clair's Defeat"—is a more economical label, but it is unmistakably negative, as it identifies "defeat" with the failure of a representative male figure. The desolation of the word "carnage" (*such a heavy carnage...*) may also offer a clue about the place of the battle in relation to Revolutionary history. Defined as "a heap

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<sup>42</sup> Freeman Hearsey, "An Elegiac Poem. Composed by F[reeman] H[earsey], a Citizen of Boston, and published by the earnest Request of many Friends" (Boston: Ezekiel Russell, 1791).

of dead bodies, especially of men slain in battle” or “the slaughter of a great number; butchery, massacre” (OED), “carnage” evokes the spectacle of unmourned flesh and senseless wounding—the wretched exposure of the body to extremity. Unlike those of Bunker’s Hill and Quebec, the casualties of “St. Clair’s Defeat” do not therefore appear to be sheltered by a coherent sense of place, purpose, or the conviction of eventual success. They do not stand *for* anything.

Following St. Clair’s defeat, the progress of Revolutionary history from Bunker Hill to Miami Village starts to look very much like degeneration, an impression sharpened by the lengthy list of casualties drawn from the ranks of experienced war veterans. Indeed, “St. Clair’s Defeat” couches the issue of historical decline as a generational problem. The battle seems to waste the lives of men who had fought in the Revolutionary war, their legacy thus quite literally lost in the woods. In addition, the ballad betrays a palpable anxiety that younger generations of American military men are either unfit or unable to carry that legacy forward. The rank and file feature as a sort of absent presence, rarely responding to the exhortations of their commanding officers, and appearing more often than not as the recipients rather than the authors of military force. Unlike in the case of the Crawford campaign, however, St. Clair’s troops’ passivity is not imposed as a condition of captivity. They are being routed in huge numbers on a battlefield: “our militia *was attacked* [ . . . ] soon *was overpowered* and *forc’d was to retreat*”; “they soon *made us retreat*”; “they *took from us our cannon*”; “our musquetry and riflemen their fire *did sustain*.<sup>1</sup>” The list goes on. Even when Ferguson’s troops weep over his body, they are “caus’d to cry”—the tense is unremittingly passive until the retreat: “we did fly.” This may begin to explain why the lyricist’s assurances that “No sons of

Mars e'er fought more true," or that "They fought like brave Herculeans," fall rather flat. Comparisons to "sheep" and "Saints" are more plausible, though these words both seem to have lost their associations with the paradoxically vigorous forbearance of the martyr: the sheep are "lost," the Saints "resigned."

To the extent that this ballad locates a certain martial inadequacy in the generational gap between Revolutionary veterans and their successors, it seems to conform to the general view of the catastrophe in its aftermath. Though the battle tends to be known as "St. Clair's defeat," St. Clair himself does not appear to have been widely blamed by the public even though he resigned his commission at Washington's request. The special committee of the House of Representatives appointed to investigate the campaign ultimately determined that poor equipment and lack of supplies were responsible for its miscarriage, and when the committee published its findings in 1792 it was careful to exculpate St. Clair: "the failure of the late expedition can, in no respect, be imputed to his conduct [ . . . ] as his conduct in all the preparatory arrangements was marked with peculiar ability and zeal, [and] his conduct during the action furnished strong testimonies of his coolness and intrepidity."<sup>43</sup> But while St. Clair was officially exonerated, the same could not necessarily be said of his soldiers, whose "want of discipline and experience" (7) were cited as contributing factors in the defeat. St. Clair acknowledged this himself, though he noted that it was not the fault of his troops that they were under-prepared: "I have nothing [ . . . ] to lay to the charge of the troops but their want of discipline, which, given the short time they had in the service, it was

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<sup>43</sup> "In the House of Representatives of the United States, Tuesday the 8<sup>th</sup> of May, 1792" (Philadelphia: Francis Childs and John Swaine, 1792), 7.

impossible they should have acquired, and which rendered it very difficult, when they were thrown into confusion, to reduce them again to order.”<sup>44</sup> The St. Clair expedition has a breathless quality, a feeling of being “out of time”—not in the mythic sense (of ritual or eternity), but as a condition of relentless and directionless disarray. No one is adequately prepared, and even the elegies can seem overextended.

The eschatological construct Brackenridge had used in 1782 to yoke the conquest of Indian lands to the redemption of the Revolution’s heroes thus seems to have become a liability in the early 1790s, as the repeated undoing of white male bodies in the western borderlands comes to look less like a precursor to, or precondition for, U.S. national triumph over Native peoples, and more like a chronic disorder of Revolutionary historical experience. I argued above that the frontier emerges in the 1780s as a temporalization of space that asserts a purportedly natural division between the progressive order of Revolutionary time and the chaotic ahistoricity of that which opposes it. Following the St. Clair expedition, the frontier seems not only to fail as a mechanism for organizing linear history but also to become associated with an awareness of history as a principle of unsystematic negativity against which all efforts to advance will necessarily fail. The result is a paradoxically dynamic state of arrest, a feeling that time is stalled, or, as the epigraph to one of the St. Clair elegies puts it, that “Man knoweth not his Time; he is *caught* in an Evil Hour” (my emphasis).<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Extract from a letter reprinted in “Mellancholy Account respecting the Western Army,” Boston: B. Edes and Son, [December 19] 1791. The author’s name is illegible due to archival damage, and the recipient is identified simply as a “Friend in New-York.” Another observer added that when the retreat began “great numbers [...] threw away their arms and abandoned themselves to despair.” St. Clair to Knox, Nov. 9, 1791. *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Freeman Hearsey, “An Elegiac Poem” (Boston: Ezekiel Russell, 1791).

#### IV. Generic Life: “Jackson Johonnet” and the Time of Interruption

When Matthew Carey published *The Dreadful Distresses of Frederick Mannheim’s Family* (1794), St. Clair’s defeat was a very recent memory and the Western Confederacy had the upper hand. As in the case of *Narratives*, *Mannheim*’s anthologized format presents the frontier as a zone of perpetual conflict between Americans and Indian savagery. All of its materials are clearly dated from the late 1770s-90s, but make almost no reference to the British, or to European-Native alliance more generally. Like Brackenridge’s anthology, *Mannheim* thus adopts Revolutionary chronology as temporal frame within which it recasts Revolutionary struggle as a “timeless” national/racial conflict that is ongoing in the present. Like *Narratives*, too, “Indians” are consistently represented in *Mannheim* as undifferentiated monsters whose lurid acts of depravity furnish justification for their preemptive destruction. In the only editorial comment he offers in his edition, for example, Carey writes in a short preface that the collection evinces “the dreadful cruelties exercised by the Indians on persons so unfortunate as to fall in their hands.”<sup>46</sup> Specific calls for action tend to be embedded at the end of individual selections, as when Jackson Johonnet concludes his narrative by exhorting “American youth” to “defend the worthy inhabitants of the frontiers from the depredations of savages; whose horrid mode of war is a scene to be deprecated by civilized nature; whose tender mercies are cruelties and whose faith is by no means to be depended on.”<sup>47</sup> However, unlike Brackenridge’s earlier collection, *Mannheim* does not focus on military campaigns, turning instead toward a sensationalized vision of the

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<sup>46</sup> Matthew Carey, ed. *The Dreadful Distresses of Frederick Mannheim’s Family* (Philadelphia: D. Humphreys for Matthew Carey, 1794).

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 42.

frontier along which white men's proprietorship over reproductive female bodies is the object of Indian violence. The anthology takes its title from the first of its selections—"The Dreadful Distresses of Frederick Mannheim's Family"—which recounts the 1779 ritual torture and immolation of two "helpless" sixteen-year old "virgins," the Mannheim twins.<sup>48</sup> While Carey's edition of 1794 was not the first, Carey was the only editor to include a frontispiece, and he tellingly chose for its image the culminating spectacle of the Mannheim narrative: the women stripped and tied to a post in a ring of fire (fig. 3).<sup>49</sup> This indicates a shift in the gendered and sexualized terms by which the frontier was imagined in the U.S. during the 1780s-90s. *Mannheim* starts to transfer the evidential burdens of frontier sufferings away from men and onto the bodies of women.

I suggest that this shift from a masculine to a feminized economy of frontier violence occurs as a response to the crisis of U.S. manhood engendered by the Western Confederacy's stunning victories over U.S. forces in the early 1790s. The repetitive scenes of homoerotic "unmanning" in popular responses to St. Clair's defeat strongly imply that the Western Confederacy's military successes had left U.S. men without a stable gender identity, or perhaps any gender at all. St. Clair's troops are not simply feminized, but unmade: they become porous and receptive surfaces that weep, bleed, and run. From the standpoint of a liberal gender matrix that identifies manhood with self-possession, individuation, and humanity itself, the reversion of white male bodies into

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 5-7.

<sup>49</sup> Matthew Carey was the first to publish *Mannheim* with the frontispiece in his Philadelphia octavo edition of 1794, and again in 1800. James Oram's 1798 printing (New York) also includes this image as a frontispiece. Three editions of *Mannheim* published in 1793 (Exeter NH: H. Ranlet); in 1799, as "Horrid Indian Cruelties!" (Boston, J. White); and in 1800 (Leominster, MA: Chapman Whitcomb) appeared without illustration.



Fig. 3 Frontispiece to Carey's edition of *The Dreadful Distresses of Frederick Mannheim's Family* (1793). The image also appears with Carey's 1794 and 1800 editions. Evans.

undifferentiated flesh constitutes a historical emergency of the first order. Women might therefore have been called forth as the “proper” objects of Indian violence at this time not necessarily because they represent the sanctity of domestic interiors in a “separate spheres” gender arrangement, but because—as they are nobodies to begin with—they are safer targets for that violence from a liberal patriarchal perspective. They can be hurt without directly compromising the symbolic power of white humanity borne by men.

I return to what I call the feminization of the frontier in the final section of this chapter, but I want to dwell in this section on the crisis of masculinity that I identify with its emergence by examining another narrative that appears in *Mannheim*. Entitled “The Remarkable Adventures of Jackson Johonnet,” it traces the eponymous hero’s involvement in the Harmar and St. Clair campaigns, and elaborates on the challenge their failure posed to constructions of the frontier as an advancing time line of Revolutionary history. “Johonnet” has the distinction of being the only text collected in *Mannheim* that had certainly appeared in print prior to its anthologization. First published in *Beers’s Almanack* (1792), the text was republished in several standalone editions between 1793-1816, but with differences from its anthologized versions. Title pages of early standalone editions seem to highlight “Johonnet’s” topical relevance by presenting the words “Harmar,” “St. Clair,” and “Kickapoo Indians” in large, eye-grabbing typeface (fig. 4).<sup>50</sup> By contrast, when it appears in *Mannheim* it is advertised simply as “The Remarkable Adventures of Jackson Johonnet” on the anthology’s various title pages, where it is of course also subordinated to the marquee act of the *Mannheim* narrative. When it is

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<sup>50</sup> In this section I will be working from the first, standalone edition (Providence: [s.n.], 1793) due to the fact that Carey redacted a key passage of the text when he anthologized it.

— THE —  
REMARKABLE ADVENTURES  
OF  
*JACKSON JOHONNET,*  
OF  
*MASSACHUSETTS.*

Who served as a Soldier in the Western Army, in  
the Massachusetts Line, in the Expedition under

*General HARMAR,*

AND THE UNFORTUNATE

*General St. CLAIR.*

Containing an Account of his Captivity, Sufferings,  
and Escape from the

**KICKAPOO INDIANS.**

Written by himself, and published at the earnest Im-  
portunity of his Friends, for the Benefit of

**AMERICAN YOUTH.**

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PRINTED AT LEXINGTON (*Kentucky*).—1791.

RE-PRINTED AT PROVIDENCE.

M.DCC.XCIII.

AFFECTING HISTORY  
OF THE  
DREADFUL DISTRESSES  
OF  
*FREDERIC MANHEIM's FAMILY.*

TO WHICH ARE ADDED, THE  
SUFFERINGS OF JOHN CORBLY's FAMILY.  
AN ENCOUNTER BETWEEN A WHITE MAN  
AND TWO SAVAGES.

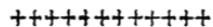
EXTRAORDINARY BRAVERY OF A WOMAN.  
ADVENTURES OF CAPT. ISAAC STEWART.

DEPOSITION OF MASSEY HERBESON.

ADVENTURES AND SUFFERINGS OF PETER  
WILKINSON.

REMARKABLE ADVENTURES OF JACKSON  
JOHONNOT.

ACCOUNT OF THE DESTRUCTION OF THE  
SETTLEMENTS AT WYOMING.



PHILADELPHIA:

PRINTED (FOR MATHEW CAREY) BY D. HUMPHREYS, No. 48,

SPRUCE-STREET.—1794.

PRICE A QUARTER DOLLAR !

Fig. 4. Title page of the standalone 1793 edition of the Johonnet narrative (left) and the title page to Carey's 1794 edition of *Affecting History of the Dreadful Distresses of Frederick Mannheim's Family* (right). Note that the "Johonnet" is buried second from the last in *Mannheim*. Evans.

published alone as a single-author text, then, “Johonnet” is marketed as an item of current interest that is clearly connected to the ongoing war with the Western Confederacy. In the format of the anthology, “Johonnet” is flattened and decontextualized; it appears (at least hypothetically) as just another example of perennial Indian cruelty.

“Johonnet”’s inclusion in *Mannheim* is rather extraordinary, given that it delivers a withering critique of the anthology’s propagandistic faith that generalizing judgments can be conjured from the repetition of loss. Indeed, I have suggested that the anthology form is ideologically effective to the extent that it gathers dispersed proofs into a single body of evidence that can be leveraged in support of historical synthesis. However, the same cannot be said of “Jackson Johonnet” itself, in which the repetitive temporality of white male defeat along the frontier appears to pose an insurmountable obstacle to coherence or self-mastery. Jackson Johonnet seems unable to unite the evidence of his experience around either a consolidated subject or a teleological narrative of progress. His narrative ponders questions raised by St. Clair’s defeat about how liberal masculine ideals enshrined in the Revolution’s nationalist legacies (courage, restraint, perseverance, self-possession) can be transmitted from one generation to another, how they can be reproduced, in a military organization based on a vertical chain of command between fathers (veterans) and sons (recruits) and, at least hypothetically, on the horizontal solidarity between “brothers” in the rank-and-file. What is to be done when the commands of paternalistic officers to their “boys” fail to impose order, and when

brothers-in-arms express themselves most coherently as a group and as subjects when they are in the act of fleeing, or when they are “mingled in one grave”?<sup>51</sup>

As I discussed in the last section, responses to St. Clair’s defeat were permeated by a homoerotic grammar of passivity. Occasionally, amorous energies between men erupt within the ranks of the U.S. army—the “mingling” of bodies in the grave, the tears that are “forc’d” over Ferguson’s corpse—and in Jackson Johonnet’s recruitment, which he describes as a seduction. Writes Johonnet: “a young officer came into my room, and soon entered into conversation on the pleasures of a military life [ . . . ]. His artifice has the desired effect; for after treating me with a bowl or two of punch, I enlisted, with a firm promise on his side to assist me [ . . . ].”<sup>52</sup> More frequently, however, the homoerotics of Native military success over U.S. forces emerge in the clash between American and Indian bodies, where Americans consistently appear as the passive objects of formidable Native virility. Serially “overpower’d” and penetrated by Indian bullets, scalping-knives, and tomahawks, their cannons seized, and their muskets dropped, white men seem in the best-case scenario to “sustain” the fire of their adversaries. “Johonnet’s” structure of narrative repetition takes up these anxieties at the levels of form and genre, thus pondering the implications of white men’s recurrent overmastery by Native forces for Revolutionary time and subjectivity as a structural feature of its emplotment. Most interesting of all, I suggest, are “Johonnet’s” queer expressions of desire for the release from linear time and possessive individualism that seems to come with defeat.

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<sup>51</sup> “Columbian Tragedy: Containing a Particular Account of the Brave and Unfortunate Officers and Soldiers, who were slain and wounded in the Ever-Memorable and Bloody Indian Battle.” Hartford: [1791?].

<sup>52</sup> *The Remarkable Adventures of Jackson Johonnet, of Massachusetts* (Providence: [s.n.], 1793), 4.

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The ataxic effects of non-linear time in “Johonnet” are encoded in its generic instability. Johonnet initially appears to set out on an autobiographical project with the observation that “There is seldom a more difficult task undertaken by a man, than the act of writing a narrative of a person’s own life; especially where the incidents border on the marvelous.”<sup>53</sup> It is a conventional enough beginning as eighteenth-century preambles go, and yet one could reasonably expect to encounter this opening line in a completely different generic context. It conspicuously fails to establish captivity and its conditions as the primary subjects of Johonnet’s tale, neither launching us directly into the action, nor laying the groundwork for a scene of capture that follows swiftly afterwards. Instead, after the opening passage, Johonnet gives an account of his family and the circumstances that led him to enlist in the Western Army, explaining that his parents’ poverty drives him to “seek a separate fortune” (3) in Boston, where he is soon duped into joining the infantry by a recruitment officer armed with a bowl of punch. Johonnet overcomes this initial setback by applying himself to his training and obtaining a sergeancy through his own efforts. He then joins General Harmar’s forces in the west, noting that the “hunger, fatigue, and toil” of the march are made tolerable by his confident expectations of “easy conquest, rich plunder and fine farms in the end” (4). And it is now, just as he begins to believe that he is on the “direct road to honour, fame, and fortune,” that Johonnet is captured by Kickapoo warriors in an ambush which takes place, as he points out, “before a single opportunity presented in which I could have a chance to signalize myself” (5).

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<sup>53</sup> *The Remarkable Adventures of Jackson Johonnet, of Massachusetts* (Providence: [s.n.], 1793), 3.

At this stage the narrative is roughly halfway through, and the contours of a *Bildungsroman* are clearly discernible even in my brief overview of the plot. Yet this *Bildung* moves at best to a staccato rhythm, for Johonnet's would-be tale of progress in and through the world is so frequently interrupted or contradicted that Johonnet rarely seems to be advancing at all. He escapes his family's penury only to be entrapped by the military; he transforms himself into an officer only to be taken captive before he sees battle; and he will subsequently escape his Indian captors only to join St. Clair's disastrous 1791 campaign, which he narrowly survives. Johonnet's life thus follows a restless pattern of advance and retreat whose sequence does not ultimately add up to a developmental narrative—it concludes neither felicitously (with the acquisition of wealth, fame, or family), nor tragically (with Johonnet's terminal disillusionment or death). Last seen hobbling back to Fort Jefferson after escaping his captors, Johonnet seems to be no further ahead than he was at the beginning of his ordeals, both in material terms and by virtue of the fact that there is no end in sight to the repetitive patterns which deny him forward momentum. Despite his near-constant activity, when Johonnet breaks off his narrative he leaves the reader with little more than a staggering sense of inertia.

Johonnet's opening remark that "there is seldom a more difficult task undertaken by man, than the act of writing a narrative of a person's life" would thus seem to bear totemic significance for the entire text, which is in many ways *about* the conditions of (im)possibility underwriting concepts of Revolutionary history that take autonomous, rights-bearing proprietary subjects as their protagonists. Johonnet never quite succeeds at being the hero of his own story, which in turn never really becomes a story inasmuch as it does not reach a conclusion. I do not mean to imply that "Johonnet" is therefore a kind

of “failed” *Bildungsroman* instead of (or in addition to) a captivity narrative, because this statement presumes that a classificatory principle obtains in the text which would assign such labels to distinct epistemologies and orders of experience. Rather, “Johonnet” locates continuities between the ambitions of *Bildung* (independence, progress, happiness, property) and the circumstances of captivity (enthralment, seizure, arrest) that raise unsettling questions about the destiny of Revolutionary freedom. Indeed, the pattern of advance and retreat that I identified above might be more precisely described as an alternation between states of mobility and arrest. But what is the relationship between these states? Are Johonnet’s various captivities to poverty, appearances, armies, and Indians conditions of his freedom in the sense that he must overcome them in order to become free? Or is freedom itself a captive condition—does it look and feel very much like internment or paralysis?

In fact these alternatives may not represent much of a choice at all in a contractual model of freedom that defines that concept in terms of privation (*freedom from...*). As Franco Moretti observes, the ethos of *Bildung*—like that of liberal contract theory—is typically one of ameliorative exchange in which individuals surrender their personal autonomy for the security and happiness afforded by social attachments.<sup>54</sup> In this account, the attainment of happiness (wealth, fame, family) is necessarily ascetic: an achievement measured through loss, a sacrifice. Yet what is lost in the exchange is a state of permissive freedoms (*freedom to...*) paradoxically characterized by scarcity, isolation, contingency, and violence. In the liberal vision that underwrites nationalist evocations of

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<sup>54</sup> Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (London: Verso, 1987).

Revolutionary history, then, freedom is experienced as constraint both before and after the assumption of social responsibility, but only in the social world is that constraint imbued with what Moretti calls “symbolic legitimacy.”<sup>55</sup> Part of what one acquires under the sign of liberal sociality is the right to believe in organized loss; by accepting one’s place in (hypothetically) symmetrical systems of reward and punishment, one attains freedom from cosmologies of accident in which things can and do happen for no reason.

Approached from this vantage, the breakdown of the freedom/captivity binary in *Johonnet* is less problematic from a liberal point of view than the fact that the social-symbolic order through which meaning is assigned to privation appears to have been compromised. Johonnet ought to be able to exchange self-discipline for social mastery, as in the case of his promotion: an instance in which work magically moves him from a lower to a higher state of attainment and just as magically atones for the mistake of having yielded to the recruitment officer’s “artifice.”<sup>56</sup> But this is the first and last time that Johonnet’s initiative affords him measurable improvement. Starting with his capture by the Kickapoo, Johonnet begins to endure adversity without compensation. The “Indian” thus figures as the impediment to Johonnet’s self-realization in his narrative, holding out an explanation for his non-fulfillment that does not necessarily implicate the structures and assumptions of liberal Revolutionary history. Indeed, if the seductive circumstances of Johonnet’s recruitment suggest that mechanisms of error and inequality lurk within the fabric of liberal sociality, captivity promises to reverse the trend by

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>56</sup> “Jackson Johonnet,” 4.

externalizing blame onto Indians who insert non-developmental seriality into Johonnet's prospective narrative of progress.

To the extent that it posits Indians as obstructions to self-determination in this way, "Johonnet's" double participation in the conventions of captivity and *Bildung* takes on the appearance of pathology, with generic mixture signaling an alien disruption to a narrative that would otherwise take its proper course. At its most ideologically effective, "Johonnet" might therefore be said to yoke the destiny of Revolutionary ideals aspirationally to the annihilation of Indians, marking the reinstatement of the subject's narrative autonomy as a condition of colonial conquest (indeed, Johonnet's concluding call is for the "defense" of the frontier from "the depredations of savages"). The displacements entailed in this view, however, remain incomplete. By marking autonomy as conditional, "Johonnet" concedes that the exemplary and/or self-authorizing subject is himself subject to potentially insuperable contingencies ("Indians")—in other words, there are limits to self-actualization which have to do with the nature of history, revealed not as a principle of advance but rather of accident, not of adventure but misadventure. In "Johonnet" we therefore lose the comforts typically extended by providential narrative, where the acquisition of individual mastery over and through contingency is precisely the point. Indeed, when Johonnet writes that he "providentially escaped unhurt" (13) from St. Clair's campaign, one is forced to wonder: to what end? Johonnet's survival is banal; it exemplifies nothing, foretells nothing. The future yields no discernible transformation. Time isn't going anywhere in particular, least of all in a linear motion.

The absence of *telos* in "Johonnet" points to a powerful ambivalence in the text to which "Indians" begin to give shape but for which they cannot be made fully

accountable. This narrative ponders the possibility embedded in eighteenth-century concepts of revolution that time is cyclical and repetitive rather than linear and progressive. Indeed, there is a double semantic movement in late eighteenth-century concepts of revolution, which had been strongly bound to older, Newtonian notions of cyclical return in Anglophone politics for at least a century before it began to acquire its now more familiar associations with radical change.<sup>57</sup> Is history driven by a principle of individuality, of change and betterment? Or can history “resist change and bring back the past”?<sup>58</sup> “Johonnet” appears to incline towards the latter view, except the revolutionary temporality Johonnet inhabits is stripped of its restorative promise; it is arbitrary and unforeseeable in nature. In that way, “Johonnet” perhaps recalls the even older Medieval and Renaissance conception of Fortune that I discussed in the last chapter. Indeed, it is in this sense that Samson Occom describes the “revolutionary” effects of the war in Indian country in his 1784 lament that “there is nothing but Wo, Wo, Wo, Written in every Turn of the Wheel of God’s providence against us.” As in the Wheel of Fortune, the return of the past in “Johonnet” is not nostalgically replete with organized meanings; instead it disrupts predictable ordinations of past, present, and future time.

After his escape from the Kickapoo, for instance, Johonnet writes that his regiment “joined the western army, on an expedition against the Indians of the Miami

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<sup>57</sup> Perhaps the most significant precedent for many late-century Whigs was the (so-called) “Glorious Revolution” of 1688. From the late 17<sup>th</sup> century onward, Whigs had insisted that this event was “revolutionary” in the sense that it *restored* the ancient Constitutional liberties of the English people, thus returning them to a state of political freedom that had been corrupted by the King. See Christopher Hill, *The Century of Revolution: 1603-1714* (New York: Routledge, 2001). For the ambiguity of the meaning of “revolution” during the American war, see Michael Kammen, *A Season of Youth: The American Revolution and the Historical Imagination* (New York: Knopf, 1978), and the introduction to this dissertation.

<sup>58</sup> Moretti, *The Way of the World*, 94.

Village, the place in which I had suffered so much, and so recently, and where I had beheld so many cruelties perpetrated on the unfortunate Americans.”<sup>59</sup> In other words, he returns with his regiment to the former scene of his captivity. Threaded between constraint and flight, Johonnet’s fate appears in this moment to be driven neither by his own exertion, nor by the instructive hand of fate, but rather by enigmatic determinations of place and time that recall past experience in present and future ones. The past does not of course recur in the strict sense that events repeat themselves exactly as they once happened. Time advances more in the manner of echoes, each repetition a kind of haunting or re-collection that at once cites and reframes what preceded it. Johonnet returns to Miami not as a captive but as an enlisted soldier. And because Johonnet’s experiences of captivity and enlistment carry him to the same location twice, the distinction between these experiences as ones of unfreedom and freedom, respectively, is drawn into question. Likewise, Johonnet’s second escape from Miami (in battle) recalls his first (from captivity), establishing a horizontal connection between escape and retreat as items in a series (“flight”). At the same time, the repetition of escape as retreat is perverse, and indeed *Johonnet* quite often phrases the motions of repetitive temporality as processes of declension very much as in other representations of St. Clair’s expedition.

In the absence of the assurance that the future will represent a linear elaboration of the past, genre loses its purposive status in “Johonnet”; contingency begins to dictate the terms of generic repetition and not the other way around. Part of what is at stake here is the status of Revolution as an origin and arbiter of legitimating social meanings.

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<sup>59</sup> “Johonnet,” 11.

“Johonnet” asks questions not only about the destiny of Revolutionary ideals, but also whether and how revolution furnishes its legatees with destinies. In that way, “Johonnet’s” generic indeterminacies might be seen to diagnose a contusion in Enlightenment epistemologies of history—and not simply a perversion introduced from outside—for if time does not follow a predictable pattern of progressive amelioration, the reproduction of possessive individualism *as a genre* becomes effectively impossible.

As Derrida suggests in “The Law of Genre” (1980), normative constructions of generic identity are founded in tautologies: “If a genre is what it is, or if it supposed to be what it is destined to be by virtue of its *telos*, then ‘genres are not to be mixed’ [ . . . ].”<sup>60</sup> Notions of generic purity and consistency, then, are founded either on hopeless reductionism (genre is what it is) or in a teleological principle that yokes generic repetition to the production of a particular end that retroactively defines it (genre is supposed to be what it is destined to be). Conceived as Law, genre dictates that repetition will predict and also produce the very outcomes that supply it with meaning; generic repetition signifies in the name of what it engenders. In “Johonnet,” the Law of Genre would dictate that Johonnet’s opening rehearsal of *Bildung*’s conventions conclude with the realization of *Bildung*, just as his initial embarkation on the proprietary script of liberal subjectivity would correctly foretell “easy conquest, rich plunder and fine farms in the end.” But that is not what happens, because Indians’ diversion of Johonnet’s narrative from its “proper” generic destinies reveals that history does not move inexorably forward. Indians are supposed to be a contingency that Johonnet overcomes

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<sup>60</sup> Jacques Derrida, “The Law of Genre,” trans. Avital Ronell. *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1980), 57 [55-81].

either through *Bildung* or through escape from captivity. Instead, they launch him into a repetitive temporality without a foreseeable conclusion in either generic mode.

Derrida's account of genre is productively distinct from either a tautological or reductionist approach. He goes on to describe what he calls "the generic mark": the "identifiable recurrence of a common trait by which one recognizes, or should recognize, membership in a class." Generic marks are the repetitive traits or patterns by which genres are recognized; yet Derrida points out that the generic mark itself—the "mark of belonging or inclusion"—"does not properly pertain to any genre or class." The generic participation of texts "never amounts to *belonging*," therefore, because the very means by which a text marks or is marked by generic participation refuses generic enclosure (my emphasis).<sup>61</sup> In Derrida's account, the mechanisms of generic reproduction do not emanate from an essence interior to texts but rather reside in alien processes of repetition that cannot be assimilated into the order they produce. As a result, there are no pure genres—all genre is necessarily conditioned by an "axiom of impossibility," "a law of impurity or a principle of contamination."<sup>62</sup>

Derrida's argument is useful for reading "Jackson Johonnet" because Indians might be said to perform the function of the generic mark in this text. They promise to structure the narrative by disrupting it, providing the "axiom of impossibility" around which generic participations are spun. However, unlike in Derrida's account, "Johonnet" does not appear to be able to leverage the disruption that Indians represent toward a particular end—the text never becomes generic, in the sense that it participates in at least

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<sup>61</sup> Jacques Derrida, "The Law of Genre," trans. Avital Ronell. *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1980): 64-65.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 56.

two genres without resolving into either. In Derrida's terms, the overwhelming disruptive force that Indians wield in the narrative thus makes "Johonnet" super- or hyper-generic (as opposed to un- or ageneric), because it is a narrative so replete with the force of generic marks that it is insufficiently impure to take a recognizable course. Another way of saying this might be that "Johonnet" becomes radically generic in the sense that it is *unspecific*: general, comprehensive, unindividuated. By supplanting the sovereignty of the agential subject in and over his story with an alternative reproductive ethic of identity as a participatory condition of repetitive emergence, Indians en-common the text. But while this appears as a kind of flattening out (Johonnet does not accede to the genre of possessive individualism, the narrative "fails" to move forward), it may actually be a filling up or opening out into another order of repletion. Something common—that is, non-proprietary—becomes possible.

In one sense, Indians are made to embody a counter-Revolutionary quantity in "Johonnet" to the extent that they deny him certain forms of narrative order (linear, progressive, terminal) as well as modes of being (self-possessed, autonomous, individuated). But if Indians forbid Johonnet from (re)producing himself as Man, their presence also annotates queer modes of personhood that take shape in non-linear time. Hence in one of the most important passages of his narrative, Johonnet positions the recursions of his own fate in a broader pattern of historical repetition. Reaching Fort Jefferson, he writes:

This Fort is [ . . . ] within a few miles of the spot where  
Braddock's defeat took place. I walked over the ground  
where the action happened, a few days after our arrival at

Fort Jefferson, and viewed it very attentively; having a companion with me who was able to describe the different positions of the English army on that very unhappy day. In many places we observed human bones strewed on the ground, which remained unconsumed, and excited melancholy sensations, Many of the trees around, still shew [sic] the scars of balls which grazed them in the action: Alas, how little did I think at the time of viewing these things, that an army of Americans nearly equal in number to Braddock's, was destined in a few days to experience a similar defeat, and fly across this melancholy spot [ . . . ].<sup>63</sup>

Before I press on with my reading, it is worth noting that this passage only appears in standalone editions of the Johonnet narrative. It is redacted from every version of the text that appears in *Mannheim*'s various editions, including Carey's. As I have been arguing throughout this chapter, I suggest that this is because the editors of those anthologies were attempting to construct "the frontier" as a Revolutionary time-line purported to have separated Indians from Americans eternally. The obvious problem with this passage for such projects is that it describes a moment of affective transport which carries Johonnet backwards in time to Braddock's defeat in 1755. He is recalling a moment in colonial history before U.S. independence, and well before the chronological cut-off for *Mannheim*'s range of coverage in the late 1770s. "Americans" did not exist in a

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<sup>63</sup> "Jackson Johonnet," 11.

nationalist sense in 1755, but at that time they would also have fought as British subjects, alongside Native allies, against France and its Native allies. Johonnet is remembering something that the anthology demands we forget; he is grieving over non-U.S.-nationalized remains.

In this passage, then, Johonnet has entered a temporality in which the cycles of revolution exceed the semiotic regime of the U.S. nation-state. Running against the current of the U.S. nationalist conceit of Revolution-as-progress, history as Johonnet apprehends it here is revolutionary in the sense that it folds back on itself in recurring but unforeseeable patterns of violence that resist symbolic recuperation. Johonnet reflects that the very spot on which he experiences “melancholy sensations” for Braddock’s defeat is the one he is “destined” to pass as he retreats from the Western Confederacy. The future is at once empty and overdetermined since its only discernible content lies in recurrence. But the past—and Johonnet’s relationship to it—is overflowing with new meanings. Indeed, Johonnet’s encounter with the repetition of violence on this “melancholy spot” allow for collective association that relies neither on individualistic triumphs over contingency (as in liberal providentialism), nor in national identity (the remains Johonnet contemplates could be English, French, and/or Native). Rather, the unloosing of memory from the possession of individuals provides the basis here for enactments of solidarity founded in the susceptibility to senseless harm that is the common lot of earthly matters. Johonnet evokes trees and bones as presences who make active claims on his attention. He writes, for instance, that the trees are witnesses to harm: they “still shew the scars of balls which grazed them [ . . . ].” Similarly, he describes how the “bones strewed on the ground [ . . . ] remained unconsumed, and excited

melancholy sensations.” The bones are doing something in this line—they are the subjects of the verbs “remained” and “excited,” despite (or in addition to) the fact that the passive past participle tense of both verbs has an adjectival quality. The grammar of this sentence thus suggests that the “remaining” of bones is a kind of active endeavor in the present as well as a condition of past-ness, just as the bones’ “excitation” of Johonnet’s melancholy is an outcome they seem energetically to bring about as well as a quality they give off as dormant artifacts. Trees and bones show and tell, move and linger. Neither subjects nor objects, they call Johonnet to join with them in the seething wake of history’s disasters.

By exiting the vertical structures of generic time, Johonnet’s encounter establishes a rapport between the living and the dead whose dimensions are not fully present to either. In fact, the distinction between the living and the dead does not really seem to hold—the encounter Johonnet describes is more rhizomatically dispersed than it is dialectically twofold, as he holds counsel with human remains, soil, trees, and the grazings of bullets in bark. In this way it is reminiscent of Monique Allewaert’s concept of “ecological personhood,” which she connects with forms of social life that take place amongst and between the rigidly partitioned and hierarchized categories of the human, the partially human, and the non-human.<sup>64</sup> However, the assemblages that Allewaert

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<sup>64</sup> Monique Allewaert, *Ariel's Ecology: Plantations, Personhood, and Colonialism in the American Tropics* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 2013). Allewaert examines forms of life pioneered by, but not exclusive to, Afro-American persons in the tropics which envision and embody the creative potential and political efficacy entailed in assemblages of the human and animal, for instance, or the body in parts. Emblematic examples include fetish magic, which conceives of assemblages of inert “things” as extensions of human bodies, and practices of marronage which engage tactile improvisations with vegetative life in the pursuit and defense of freedom. Allewaert’s examples typically emphasize vibrancy, creativity, thriving, whereas Johonnet’s tone is decidedly melancholic. Allewaert’s work forms part of a critical project drawn through “object-oriented ontology” (OOO), black feminism, and assemblage theory which challenges

examines are typically characterized by diversification, proximity, and thriving; by comparison, the timbre of Johonnet's encounter is sorrowful, and its contours ghostly. What draws trees, bones, ground, Johonnet, and grazings together in the passage above is that they are all remaining—they are what remains of history's winnowing impacts on matter. Along these lines, Johonnet's invocation of “melancholy” twice in the course of his reflection demands comparison with Sigmund Freud's description of melancholia, beautifully glossed by David L. Eng and David Kazanjian as “an enduring devotion on the part of the ego to the lost object” and “mourning without end.”<sup>65</sup> Key both to Freud's account of melancholia and to Eng and Kazanjian's discussion of it is the notion that “melancholia results from the inability to resolve the grief and ambivalence precipitated by the loss of the loved object.”<sup>66</sup> As Freud himself suggests, this may be because the melancholic “cannot see clearly what it is that has been lost”; the melancholic “knows whom he has lost but not what he has lost in him.”<sup>67</sup>

In these terms, and distinctly *unlike* eighteenth-century sympathetic identification which turn on the fantasy of intersubjective transparency between individuated persons, Johonnet's “melancholy sensations” arise from an encounter with traces and remains whose histories are not completely available to him, and which may move him for exactly this reason. He does not know what they have lost, or what he has lost in their

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Enlightenment genealogies of the human based on upright, autonomous masculine subjects. See also Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke UP, 2010) and Alex Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham: Duke UP, 2014).

<sup>65</sup> David L. Eng and David Kazanjian, “Introduction: Mourning Remains,” *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*, Eds. Eng and Kazanjian (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 3.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>67</sup> Sigmund Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia” [1917], *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 14, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), 245.

losses. Johonnet is bound in closer fellowship to the bones in the woods than he realizes when he first encounters them (“little did I think”); it is only after he flies back across the place that he retrospectively constructs this connection. The significance of his encounter with the remains of the battle is therefore not exhausted because it was not known in the original moment he experienced it. The “origin” has ceased to arbitrate historical meaning; it cannot even be located. (Was the first time Johonnet encountered the remains when he stood in the wood? When he ran back across the “melancholy spot” in retreat? When he recalled these experiences retrospectively?) Only later does Johonnet understand that he is in solidarity with the remains of Braddock’s defeat because he, too, will move through a historical passage over which he has no control. He, too, will be subject to time. The implications of this realization are still to be realized. Perhaps the bones, trees, and ground might have told Johonnet that, when time does not necessarily move forward, the full scope of what it means to be moved by loss remains to be seen.

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As in other popular U.S. literary responses to St. Clair’s defeat, Johonnet’s questions about the destiny of Revolutionary history appear to revolve anxiously around the imperilment of reproductive American masculinity by repeated Indian overmastery, which seems to strip white men of both “whiteness” and “maleness.” Indians seem to embody forms of personhood and enact forms of collective association that derail the identitarian constraints of proprietary subjectivity and throw the future into question. Yet the repetitive disruption that Indians introduce into 1780s-90s U.S. frontier imaginaries also mark queer alternatives (though non-liberatory ones) to linear time and proprietary individualism, in which the acquisition of freedom can look and feel much like an empty

exchange. While the tenor of U.S. literary responses to the Western Confederacy's successes is ostensibly one of homophobic panic, by the same token "Indians" may figure in them as reviled objects of desire for an escape from national history and its imperatives to self-possession. In other words, while Indians appear to function as non-reproductive threats to life that depend on linear history and individualism, I suggest that they may in fact mark *differently* reproductive organizations of collective life which occur in melancholic time.

Entailed in the desire for the alternatives that Indians make available in these materials is the buried consciousness that the supposed blessings of "whiteness" are a swindle. Dana Nelson contends that "white/national manhood" emerged as an "abstracting identity" (67) in the U.S. that promised to neutralize the "divisive effects of interpersonal, interclass, and interregional masculine competition" (37).<sup>68</sup> She argues that imagined integrity of this identity was stabilized through the projection of its "disavowed fragmentation [and] self-division" (88) onto "Indian territories, Indian bodies, Indian identities" (67). In other words, Nelson contends that "white/national manhood" consolidated itself as a homogenizing identity in the U.S. by projecting its own frictional and divided energies onto "Indianness." As Nelson suggests, in the cases I have been examining from St. Clair's campaign, Indians do appear to have "divisive effects" on the integrity of white/national manhood in the sense that they seem to ruin and overwhelm all efforts at U.S. military organization. However, even in the ideological miasma of these materials, Indians do not appear *themselves* to be fragmented or divided.

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<sup>68</sup> Dana Nelson, *National Manhood: Capitalist Citizenship and the Imagined Fraternity of White Men* (Durham: Duke UP, 1998).

If “whiteness” comes into view around the St. Clair expedition, it seems to be vitiated in direct proportion to the power and efficacy of Indian military confederation. This is reminiscent of Michael Drexler’s argument that “whiteness” appears in the context of the Haitian Revolution as a negative quantity, or counter-identity, that is drawn into relief by “the more effective collective actions” of its Others.<sup>69</sup> Drexler contends that during the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804), Haiti comes to represent the “comparative strength of black collectivity when measured against a Creole, New World community constructed on racial fantasy and communal perceptions of victimization.”<sup>70</sup> In another context, Ed White has similarly argued that Anglo-American colonial nationalism arises as a response to Indian pan-nativist movements of the early 1760s—for White, the U.S. may ultimately be a “counternation” to Indian tribal confederacy.<sup>71</sup> Differently from Nelson, then, Drexler and White historicize white/national creole identities as the etiolated negatives of black and indigenous forms of insurgent life.

Implicit in White and Drexler’s formulations is the sense that white/national creole identities are forged through the awareness of their own comparative shortfall. I am suggesting that “Johonnet’s” poetics of Indian interruption evince a kind of exhaustion with the penury of “whiteness,” but even more deeply, with the whole concept of the human in which it is constitutively grounded. Perhaps, as objects of fear as well as yearning, “Indians” represent the desire to be something other than national, other than linear, other than manly, where those qualities are sustained by possessive logics which

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<sup>69</sup> Michael Drexler, “Brigands and Nuns: The Vernacular Sociology of Collectivity after the Haitian Revolution,” *Messy Beginnings: Postcoloniality and Early American Studies*, Malini Schueller and Ed Watts, eds. (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 2003), 176 [175-99].

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 189.

<sup>71</sup> *The Backcountry and the City* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2005), 112.

ruthlessly require that everything—including time—should have a border. Capable of enacting a model of collective affiliation that does not appear to be based on the integrity of autonomous subjects, male Indian bodies seem in 1790s U.S. frontier imaginaries to remain curiously resistant to objectification even as (or precisely because) they are denied humanity. (Recall that “they” are the actants of “St. Clair’s Defeat.”) Moreover, Indian military organization appears to be effective across these accounts because it is not subject to rigid hierarchy. To the extent that they are perceived to be unindividuated masses, Native warriors thus share power across a collective body that is unimpeded by failures of communication or personal resolve. It may be possible, then, to read Indian confederation in these texts as the focus of queer desires for modes of identity and affiliation that are precluded by the constraints of nationally-sponsored possessive individualism, with its insistence on highly regulated relationships of insides to outsides, now and then. Such desires could never be fulfilled through identitarian consolidation. But they might be glimpsed in the unanticipated plenitude of trees and bones that have something trying yet to tell about failing *en masse*.

#### V. Feminizing the Frontier: The Mannheim Narrative and *The Hapless Orphan*

In the section above, I noted that the anthology in which Johonnet often appears in the 1790s, *The Dreadful Distresses of Frederick Mannheim’s Family* (1793-4), evinces a change in the gendered and sexual terms by which the frontier was imagined during the 1780s-90s. Much like anthologies themselves, however, this was neither a clean nor a linear development. If they had perused it cover to cover, *Mannheim*’s first readers would have encountered a range of stories, including a redacted version of “Johonnet,” an account of the burning of Wyoming settlements in 1778, and Massy Herbeson’s 1792

captivity narrative (which concludes with her redemption), all jostled together. What these stories have in common is chronology—they are all dated between 1779-92—and a shared vision of the frontier as a scene of contest between “merciless” savages and Americans from which other European actors (French, British, Spanish) are for the most part curiously missing. In terms of its content, *Mannheim* by no means represents a coherent expression of a new gendered and sexualized paradigm. However, Carey’s influential 1794 edition includes a frontispiece image of a scene from the Mannheim narrative that shows the Mannheim twins moments from death (fig. 3). In combination with the fact that this narrative is always the first to be anthologized both sequentially and chronologically, Carey’s frontispiece appears rather spectacularly to nominate women as sensationalized objects of Indian violence. Carey’s marketing of *Mannheim* thus clearly seems to shift the burdens of serial Indian penetration onto sexualized female bodies.

The Mannheim narrative from which Carey’s collection takes its name makes good on the promise of the frontispiece. It takes up only two pages, over half of which are consumed with a minute description of how “the dreadful distresses” in question were prepared and enacted. Depicted in the frontispiece of Carey’s 1794 and 1800 editions (fig. 3), the torture itself is replete with eroticized detail:

These furies assisted by their comrades, stripped the forlorn  
girls, already convulsed with apprehensions, and tied each  
to a sapling, with their hands as high extended above their  
heads as possible; and then pitched them from their knees  
to their shoulders, with upwards of six hundred of the  
sharpened splinters above described, which, at every

puncture, were attended with screams of distress, that echoed and re-echoed through the wilderness. And then to complete the infernal tragedy, the splinters, all standing erect on the bleeding victims, were every one set of fire, and exhibited a scene of monstrous misery, beyond the power of speech to describe, or even the imagination to conceive.<sup>72</sup>

While they may be deplorably familiar in the wake of nineteenth-century U.S. dime novels and the high crimes of John Ford movies, such sensationalized depictions of white women's violation by Indians had very few precedents in frontier literatures published between 1770-93.<sup>73</sup> The spectacular appearance of this argument in 1793 suggests that the ideological investment in female vulnerability to Indian violence was not a necessary or inevitable state of affairs in U.S. frontier imaginaries. I suggest that it emerges when it does as female bodies are made to bear emblematic responsibility for U.S. national "whiteness," which was too vulnerable to direct assault when it was carried by its normatively male proprietors into military defeat. Understanding the feminization of the frontier in the context of anxieties about masculinity in the era of the Western Confederacy may thus offer a slightly different historicization of the relationships

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<sup>72</sup> "The Dreadful Distresses of Frederick Mannheim's Family" (Philadelphia: Matthew Carey, 1794), 6.

<sup>73</sup> Two prominent exceptions are Wheeler Case's wartime verse description of "The tragical Death of Miss Jane Mcrea" (1778)—discussed in section 1 of this chapter—and possibly the "Panther" narrative (1787), in which the female protagonist narrowly escapes being raped by a giant who lives in a cave. Neither of these examples makes precisely the same ideological racial argument of the Mannheim narrative, however. Case's poems indict Indians along with the British, while the Panther narrative's bizarre depiction of the giant only tacitly identifies native peoples with sexualized threat. See Wheeler Case, *Poems, Occasioned By Several Circumstances and Occurrences, in the Present Grand Contest of America for Liberty*, (New Haven: Thomas and Samuel Green, 1778). The "Panther" narrative is notoriously difficult to cite; it was first published in Bickerstaff's Almanack in 1787 but was reprinted in tens of editions thereafter.

between white femininity and U.S. empire than those of scholars like Amy Kaplan, Linda Kerber, and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, all of whom have compellingly excavated the links between the rise of bourgeois female subjectivity, “separate spheres” domestic ideology, and U.S. histories of race and imperial expansion.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, in the case of “Mannheim” I suggest that the twins’ torture does not represent an assault on a feminized domestic sphere or a sentimental female subjectivity. What is violated when they suffer is instead their speculative value as sources of reproductive labor.

In fact the Mannheim twins are hardly subjects at all—little more than hollow surfaces to be punctured, pitched, and burnt. They scream and “shriek,” but they are not permitted to utter a single articulate word in the entire course of the narrative, and even their screams seem curiously empty, “echoing and re-echoing” through the wilderness in search of a white male response. Indeed, it seems to me that the twins are not the objects of Indian aggression here, which is directed instead at the male observer who holds property in them. The title of the narrative, we recall, is “The Dreadful Distresses of *Frederick Mannheim’s Family*,” not “The Dreadful Distresses of the Mannheim Twins,” and if there are sentimental subjects being constructed in this text they are “the unfortunate Mannheim,” obliged to watch his daughters die, and the implicitly male reader who watches with him.<sup>75</sup>

In the Mannheim narrative, men seem to have moved from being the direct to the indirect objects of serial Indian violence, from victims to witnesses, and this allows the

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<sup>74</sup> Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2002); Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Raleigh: UNC Press, 1980); Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “Dis-Covering the Subject of the ‘Great Constitutional Discussion,’ 1786-1789,” *Journal of American History* 79.3 (1992): 841-73.

<sup>75</sup> “The Dreadful Distresses of Frederick Mannheim’s Family” (Philadelphia: Matthew Carey, 1794), 5.

integrity of white male proprietary subjectivity to be maintained and re-confirmed through the spectacular exposure of female bodies to Indian violence. Whereas Knight was careful to emphasize the restraint and defiance with which Crawford meets his fate, the Mannheim twins—as women—are not assumed to be capable of rational self-mastery, nor can they lose their whiteness through Indian penetration. Properly speaking, they don’t *have* whiteness. According to proprietary logic, “men” are charged with reproductive power and “women” with the labor of realizing that power; women are therefore “nobodies,” but they have value insofar as men hold future labor and/or property in them. The Mannheim twins are “virgins,” not mothers; their value is measured abstractly, as potential future bearers of whiteness through succession. And since, as women, they are not thought to be capable of self-possession, they are free to scream their heads off. The louder the better, because each agonizing detail of their tortures raises the cost of witnessing their deaths, and with it the affective “pain” endured by their silent voyeurs. No longer viable as sources of sexual reproductive labor, what women in pain produce and reproduce is “feeling” as a possession of white masculinity. White men are thus (re)produced as *feeling* subjects whose humanity is affirmed in opposition to “unfeeling savages,” and in direct proportion to white female suffering. Routed through Mannheim’s forced observation, the twins’ deaths call on the benign-seeming sentiments of paternalistic love and protection, yet these are revealed to be not far distant from extraordinary sadism. The relish with which the narrator enumerates each puncture and cry brings the male spectator to participate vicariously in their torment, because the presumption of women’s utter helplessness is exactly what makes the twins’ deaths so moving from the vantage of proprietary men. In other words, because the

Mannheim twins make claims on white men's feelings by virtue of their utter abjection-as-property, white male sentimentality both requires and re-inscribes that abjection.

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*Mannheim*'s brand of spectacular fear mongering did not go unchallenged. By way of conclusion, I turn now to an anonymous epistolary novel, *The Hapless Orphan* (1793), which is set in 1790-92 against the backdrop of the Western Confederacy's campaigns in the upper Ohio and St. Clair's defeat.<sup>76</sup> *Hapless* protests the configuration I have just described—women's spectacular suffering as the prerogative of “benign” masculine melodrama—and it does so in highly confrontational terms. The scale of the brutality in its pages invites comparisons with de Sade, evoking an apparently indifferent cosmological order in which force is applied arbitrarily to (usually female) bodies through the expression of fundamentally perverse laws of “nature.” Like de Sade’s fiction, too, *The Hapless Orphan* seems to locate in these patterns of abuse the limits of proprietary subjectivity, measured specifically from the vantage of female embodiment. Whereas Jackson Johonnet may either lament or secretly desire the Indian interruptions of his autobiography, *Hapless* underlines the inordinate costs for women entailed in the pursuit of self-possession, exposing the ideal of female transparency on which it relies to be, quite literally, a death sentence. The novel thus delivers a particularly harrowing proof of the Enlightenment axiom that women are incapable of achieving rational self-possession because their objectification is a condition of its realization.

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<sup>76</sup> Anon. [“An American Lady”], *The Hapless Orphan; or, Innocent Victim of Revenge*, 2 vols. (Boston: Belknap and Hall, 1793).

The title alone signals trouble ahead: *The Hapless Orphan; or, The Innocent Victim of Revenge*. “Hapless” means “destitute of [ . . . ] good fortune, unfortunate, unlucky, luckless” (OED), denotations which signal the text’s concerns with cosmological accident. The root word “hap” by itself indicates an “absence of design or intent in relation to a particular event; fortuity, chance or fortune, considered as the cause or determiner of events” (OED). *Hap-less* thus presents something of a double negative—the lack of an absence of design or intention—where the terms of the negation seem to deepen in intensity instead of cancelling each other out (“the lack of an absence” *might* infer presence, but it can also be read as a redundancy: the lack of absence, i.e. the lack that pertains to absence). Two other negative states follow “hapless” in the title: “orphan” (the lack of parents) and “innocent victim” (the lack of justice in relation to the arbitrary power of “revenge”). In the place where we expect, as readers, to encounter the subject of the novel, we instead find a sequence of widening lacunae: hap-less, orphan, victim, and finally, remains. Indeed, the novel’s “Introductory Letter” discloses that the eponymous “hapless orphan,” Caroline Francis, is already dead. Writes her friend Maria, “[These letters] contain the most interesting events of her life, until the period she became missing. To these I have added the circumstances of her being forced by my brother, with the melancholy account of her death [ . . . ]” (I.4). This is the auto(?)biography of a corpse.

Given that *Hapless* is a long and obscure text, a brief overview of how Caroline meets her fate is in order. For Caroline Francis begins her adventures fairly educated, full of faith in the virtues of rational self-management, and modestly provided for by a revered uncle whose name, significantly, is Franklin: a physician who dies not long after

he rescues Caroline from her less charitable Aunt Noble. Caroline's own last name, Francis, derives from the Latin root *franciscus*, or "Frank-ish," which, along with Caroline's overt admiration for her Uncle Franklin, clearly invites the reader to identify her with Franklinian proprietary values even as it marks her gendered distance from them. Caroline is Frank-*ish*; the access to Enlightened proprietorship that she inherits at birth can only ever be approximate. Indeed, Caroline is no Franklinian heir despite her best efforts; she is unable with all her strengths of mind either to resist or escape her relentless misfortune, which is gradually revealed to be an effect of systematic oppression that only *looks* adventitious. Early in the novel, Caroline accidentally incurs the wrath of a woman named Eliza who wrongly believes Caroline to have caused her fiancé to commit suicide. From this point on, Caroline is beset by exponentially worsening threats ranging from mail fraud to kidnapping, some of which are clearly orchestrated by Eliza and some perhaps not. At least two of Caroline's closest friends are murdered by their husbands, and another is abducted from a night at the theatre and held in a safe house for days. Meanwhile, Caroline is tormented by the absence of her male family and friends, abroad in the Pennsylvania borderlands in the miserable campaigns of 1791-92. Her cousin is taken captive early in the novel and eventually confirmed dead by torture. Later, Caroline's fiancé, Captain Evremont, and two good friends are all killed in St. Clair's campaign. Caroline never fully recovers from their deaths despite her engagement to a Mr. Helen shortly afterwards, and despite her own fear that failing to conquer or even to give vent to her grief will slowly kill her. One night she goes out to meet Mr. Helen and never comes back. In the astonishing final pages of the novel, Mr. Helen discovers her body just before it is dissected by medical students in a tavern. It

transpires that Caroline was murdered (though by whom no one knows), buried in someone else's grave, and subsequently exhumed for an anatomy lesson.

At first it may appear that the jealous Eliza is responsible for most of what happens to Caroline, but in fact Eliza's machinations only activate the latent potential for violence that lurks within the novel's patriarchal arrangements. For example, Caroline's newlywed best friend, Lucretia Wilkins, succumbs to despair after her husband receives an anonymous letter (late revealed to have been penned by Eliza) accusing her of infidelity. Believing it to be genuine though he has no grounds for this conviction, Wilkins subjects his wife to remorseless emotional abuse, which she silently endures for months before she finally goes mad and dies. Her bereaved father, Mr. Barton, shoots Wilkins through the head over his daughter's corpse only to be poisoned a few days later, his body becoming so horribly bloated that it has to be put into a coffin before it bursts (I.160). Wilkins survives his wound long enough to suffer an agonizing, drawn-out death.

The Wilkins affair illustrates how little it takes to set the blades of the abattoir spinning. Eliza's letter is nothing compared to the disturbing power of a husband over his wife. Wilkins tortures Lucretia into madness over a baseless, anonymous accusation, and the authority he has over her is compounded by the social mandate that she maintain her silence. When Caroline attempts to discover what is making Lucretia so ill, Lucretia replies: "Remember I am now a wife. The little secrets I once instructed to you, as they concerned no one by my self, I was at liberty to divulge; but it is now my duty to be silent" (I.119). As her husband's property, Lucretia is not permitted to do anything but reflect and confirm his proprietary power—a task she accomplishes at the cost of her own

life. At the same time, attempting to refuse male proprietorship does not offer much of an alternative in the novel, as we discover when Caroline's friend Fanny is shot by a suitor after she declines to marry him: "the blood profusely poured from her wound; nothing can ever efface the impressions the horrid sight has made upon my mind. Mr. Ashley had fallen upon the floor by her side, and was also covered with the crimson fluid. [. . .] Our house is one constant scene of horror" (II.211).

Women are destroyed in both these cases by melodramas of proprietary manhood (to play on Nina Baym's memorable phrase), yet one notices that the same melodramas destroy men, too.<sup>77</sup> They shoot each other and themselves over the very situations they are responsible for producing. *Hapless* has a tendency to leave men, in particular, weltering in their own blood or suffering terminal physical and psychological damage, and as a result the novel usually does not suffer sentimental appropriations of either men's or women's bodies after death. The undue corporeality of Barton's poisoning is an especially conspicuous example. After his daughter's death, Barton turns into a distended corpse that threatens to pop like a blister inside the house. What we do *not* get here—or really anywhere in the novel—is a maudlin scene of his bereavement, as that would only substantiate male prerogative to convert women into feeling. The novel's methods are radical: *Hapless* pushes sensational violence so far that it cracks the patina of sentiment and passes straight into its underlying horrors.

Another notable example is the discovery of Caroline's corpse at the end of the novel, a scene in which her hyperbolic exposure is all but thrown in our faces. This scene

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<sup>77</sup> Nina Baym, "Melodramas of Beset Manhood: How Theories of American Fiction Exclude Women Authors," *American Quarterly* 33.2 (1981), 123-139.

is extraordinarily cynical, almost jeering, and it subverts the sentimental ideal of women's infinite receptivity to male entitlement by pushing it to its logical conclusion. Where men have unchecked power over women, the result is female murder, exhumation, dissection; even as corpses, women do not appear to be able to escape male prerogative. Their only hope lies in dying with such appalling hideousness that they cannot be reclaimed by male affective possession. Paradoxically, therefore, Caroline achieves an unassailible "privacy" in her shocking and mysterious death, as her body is illegible: unidentifiable as itself in another woman's grave, and not likely to reveal any of its secrets on the cutting table (the identity of her killer(s) remains a matter for speculation). At the extremes of objectification, Caroline's body short-circuits the sadistic pleasures of male sentimental hand-wringing. The moment in which Mr. Helen recognizes her body as "his own" makes him insane—not temporarily, picturesquely mad with grief, but permanently divested of self-mastery: there is "no expectation of his recovery" (II.232).

The harrowing encounters with patriarchal power that conclude with Caroline's death play out in the novel against the backdrop of frontier wars (1790-91) that seem to inch closer to the heart of the narrative as it develops. At times Eliza's machinations directly intersect with the scene of loss taking place in the west. Shortly before he dies, for instance, Caroline receives a letter from Evremont in which he accuses her of coquetry, leading Caroline to infer that Eliza has successfully convinced him of her infidelity with (yet another) jealousy-inspiring note. Evremont dies, however, before Caroline's explanation reaches him. "Insupportable idea!" writes Caroline, "He has left the world *alienated* from [me]" (II.121, my emphasis). Alienated: estranged (affectively distanced), but also "transferred to the ownership of another," and more generally *made*

Other (OED). Eliza's activities are doubled and amplified in this moment by methods of "savage invention"; the letter's emotionally alienating effects echo the gruesome physical Othering of Evremont's corpse. Writes Caroline: "No tolling bell announced the melancholy event; but, with many brave men, he [Evremont] lies exposed to the insult of every barbarian" (II.130).

The presence of "Indians" in the novel thus seems to offer a gothic diagnosis of the symptomatically femicidal divisions of space and time that structure liberal patriarchy (inside/outside, now/then). Counter-intuitively, what this means is that purported "victimization" of white/national men by Indian men is revealed to be coextensive with those same victims' brutalization of women at home. What happens in the sub-historical time of domesticity reverberates in the supra-historical time of war, and vice versa. By the end of the novel, the exposure of Caroline's corpse will recall the dead bodies of her cousin, Evremont, and her friends who die in the borderlands in grim succession. Caroline's spectacularly dreadful fate puns in this way on the "savagery" of female domestic abjection, which produces a similar outcome for Caroline as does "the plunder of savage tribes" for men. Unlike Evremont and his cronies, however, virtually nobody is left to mourn Caroline by the end of the novel, whereas Caroline's demise is hastened by the crushing labor of grief she endures as her male compatriots die off one by one.

Caroline is consistently overwrought about the state in which these men's bodies are left after they die, and she dwells obsessively on their remains. When her cousin is confirmed dead early in the second volume, Caroline writes:

Every object recalls the tortured body to my view; my heart  
is warped with the most tenebrous ideas, and misfortune

awaits me upon every side. Our friends strongly attach us to life. To part with them is painful—but to part with them, by the aggravated tortures of savage invention, is an insupportable reflection. (II.31-32)

Much as in popular responses to “St Clair’s Defeat,” the slain bodies of Caroline’s friends are persistently disturbing because they demand symbolic repair that is not forthcoming. As properties alienated from their owners and made strange through torture or scalping, the proper relation of the corpses’ insides to their outsides has been unhinged—they cannot be buried, they may no longer even be human. But burial is as much about time as it is about space. Interment gives place to the dead and shields their bodies from dishonor; it brings them back “inside” earth, family, home, nation. Burial also gives time to the dead by committing them to the past, re-organizing and re-sealing the balance between what is gone (what was *then*) and what remains (what is *now*). Unable to bury her cousin in either time or space, Caroline is almost compulsively driven in the passage above to remember his body, but it resists even psychic “burial”; she remembers a corpse she has never seen rather than a person she loves, and remembers it perpetually and repeatedly in its mangled state.

Whereas the melancholic revolutions of memory appear to offer Jackson Johonnet an expansive solidarity with the dead and an escape from possessive individualism, Caroline’s consignment to melancholic rumination slowly kills her because it is driven by a shortfall in gendered proprietary logic. In the absence of ritual, Caroline’s mourning is charged with the task of restoring her cousin to proprietorship—she must restore him to himself, to humanity, she must give him space and time. She must make him “white”

again. But Caroline cannot wield that power in a gender system that withheld it from her at birth. In other words, Caroline's undertaking of "mourning without end" is a gendered form of labor akin to Lucretia's maintenance of silence: it's an observance of the borders between inside/outside, now/then, which has been fully co-opted by the project of white/national manhood. Caroline's grief unfolds as a fruitless imperative to repair the very structure of white masculinity that exposes her to limitless force, along every other woman in the novel. "Nobody" (Caroline) is left to grieve no-bodies (Evremont's, her cousin's). And even if Nobody managed to memorialize no-bodies as somebodies, it would only leave her where and when she started—no place or time at all.

For Caroline, memory is a death-trap, a mausoleum, capable at best of "embalming" its subjects. Her obsessive desire to give shelter to the (in)glorious dead thus manifests itself as a deepening depression, during which Caroline spends her time drawing up elaborate plans for memorials. The same letter in which she describes her engagement to Mr. Helen contains a lengthy description of a monument she intends to build for her dead lover:

As a memento of my uniform attachment, I will cause a  
monument to be raised, on the base of which shall be  
represented, upon one side, an urn, which shall be supposed  
to contain the ashes of my friend; [ . . . ] while the figure of a  
female, shall be seated under the shade of a weeping  
willow, in a melancholy attitude, pointing to a number of  
angels that will be seen above. (II.181)

One notes of this shrine for absent ashes that it entombs Caroline in its structure; she is petrified as “the figure of a female” in perpetual sorrow. Being in some sense already dead by her own reckoning, it is thus hardly surprising that the last time we see Caroline writing, she is penning her own epitaph: “The body here entombed, once possessed a mind warmed with humanity...” (II.221). Caroline’s claim on “the human” reduces to the merest chance of retrospection.

The kinship between Caroline’s exposed corpse and those of her male friends and family members can thus be traced through their common, though non-identical, abjection within the compartmentalizations of time and space that subtend white/national masculinity. The supposed victimization of men at the frontier is implicated in the sadistic arrangement that claims Caroline’s life: men’s war against “Indians” appears in *The Hapless Orphan* as a craven psychodrama in which they project their own proprietary power onto Indians and then pose as its casualties, forcing women to pick up the check by tasking them with the impossible chore of restoring them to wholeness. White/national manhood is nothing but a pantomime of “protection” and “defense” whose only guarantee is that women will continue to be tortured by their protectors, even after death. The gothic critique that “Indians” make possible in *Hapless* thus reveals that the barbarians who drive women to despair are the same white men who nominate Native people for extinction. I am not suggesting, of course, that this is an expressly anti-racist or anti-colonial text. Caroline herself conveys nothing but horror and contempt towards Native peoples, and the possibility that Native insurgency may challenge the order which kills her is ruthlessly denied. If “Indians” can be said to reveal the powerful imbrication of patriarchal and colonial imperatives in *Hapless*, they do so as at the level of the

narrative's unconscious, and as a condition of their racialization. However, this novel does clearly suggest that if westward expansion came to be prosecuted in the name of U.S. domestic security, then it did so over Caroline Francis's dead body.

## CHAPTER 3

### The Parties to Which We Belong: John André and the Tragedy of Revolution

The successful revolution, we might say, becomes not tragedy but epic: it is the origin of a people, and of its valued way of life. When the suffering is remembered, it is at once either honoured or justified. That particular revolution, we say, was a necessary condition of life.

-- Raymond Williams<sup>1</sup>

#### I. The Unfortunate André

In the early hours of September 22, 1780, a group of militiamen encountered a man in civilian dress wandering the environs of the “neutral ground” in New York’s Hudson River Valley. Evidently lost, the man asked the militiamen to which party they belonged. They are reported to have replied, “Yours.” He then revealed his identity and was taken into custody. His name was Major John André, Adjutant General in the British army, and he had just tripped into a fatal accident. At the time of his capture, André was returning from a secret meeting with Benedict Arnold about Arnold’s plans to defect and deliver West Point to the British (this incident is sometimes known as “the West Point treason”). André had missed the boat that was to ferry him back down the river from West Point to British headquarters in New York City, and he therefore changed out of his uniform to cross the Continental lines on foot. In the weeks that followed, he was convicted of espionage and sentenced to die. In the eyes of the military tribunal that issued his sentence, the fact that André was in disguise when he was apprehended earned him a traitor’s death (by hanging), as opposed to what was then considered a more dignified military death (by firing squad). André appealed to George Washington on at least two different occasions for the mercy of a firing squad, writing that he accepted his

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<sup>1</sup> Raymond Williams, *Modern Tragedy* [1966], Ed. Pamela McCallum (Toronto: Broadview, 2006), 89.

lot but did not want “to die on a gibbet.”<sup>2</sup> Washington appears to have insisted, however, and André was hanged on October 2, 1780, at Continental headquarters in Tappan, New York.

André was an object of acute public mourning at the time of his death. The immediate response to his execution within the Continental camp appears to have been one of terrible distress. Linda Colley relates that Continental soldiers had to hold back crowds of spectators who “wept and moaned and watched as [André’s] body swayed for a full half hour before it was cut down.”<sup>3</sup> Alexander Hamilton was present at the execution in his capacity as Washington’s aide-de-camp, and wrote of this experience in a widely republished letter: “My feelings were never put to so severe a trial. [ . . . ] Never perhaps did a man suffer death with more justice, or deserve it less.”<sup>4</sup> The Continental officer in charge of André in the days leading up to his execution, Major Benjamin Tallmadge, likewise recalled André’s execution in harrowing terms. Wrote Tallmadge: “I became so deeply attached to Major André, that I could remember no instance where my affections were so fully absorbed by any man. When I saw him swing under the gibbet, it seemed for a time utterly insupportable: all were overwhelmed with the affecting spectacle, and the eyes of many were suffused with tears.”<sup>5</sup> Even Washington attested to André’s personal virtues. In his official report on the André affair, he declared

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<sup>2</sup> John Andre to George Washington, reprinted in *Proceedings of a Board of General Officers* (Philadelphia: James Rivington, 1780), 13.

<sup>3</sup> Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire, and the World, 1600-1850* (New York: Anchor, 2004), 204.

<sup>4</sup> *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 25 October 1780

<sup>5</sup> Winthrop Sargent, *The Life and Career of Major John André, Adjutant-General of the British Army in North America* (Boston: Ticknor & Fields, 1861), 89.

the man he had just put to death to be “of the highest integrity and honour, and incapable of any base action, or unworthy conduct.”<sup>6</sup>

Sweet enemy, honorable spy. André confounded the distinctions of war and commanded a baffling appeal in his time and for long afterwards. Here was a man in league with the Revolution’s most notorious turncoat, hanged as a criminal, whose loss elicited cries of anguish even (and perhaps especially) from his executioners. Why? It was not as though André was the first person to have been executed for espionage during the war. Nathan Hale was hanged as a spy by the British in 1776, but André’s death seems to have produced more intensely despairing responses among American observers despite the (supposed) fact that he was on the wrong “side.” Moreover, while Hale was quickly enshrined as an illustrious native son of New England (he is Connecticut’s state hero), André’s ghost—like all ghosts—is homeless and ambiguous. He haunted America almost from the moment of his decease, stalking the pages of what is now considered U.S. American literature for decades after the Revolution’s official conclusion. Anna Seward composed a monody for him in 1781, the year of Cornwallis’s surrender at Yorktown. William Dunlap staged a tragedy about him in 1798. Later, he visited 1840s-50s U.S. historical romances, where he appears, as Elisa Tamarkin puts it, “wandering the war-torn fields of New York picking forget-me-nots and playing the flute.”<sup>7</sup> Perhaps André’s most famous apparition is in Washington Irving’s “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” (1820-21). As Ichabod Crane wends his solitary way back from Van Tassel’s autumn feast, he passes by “an enormous tulip-tree [ . . . ] known as Major André’s tree,”

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<sup>6</sup> Headquarters, New York, 8<sup>th</sup> October 1780, *Proceedings* (Philadelphia: Rivington, 1780), 16.

<sup>7</sup> Elisa Tamarkin, *Anglophilia: Deference, Devotion, and Antebellum America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 142.

so named because André was thought to have been taken captive nearby. Irving's narrator, Diedrich Knickerbocker, remarks that "the common people regarded it [the tree] with a mixture of respect and superstition, partly out of sympathy for the fate of its ill-starred namesake, and partly from the tales of strange sights, and doleful lamentations told, concerning it." This is where Crane encounters the Headless Horseman: at the "identical spot that the unfortunate André was captured."<sup>8</sup>

Avery Gordon writes that "the ghost is not simply a dead or a missing person, but a social figure."<sup>9</sup> Ghosts are relational. They are left over from a dominant arrangement and "give notice that something is missing" (15)—but they do this affectively, by haunting, which Gordon describes as another kind of knowledge at the edges of what it is possible to see or to say. It may therefore be slightly the wrong question to ask why André came to haunt America, for this question risks the presupposition that he represents something definitive in himself that could be discovered and named in order to lay him to rest. Gordon proposes different questions: what does André's ghost designate as missing? What does it recall as lost? What kinds of knowledge do André's hauntings seem to imply or produce? What might we stand to learn—or indeed, unlearn—if we set out to speak with André's ghost and not to banish it?

Scholars who have puzzled over André have argued that his legacy endured because he embodied an ideal of sensibility that fed alternative constructions of U.S. national identity after the Revolution. The consensus seems to be that André points to an absence at the heart of American democracy. Sarah Knott argues that outpourings of

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<sup>8</sup> Washington Irving, "Legend of Sleepy Hollow" [1820-21], *The Sketchbook of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.*, Ed. Susan Manning (Oxford: OUP, 1996), 312-313.

<sup>9</sup> Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 8.

grief around the André case insulated the independence movement from charges of inhumanity and helped to establish an emotional framework for American military and social cohesion that supplemented the arid discourse of natural rights moving into the early U.S. republic.<sup>10</sup> Caleb Crain argues that “John André represents sympathy [ . . . ] a principle higher and more appealing than nationality, an ideal to which America as a nation aspired.”<sup>11</sup> Most recently, Elisa Tamarkin locates André at the center of an Anglophilic antebellum U.S. culture of “elegiac return to dependence” that emphasized “inconsequential amusements” and sociable exchange across enemy lines.<sup>12</sup> Tamarkin makes the case that what set André apart from other slain figures of the Revolutionary war was his association with polite culture: “while an appreciation for Hale or other revolutionary figures could always drift into—or synecdochically become—patriotic memorializations of independence, the love of André offered the appeal of a simply aesthetic sensation” (144).

As these scholars attest, André was in many ways a paradigmatic man of feeling. He was young, handsome, and educated; an epic party-planner and amateur poet. Only 29 when he was killed, he was perhaps best known before his arrest for orchestrating the Meschianza in Philadelphia in 1778: a lavish fête, complete with regatta, turbans, and a joust, that saw the disgraced General Howe off from his post after a disastrous winter

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<sup>10</sup> André’s execution marks an “extraordinary efflorescence of sensibility at war’s end” that set the stage for “the articulation of an American sentimental project for self, society, and state.” Sarah Knott, *Sensibility and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: UNCP/Omohundro, 2009), 193.

<sup>11</sup> Caleb Crain, *American Sympathy: Men, Friendship, and the New Nation* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2001), 13.

<sup>12</sup> Tamarkin, *Anglophilia: Deference, Devotion, and Antebellum America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 111.

campaign.<sup>13</sup> Shortly before he died, he published a clever ballad entitled “The Cow-Chace” (1780) that poked fun at General “Mad Anthony” Wayne’s thwarted attack on some refugees in a block-house (Wayne was repulsed and returned to camp with only some cattle to show for his trouble).<sup>14</sup> No less alluring were the whispers of André’s youthful engagement to Honora Sneyd, which was rumored to have been cut off because her parents disapproved his financial prospects. Sneyd died of tuberculosis at the age of 28, five months before André’s execution. For many, then, André may have appeared as a kind of storybook character: a star-crossed lover of delicate refinement who dashed off lovely sketches of himself in his prison cell (fig. 1), and wrote good-mannered letters from custody both to Washington and to his own commander, Sir Henry Clinton, on the subject of honor.

Though André is clearly associated with cultures of sensibility, I demur from readings that identify him with sensibility tout court on the grounds that those readings simultaneously nationalize and depoliticize André’s ghostly aftereffects. For Knott, Crain, and Tamarkin, André represents the possibility for U.S. nationalisms that does not feel like ones—nationalisms expressed apolitically through nostalgia, aesthetics, fine feeling. Tamarkin, for instance, contends that André offered an anchor for Revolutionary history “at a distance from its politics” (171), but she posits that what is ultimately at stake in the “simply aesthetic sensation” for which he acts as a focalizer is a “particular

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<sup>13</sup> For more on the Meschianza, see Randall Fuller, “Theaters of the American Revolution: The Valley Forge *Cato* and the *Meschianza* in Their Transcultural Contexts,” *Early American Literature* 34 (1999): 126-46.

<sup>14</sup> *Cow-Chace, in Three Cantos, Published on Occasion of the Rebel General Wayne’s Attack of the Refugees Block-House on Hudson’s River, on Friday the 21<sup>st</sup> of July, 1780* (New York: James Rivington, 1780). For a reading of André’s “Cow-Chace” and its relationship to ballad tradition, see Philip Gould, *Writing the Rebellion: Loyalists and the Literature of Politics in British America* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013), 84-113.



Fig. 1. André's self-portrait in custody in Tappan, New York (1780). George Dudley Seymour Papers, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

experience of being American" (xxv): "American independence simply feels like the vertiginous capacity to be both nationalistic and nostalgic for our antenational relations [. . .] our generous return to the memory of being subjects is the sign of nothing less than our unfettered liberty to do so" (148). Like those of Knott and Crain, for whom André embodies "sympathy" or "sensibility" more generally, Tamarkin's argument rests on a sleight-of-hand that identifies André with a zone putatively outside politics—"simply aesthetic sensation"—which becomes political as it is drawn into contact with U.S. state and cultural formations. André's legacy is thus both apolitical and exhaustively accounted for within a U.S. national framework. This entails the unquestioned assumption that there exists a domain without politics. It also negates Revolutionary

history as anything other than the point of departure for U.S. national time: an origin to which the nation may return largely without risk, and at its leisure.

What André has not been taken to indicate is the possibility that Revolution itself entailed forms of rupture for which the birth of the nation may not have provided adequate recompense, and hence that André's visitations might represent more serious threats to nationalist orders of meaning that are founded in Revolutionary history. This chapter contends that André's ghostly career in the 1780s-90s produces forms of historical knowledge at the edges of what U.S. nationalist epistemologies of Revolution allow us to see or to say. Tracing him from his death to William Dunlap's *André* (1798), I argue that André appears and reappears where allegiances to state powers or partisan ideologies fail as explanatory mechanisms for Revolutionary struggle (American vs. British, Patriot vs. Loyalist). What I see André presencing as lost or missing from conventional understandings of the Revolutionary war(s) is a meaningful account of the politics beyond Politics: the various forms of associated life that traverse or elude the preconceived categories through which the Revolution is typically drawn as a conflict between "sides." Strongly associated with the love between men across enemy lines, André gives notice, in particular, of the social costs that are entailed in the reduction of politics to partisanship, and the hollowness of the state's assurance that Revolutionary sacrifice is an honored or justified condition of national life. I maintain, however, that the sorrow and alienation occasioned by André's hauntings are not apolitical sensations of Revolutionary history that can be fully co-opted by national projects, but rather, *otherwise* political commitments and entanglements which protest the partition of politics from sociality. André does not simply represent the claims of the social over and against

those of politics; he points to the anguish involved in producing that split in the first place: the anguish of having to be one thing or another at the expense of the beloved.

From the vantage of nationalist history, André thus conjures an unthinkable Revolutionary politics—the outlawed passion for the enemy—which registers the “necessary” expenses of war for the achievement of U.S. independence as an impoverishment from which it may not be possible to move on.

André’s sacrifice to the rules of war thus tends to produce an awareness of Revolutionary history in its aftermath that I contend is *tragic* in its provenance and outlook. Indeed, André is given rise to an experience in his mourners that George Steiner identifies as the “axiomatic constant of tragedy”: “ontological homelessness [. . .] alienation or ostracism from the safeguard of licensed being.”<sup>15</sup> (Tallmadge’s comment that the spectacle of André’s body “seemed for a time utterly insupportable” might fall under this heading.) While Dunlap’s *André* is the only text I examine here that was written and performed as a tragedy for the stage, I draw on theorists of tragedy such as Judith Butler, David Scott, and Raymond Williams who argue that tragedy’s modalities can travel across periods and forms. Much like classical tragedy itself, the debates in which these scholars have engaged around tragedy are long and venerable, but they have centered most recently on whether or not tragedy is relevant to “modern” experience.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> George Steiner, “‘Tragedy, Reconsidered,’ *Rethinking Tragedy*, Ed. Rita Felski (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2008), 30. This essay offers a slight revision of Steiner’s highly influential thesis in *The Death of Tragedy* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1961).

<sup>16</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno see Enlightened modernity as the fulfillment of classical myth, and of tragic fate in particular; while Steiner contends that the vision of tragedy was superseded by modernity. More recently, Terry Eagleton has retooled Horkheimer and Adorno’s position, arguing that modernity universalizes the conditions for tragedy. But Eagleton distinguishes tragic inevitability from the “more brittle forms of teleology” upon which modern historical narrative often rests, arguing that in tragedy “the injurious remains injurious; it is not magically transmuted into good by its instrumental value” (39). *The Dialectic of the Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford UP,

On one pole of this debate, Horkheimer, Adorno, and Eagleton argue that tragedy is homologous with modernity; and on the other, George Steiner argues that tragedy was superseded by modernity. I identify tragedy instead with counter-modern temporal disruptions, centered in grief, which contest the partition of the *oikos* from the *polis* and block principles of succession derived through binary conceptions of historical conflict. Or, more simply: I think tragedy speaks to modernity by interrupting it with “tales of strange sights, and doleful lamentations.” There is a productive anachronism internal to tragedy that has to do with its bleak discovery of the irremediable injury at the foundation of every sovereignty demanding “progress.” David Scott refers to this as the “temporal dissonance” of tragedy, where “time resists being narrated as an unambiguously progressive resolution to the present’s impasses.”<sup>17</sup>

Like the other “old-fashioned” forms I examine in this project, tragedy’s “flat,” non-narrative properties disturb nationalist Revolutionary history by subverting proprietary conceptions of subjectivity and linear constructions of time. But unlike the other forms that interest me, tragedy is classically preoccupied with the stand-offs between contending, and usually mutually incompatible, obligations (Antigone/Creon, Clytemnestra/Agamemnon, Medea/Jason). Tragedy’s capacities for critiquing such dualities seem to be what activates it in the André affair, whose central dilemmas revolve around the arbitrariness of binary partisan distinctions in a conflict that was thought by many, including André himself, to be a civil war. Duality is the *pharmakon* of tragedy; it

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2002); George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1961); Terry Eagleton, *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003). For a more recent essay by Steiner in which he tempers his original 1961 thesis, see “‘Tragedy,’ Reconsidered,” *Rethinking Tragedy*, ed. Rita Felski (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2008): 29-44.

<sup>17</sup> David Scott, “Tragedy’s Time: Postemancipation Futures Past and Present.” *Rethinking Tragedy*, ed. Rita Felski (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2008), 200.

sickens us with binaries to bring us to the knowledge of violence at the root of law.

Whereas classical tragedy's *techne* for this project is in dramatic form, however, I am interested in how André's tragic *techne* goes to work in tiny, incidental fragments of description and dialogue that recall him from beyond the grave. His ghost flits in and out of the historical field of vision, making its presence felt indirectly in matters of syntax and significant details that bring down destruction on our heads.

Hamilton's comment—"Never perhaps did a man suffer death with more justice, or deserve it less"—is a good example. Asserting that André died from an overdose of justice out of proportion with the merits of his case, Hamilton seems to be wrestling with the fact that André's sentence was perfectly legal according to the rules of war. Hanging was (supposed to be) the acceptable punishment for espionage, yet Hamilton maintains that what André deserved was drastically out of alignment with what he received. Hamilton draws this misalignment syntactically in the opposition of quantified nouns (so much justice, so little deserving) whose relation does not seem to make sense. How can one die a fully just death while also being minimally deserving of that death? "Deserving" here appears to allude to what the law cannot see, or refuses to admit as evidence: the mitigating circumstances of André's capture, André's personal virtues, the love and esteem between men that survive the divisions of sides. André's "deserving" had no effect either on his judges or on his appeals for a commutation of his sentence to firing squad. And the denial of these appeals was especially shocking, as it required that André's body be restricted absolutely to the juridical identifications of enemy and criminal even in death. André thus seems to reveal through Hamilton the constitutive perversion of the law, which functions properly as an instrument of violence that licenses

the unacceptable division of life from itself. But André performs this revelation in the merest way: by stalling the syntax of paradox in contradiction.

André also reveals through syntax that the rules of war which withhold common dignity from the adversary do not for the same reason absolutely negate all social possibility. Hamilton's formulation carries the force of inconsolable injury to the present in the shape of a terrible impasse (too much justice/too little deserving). In so doing, it sustains a kinship with André after death that constellates in frustrated desires for another outcome, belatedly and in defiance of the law. The imbalance between too much justice and too little deserving calls for repair. But it's too late: André is dead, the sentence has been carried out, the law says we have to move on. We also know now that the law is a hatchet; hence there can be no appeal to its power for redress. The desire for another outcome in the form of justice cannot be realized, however, because it is too late, André is dead,...etc., etc. Around and around we go, seemingly into a void, yet the feeling of deadlock inspired by tragic contradiction may nevertheless have a weird social life that begins in contact with the slain and absorbs author and reader alike into its gravity well.

Nietzsche's emphasis on tragedy's irreparable pessimism draws out the implications of this downward centripetal action. In *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), Nietzsche argues that tragedy originates with Dionysus, the god of ecstasy and madness, because "tragedy arose from the tragic chorus, and was originally chorus and nothing but chorus."<sup>18</sup> Nietzsche alludes here to tragedy's etymological roots in *tragōidia* (*tragos* – goat; *ōidē* – song, ode), or "goat song," which are thought to refer to ancient practices of scapegoating and blood rite. Dionysian to the extent that it is an "impossible," bestial

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<sup>18</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* [1872], trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967), 56.

utterance which emerges beyond the individuated and classificatory limits of reason, tragedy's "goat song" is the cry of the one who has been cast out. For Nietzsche, it therefore sings from the position of what is destroyed in the name of community, of what must be forsaken in order for the law to assert its power, and of what must be forgotten in order for history to advance. André was not simply a victim of circumstances; he was a scapegoat in the specifically tragic sense that he marked a moment in the Revolution when the logic of sacrifice failed to atone for the brutality of sacrifice's enactment.

The knowledge of irreparable harm arising from the scapegoat's cries is not necessarily cynical or apolitical, however. Nietzsche insists that tragedy's Dionysian function is to yield another history, and another politics, by destroying the spectator's conception of himself as an individual ("the primal cause of evil"). Tragedy abolishes "the gulfs between man and man" in order to "give way to an overwhelming feeling of unity leading back to the very heart of nature." For Nietzsche, what lies at the heart of nature is cruelty, and the "unity" to which the tragic spectator is returned is one of "terrible destructiveness" (59). While Nietzsche's emphasis on the profound pessimism to which tragedy gives rise has sometimes been construed as nihilistic, I read it differently as a condition of possibility for politics that do not draw their meaning either from doctrinal morality or from utopian thought. Such politics, in Joshua Foa Dienstag's terms, might be taken paradoxically to entail "an affirmation in the dark, an approval given in ignorance."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Dienstag writes that Nietzsche's pessimism "does *chasten* politics in that it discourages utopianism; it discounts the belief either in the perfectibility of the species or of our political conditions. But to claim that it deflates our political energies in general is to mistake utopianism for the whole of politics." Joshua Foa Dienstag, "Tragedy, Pessimism, Nietzsche." *Rethinking Tragedy*. Ed. Rita Felski (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2008), 120.

I am drawn to Nietzsche's account because it resists cathartic readings of tragedy's inconsolable injuries; Nietzsche refers to the concept of catharsis as an Aristotelian "pathological discharge" (132) that betrays tragedy's true vision of primordial chaos in which "excess reveals itself as truth" (42). I take Nietzsche to mean that tragedy's painful excesses give rise to forms of associated life (or: politics), and are not simply negations that must be endured so that a chastened instantiation of the Political can resume its activity. Nietzsche thus perhaps counsels us to develop more restive responses to readings of tragic fatality that go no further than to pronounce "the perverse [ . . . ] to be essential to the norm."<sup>20</sup> Judith Butler expresses the frustration with such readings in *Antigone's Claim* (2000): "The problem as I see it is that the perverse remains entombed precisely there, as the essential and negative feature of the norm, and the relation between the two remains static, giving way to no rearticulation of the norm itself" (76). I am in agreement with Butler except, perhaps, on the very last point she makes about the rearticulation of the norm, as I follow Nietzsche's line that our options may not be limited in tragedy to negative or norm if we refuse to accept the equation of the negative with nothing. Indeed, André's tragedy discloses that the "negative" feature of the norm is never fully enclosed or entombed by the norm because it is a "nothing" with substance—an indwelling of which pain is a part, but not all. Then again, Butler may mean by "rearticulation" the segmentation (from *secare*, to cut) and re-sounding of the norm through the cry of the scapegoat, which might lead out into what Butler went on to describe as "precarious life." If so, Nietzsche and Butler converge in the assessment I

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<sup>20</sup> Butler is diagnosing a problem that is particularly pronounced in Oedipal traditions of tragedy and their philosophical heirs, especially psychoanalysis. Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life & Death* (New York: Columbia UP, 2000), 76.

hope to advance around André that the conditions of tragedy are ones in which politics can be re-thought in excess of Politics through the “exposure to violence and our complicity in it, [. . .the] vulnerability to loss and the task of mourning that follows.”<sup>21</sup>

## II. The Rule of Thirds

André revealed that the necessity of choosing sides makes a hideous prospect at the gallows. Perhaps this is why those who remained to tell the tale of his execution called to him with contradictions: sweet enemy, honorable spy, so much justice/so little deserving. Having to be one thing or another had rendered André partially, and the upshot was that the antagonisms which were supposed to make the war between imperial and colonial forces legible as such (British/American, Loyalist/Patriot) became unendurable. André made the Revolution’s partisan distinctions feel contradictory in the sense that they broke things apart but didn’t add up. He may therefore have diagnosed a problem with the binary configuration of Revolutionary politics in 1780 that continues to haunt the writing of Revolutionary history. The case of André calls for further examination of the great shibboleth of Revolutionary historiography I antagonize in this project: the notion that the war(s) split the colonial population into three parts—Patriot (American), Loyalist [British?], and “neutral.”<sup>22</sup> The two foregoing chapters zeroed in on

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<sup>21</sup> Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), 19.

<sup>22</sup> One of the many weirdnesses about the rule of thirds is that while the term Patriot is thought to map directly onto “America,” the same ought not to be true for Loyalism and Britain (but is often assumed in any case). To the extent that “Loyalists” names a group of consolidated identity, which I question, they would have been white creoles. They could have been from a range of ethnic backgrounds, and may or may not have cared about “Britain” as such, but perhaps would have had some kind of interest (economic, social, etc.) in British imperial citizenship. Britain had an army, Loyalists did not except insofar as they entered British ranks. My point is that Britain is excluded from the Patriot-Loyalist-neutral split, while Loyalists are excluded from the British-American dyad. While these two frameworks are often fused, they name two different wars: one of them internal to the colonies, the other between contending armies. I think this is important because both of these wars presuppose “American” victory. Patriot/American is the only place where the two systems for describing Revolutionary allegiance overlap.

the first set of terms (Patriot/American) by attempting to fray the historical and imaginative suture this pairing proposes between independence and U.S. national time. This chapter and the next maintain that concern, but they zoom out to the more neglected partisan designations—Loyalist [British] and “neutral”—which conventionally designate what lies beyond or outside the Revolutionary winners’ circle. What strikes me initially about these terms is the presence of that final word, neutral, which suggests a position that is not simply ambivalent in its politics, but disinterested in or absent from the Political as such. The figure of “the neutral” recalls the arguments I described above in which André is thought to embody a depoliticized set of values which recalibrate U.S. nationalism on a higher frequency. This begs the question: how must politics be accounted in order for them to take an “outside”? Or perhaps: what definition of the political is guaranteed by the internal exclusion of “neutrality”?

These questions bear some examination because they draw out a quandary around the issue of choice in the Revolution that bedeviled André and his onlookers alike, but which has been largely obscured in our own time. Indeed, the origins of the Patriot-Loyalist-neutral arrangement (what I shall call “the rule of thirds”) can be traced to a serially misquoted letter that John Adams wrote to James Lloyd in January 1815. Lloyd had written to Adams deplored disunity and party faction in Congress, and Adams responded with a rambling response on the same subject in which his memory drifts from 1774 to 1797 in the course of a paragraph. Adams was 80 years old; he just crossed a wire along the way. But it is in at this point (in 1797) that the famous passage on the rule of thirds appears in his letter:

If I were called to calculate the divisions among the people of America, as Mr Burke did those of the people of England, I should say that full one third were averse to the revolution. These, retaining that overweening fondness, in which they had been educated, for the English, could not cordially like the French; indeed, they most heartily detested them. The opposite third conceived a hatred of the English, and gave themselves up to an enthusiastic gratitude to France. The middle third, composed principally of the yeomanry, the soundest part of the nation, and always averse to war, were rather lukewarm both to England and France; and sometimes stragglers from them, and sometimes the whole body, united with the first or the last third, according to circumstances.<sup>23</sup>

A careful reading of this passage reveals that Adams is talking about U.S. American opinion on the French Revolution, not the American colonies' war with Britain.<sup>24</sup> Adams became very preoccupied with memory in his later writings, which often throw queer

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<sup>23</sup> *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States: with a Life of the Author, Notes and Illustrations*, ed. Charles Francis Adams, Vol. X (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1856), 110-111.

<sup>24</sup> This is made clear by the references to the Franco-American alliance ("enthusiastic gratitude to France") and to Burke, who spun increasingly paranoid estimates of English partisan support for French republicanism in 1790-91. "This system has many partisans in every country in Europe, but particularly in England, where they are already formed into a body, comprehending most of the Dissenters of the three leading denominations. To these are readily aggregated all who are Dissenters in character, temper, and disposition, though not belonging to any of their congregations: that is, all the restless people who resemble them, of all ranks and all parties, Whigs, and even Tories; the whole race of half-bred speculators; all the Atheists, Deists, and Socinians; all those who hate the clergy and envy the nobility; a good many among the moneyed people; the East Indians almost to a man, who cannot bear to find that their present importance does not bear a proportion to their wealth." See "Thoughts on French Affairs" [1791], *The Portable Edmund Burke*, ed. Isaac Kramnick (New York: Penguin, 1999), 503.

temporal wrenches into the works of teleological history because he seems unable to fix the Revolution to a linear sequence. For the same reason, however, Adams's late letters do not offer much in the way of a solid foundation for a U.S. nationalist historiographic tradition that spans more than a century. Yet that is exactly how this passage has been invoked. It continues to be cited and re-cited as evidence of the Revolutionary split in the [white male] colonial population, and today the historical consensus is that roughly 20 to 30 percent of settler-colonists opposed independence ("Loyalist"), while 20 to 40 percent of them supported it ("Patriot").<sup>25</sup> The remainder is typically described as being "neutral." Here, for instance, is Michael A. McDonnell in the *Oxford Handbook of the American Revolution* (2013): "In some ways, [...] the most troubling political fissure to emerge with independence was that between adversaries—whether patriot or loyalist—and those seeking some form of neutrality. [...] Estimates of neutrals in the conflict run anywhere from 40 percent to 60 percent of the population."<sup>26</sup>

The rule of thirds hypothesis about the Revolution is based in a misreading, then, but it has turned out to be a faithful misreading inasmuch as it reproduces the tripartite

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<sup>25</sup> The first instance in which Adams's 1815 letter to Lloyd was cited as evidence of the "rule of thirds" in Revolutionary historiography was in George Sidney Fisher's *The True History of the American Revolution* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1902). Fisher's estimate was re-cited widely by U.S. historians during the 1970s—a period in which the bicentennial spurred an enormous output of Revolutionary historiography. See for instance Alistair Cooke, *America* (New York: Knopf, 1973); Thomas H. Greene, *Comparative Revolutionary Movements* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1974); Page Smith, *A New Age Now Begins: A People's History of the American Revolution*, 2 vols. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976). The misquotation of Adams's letter and the "thirding" to which it has given rise has been questioned a number of times since the 1950s, particularly by Marxist scholars, and yet it persists. Most recently (and insofar as this chapter is concerned), I have encountered "the rule of thirds" in recuperative scholarship on Loyalism. For Marxist myth-busting of the rule of thirds, see for instance Herbert Aptheker, *The American Revolution: 1763-1783* (New York: International Publishing, 1960), 54-55. For recent citations of Adams's letter as evidence of Revolutionary partisanship, see Edward Larkin, "The Cosmopolitan Revolution: Loyalism and the Fiction of an American Nation." *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 40:1/2 (2006-07), 57; and Philip Gould, *Writing the Rebellion: Loyalists and the Literature of Politics in Revolutionary America* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013).

<sup>26</sup> Michael A. McDonnell, "The Struggle Within: Colonial Politics on the Eve of Independence," *The Oxford Handbook of the American Revolution*, Eds. Edward Gray and Jane Kamensky (Oxford: OUP, 2013), 113.

architecture of Adams's 1815 remarks. However, the presumed opposition between Patriots and Loyalists in contemporary Revolutionary historiography is held in place by a third term—"neutral"—that was not present in Adams's original comments. Adams estimated that colonial opinion on the French Revolution was split between those who were for France (and/or against England), those who were for England (and/or against France), and those who were averse to war in general. The antipathy to war does not appear in his letter to constitute a depoliticized position: only an ambivalent one when measured against the bellicose English/French divide. Something very different has transpired in the dyadic patterning of American Revolutionary politics, where scholars maintain that the two available positions—Patriot and Loyalist—were offset by a third blob of a constituency, "the neutrals," who were neither clearly for nor against independence. The position evoked by "neutrality" in the rule of thirds is thus both disposable and definitive because it shores up the operation of the Patriot/Loyalist binary, which works to exhaust the entire field of politics with only two partisanship that are held in place by the denomination of a field *outside* politics. The possibilities for conceivable forms of relation that might not be available to a strict partisan template but nevertheless constitute politics (for instance, the politics of aversion to war) are thereby annulled. In the standard accounting of the Revolution's political field, what lies beyond Patriotism and Loyalism is nothing: the apolitical.

The evacuation of discernible politics from neutrality in the rule of thirds produces as its remainder a model of the Political adduced exclusively through allegiance, which in turn demands an agential, self-identical political subject defined by *choice*. Recent recuperative work on Loyalism provides an especially clear image of how

this works. Loyalism has long suffered under the regime of Revolutionary historiographic biases toward U.S. nationalist perspectives; it has tended to be described as a caricature of old-fashioned patriarchal fusspottery, a lock-step obedience to King and country that requires little or no explanation as compared to the brilliant achievements of Jefferson or Paine. Undoubtedly this is a problem, and the scholars who have set out to correct it have uncovered much richer imaginative picture of what Loyalism might have entailed for people at different times and places. However, what often goes unchallenged in these studies is the assumption that Loyalism exists in a binary with Patriotism that takes an apolitical outside. Jerry Bannister and Liam Riordan characterize Loyalism as a “body of thought, opinion, and self understanding” that is separated by a “subtle but at times decisive line [ . . . ] from neutrality.”<sup>27</sup> Maya Jasanoff, too, maintains that “there were two sides in the American Revolution” and describes Loyalism as “a shared allegiance to the king and a commitment to empire.”<sup>28</sup> Loyalism thus takes a subject who is defined by unambiguous decision-making, or conscious alignment. This is why Bannister and Riordan draw a “subtle but decisive line” at neutrality—because any unsettled ambiguity would dump a Loyalist back into the trough of the neutral. Ed

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<sup>27</sup> Like Jasanoff, Bannister and Riordan’s collection addresses loyalty as “as a multifaceted international phenomenon” which they track as it moves out of the U.S. nation-state after 1783, turning to the international as a corrective to “the ongoing force of national frameworks that shape how we study and explain the past.” I am very sympathetic to their critique—indeed, this project offers another version of the same—but I remain doubtful that the turn to global or transnational frameworks in itself can dislodge the protocols established by nationalist paradigms of interpretation, especially when the terms on which “the political” are judged remain unaltered. Bannister and Riordan, “Loyalism and the British Atlantic,” *The Loyal Atlantic* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 5-6.

<sup>28</sup> The emphasis on choice in Jasanoff’s argument is particularly problematic because she includes Britain’s native allies and self-liberated black recruits under the heading of Loyalism—a move I contest in Chapters 2 and 4 of this project. I do not understand Loyalism as a kind of multicultural formation. To the extent that I consider it as a position at all, I take it to pertain rather narrowly to white (and male-dominated) settler-colonial expression. Maya Jasanoff, *Liberty’s Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World* (New York: Knopf, 2011), 5-8.

Larkin has the most capacious definition of a Loyalist on offer: “a person who favored reconciliation with Great Britain during the conflicts that began with the Stamp Act and concluded with the War of 1812.”<sup>29</sup> Yet Larkin goes on to say that Loyalist writings argue it is “wrong to choose the political over the personal.” Loyalism is thus a political choice of the supposedly apolitical over the political; it is defined as a position by the definition of a zone without politics (“the personal”) that also appears to be at least partially inside it.

The punch line is not terribly surprising. The design of the Political as it is imagined by the rule of thirds is a liberal one from top to bottom. Each of its positive terms as well as the relationships between them and “neutrality” take the classically invigorated structure of liberal thought, which defines the *polis* and the subject alike in opposition to a feminized sphere that it dominates internally. Using the terms of liberalism, the field delimited by the triad Patriot-Loyalist-neutral is the *polis* of which Patriots and Loyalists are the subjects. “Neutrality” is a woman in the dark, sometimes known as social life, who is inconsequential except insofar as she can be nominated for protection by the subjects that demand her silence. Where enslaved and free people of African descent, Native people, the indentured, and the working classes fit into this picture is unclear. If they haven’t been absorbed as preconditions for the subject’s existence at a moment anterior to this one, they might be in a reconfigured version of “the neutral”—or else in a place that cannot be thought by liberal frameworks. (It should be noted that Native women and enslaved women of African descent could be in at least two places or non-places at once).

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<sup>29</sup> Edward Larkin, “What is a Loyalist? The American Revolution as Civil War,” *Common-place* 8.1 (2007). <<http://www.common-place.org/vol-08/no-01/larkin/>>.

In the case of André, the rule of thirds' total conflation of allegiance with identity through the operation of unambiguous choice appears as a tragic concern. This seems to be because it declares life to be ineligible for Politics if it is more or less than one thing at a time. A decision must be made; something has to be volitionally excluded in order for the subject to become a subject. André appears to have confronted the congealment of this liberal arrangement by being stubbornly multiple. All the available evidence suggests that he was quite firm in his loyalties to crown and empire. More to the point, those who wrote about him after his death typically represent him as honorable for precisely this reason. In the final scene of William Dunlap's *André* (1798), for instance, André is last heard discussing his belief that the rebellion is a mistake: "I must think your country has mistook / Her interests. Believe me, but for this I should / Not willingly have drawn a sword against her."<sup>30</sup> The end of his speech trails off as he is moved away by the visibly emotional detachment assigned to escort him to the gallows. Yet André is not angry; he has maintained his position *and* loved his enemy. The stage directions read: "*they sorrowful, he cheerfully conversing as he passes over the stage*" (106).

André demonstrates in this moment that it is *not* necessary to choose the political over the apolitical, or vice versa. Notice that André is doubly engaged in a social interaction and a political debate here—he is practicing two things at the same time that are construed as mutually exclusive in the rule of thirds. And he's pulling it off. He is chatting away "cheerfully" to his captors about why the rebellion is a bad idea, and they are moved, "sorrowful." André's ability to socialize with his executioners seems also to produce a relation between sorrow and cheer, which in turn appears to be flowing back

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<sup>30</sup> William Dunlap, *André: A Tragedy in Five Acts* [1798] (New York: Penguin, 1997), 107. All citations are page numbers from this edition.

and forth in the form of offerings between André and his captors. He is supporting their morale by being cheerful, and they seem to doing the weeping that he isn't doing for himself. Sorrow and cheer are not simply juxtaposed; they are mutually entailed in one another. It is almost the inverse of Hamilton's syntax, where paradox is tragically rearticulated (re-sounded) as contradiction. Here, contradiction turns to paradox because André has not chosen sides. He is to die on the gibbet without changing his views or expressing any discernible bitterness or wrath. André thus meekly confronts his spectators with a vision of the Revolution as a civil conflict in which all loss of life is deplorable and the love of one's enemy assured. Maybe all war is civil war for those who imagine (as André appears to do in this scene) that what is at stake in the fight is the reclamation of lost kin and not their destruction. This may begin to explain why André was beloved and Arnold reviled. Arnold wanted to switch sides; André denied that there *were* sides. The difference is one of ambivalence (*ambi* – both ways + *valentia* – strong, strength), the splitting or shuttling of the will along two distinct courses, as opposed to ambiguity: *ambiguus*, “doubtful”—from *ambigere*, “to waver, go around” (*ambi* - both ways + *agere* – to drive). Ambiguity implies a passive suspension of the will that proceeds indirectly; it is a quality of undifferentiation, impartial to sides, which allows for the open proliferation of forms of life “in touch” with feeling. André is ambiguous—he passively resists enclosure by declining to choose anything absolutely, or to be one thing at a time. In the wake of André, the independence movement's purportedly lofty ambition for individual, national being could thus be considered, in Nietzsche's words, as “the primal cause of evil”: an arbitrary and self-lacerating imposition of “gulfs between man and man” that cut off multiplicity and parceled the world into pieces.

### **III. The Neutral Ground**

André’s death was a sacrifice that compelled him and everyone else to become partial: American or British, friend or foe, Patriot or Loyalist. André’s story seems almost allegorically to mark a moment in the Revolution as it was unfolding when the rule of thirds leapt into action as a force of irrevocable doom. This suggests that the rule of thirds was not necessarily descriptive of how allegiance or party may actually have been felt during the war, but rather that it became so at a belated point in time by dint of U.S. nationalist proscription. Indeed, the rule of thirds governs the dominant narrative of the Revolution that terminates in the birth of the nation because it splits brethren into sides around the single issue of independence: were you for us or against us? André was a possibility that had to be excluded in order for the U.S. to emerge preemptively as the ideological subject of Revolutionary history. There were of course many others. But the significance of André is that he exposed how even the normatively white, male beneficiaries of the rule of thirds’ liberal design felt its requirements as a tragic bereavement. And André tells us something else, too—something unanticipated. What was lost with André was not a “something,” an object or idealization, but the capacity for being more than one thing at the same time. The Revolution became “modern” in the André myth by denying its protagonists the freedom to be ambiguous in what was, historically considered, a highly ambiguous situation.

André’s ghost thus calls attention to the painful exchange of ambiguity for choice as a measure of Political being. The tragic scope of this switch point begins with the circumstances surrounding André’s capture. Linda Colley argues that André’s inability to identify “Americans” correctly drew into stark relief the “fundamental disagreements

and uncertainties” about “the clarity and homogeneity of allegiances” in the war.<sup>31</sup> How was one to tell friends from enemies in what André himself considered as a civil war? This problem was endemic to the colonies’ standoff with Britain, but it seems to have been an especially pressing issue in Revolutionary New York. The city was held by the British, but it was surrounded by a 30-mile area called “the neutral ground” that formed a buffer with the rebel-occupied territories of Westchester County. Due to the close proximity of contending armies, partisan identifications in this area during the 1770s-80s were famously blurry. Judith Van Buskirk has argued that in New York, the Revolution was not experienced as a “total war”: “Loyalists and rebels, typically depicted as hostile opponents, were, in fact, in constant contact [ . . . ] crossing military lines to socialize, lend a helping hand to relatives and friends, or conduct a little business.”<sup>32</sup> Families split by partisan allegiance were in the habit of taking tea together, and the neutral ground itself was a gray zone in which it was more or less impossible to tell who was who, or where was where. André was captured because he could not make these discriminations himself—he accidentally wandered out of the neutral ground on his way back to Clinton’s camp, and then misconstrued the meaning of the militamen’s response to his question about the party to which they belonged: “Yours.”

Here, already, André exposes the distress entailed in the displacement of ambiguity by the forcible imposition of a choice between sides. The tragic irony of André’s arrest is that he was apprehended for failing at an impossible task in a manner that was at once arbitrary (he had a 50/50 shot) and unavoidable. He made a mistake that

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<sup>31</sup> Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire, and the World, 1600-1850* (New York: Anchor, 2004), 207; 212.

<sup>32</sup> Judith Van Buskirk, *Generous Enemies: Patriots and Loyalists in Revolutionary New York* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 2.

anyone could have made on or near the neutral ground, and one that arose more generally as a condition of war in which kin were set at odds. Hence there is an aporia between contingency and inevitability at the initial scene of André’s capture that blocks the assignation of fault to a single point of reference. Tragedy has a word for this aporia—“fate,” or sometimes “fortune”—that appears all over André’s literary traces. In “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,” for instance, the people of the village regard Major André’s tree with “a mixture of respect and superstition, partly out of sympathy for the *fate* of its *ill-starred* namesake [ . . . ]” (312, my emphases). Knickerbocker also describes André as “unfortunate.”

Fate is what happens when agency becomes atmospheric, by which I mean that fate is when individual choice gets undermined as the authorizing cause of effects, and events appear instead to be driven forward by circumstances that are of the world yet beyond our control: stars, war, a missed boat, a change of clothes. Fate might also be described as the traumatization of choice by something like “context,” with the qualification that context appears under the hand of fate not as background but as an interactive principle in motion, working energetically—but indifferently—to limit human options and obstruct judgment. Pat understandings of “tragic errors” and “fatal flaws” as deficiencies of individual character or decision-making are for this reason of little use, because they miss tragic fate’s radical disclosure that autonomous individuality is a lie and the concept of choice may itself be a problem. A whole series of mishaps lead to André’s encounter with the militiamen, none of which can be laid exclusively at his feet. And what happened next (as far as we know) is that André asked perhaps the single most

dangerous question it was possible to ask near the neutral ground, and the most controversial one in the midst a civil war.<sup>33</sup> “Of which party are you?”

A silly thing to say, perhaps, but interesting for that reason. The situation demanded that a choice be made. Friend or foe? Patriot or Loyalist? American or British? It wasn’t safe to come right out with it; André’s foes might have looked and sounded much like him. So André instead phrased an open, un-Enlightened query. Not a Cartesian question: who are you, who do you think you are, are you who you are because you think you are?, etc. etc. (How do you choose? Identify yourself!) Instead: what makes claims upon you, what calls you as its own, how are “you” not yourself? (How are you chosen? How are you identified?) The conditions of the neutral ground limited Enlightened reason enough to allow for another relation to knowledge. The Enlightenment asks questions of agential individuals; André asked a *fateful* question of actants—possessed forms of life. Whereas Cartesian questions aggressively demand that a subject stand forth, André’s ontological question can only be phrased as an interrogative that renders the respondent as an influenced creature. The question “Of which party are you?” is thus socio-political, because it asks how we are entangled with things that are external to ourselves, even by forces that are not fully available to our senses.

André was talking like a ghost before he died. Maybe that is why his open question was able magically to conjure an open answer. *Yours.* If André made a mistake, it was not that he failed accurately to identify his foe, but rather that he over-

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<sup>33</sup> There are no written records of this transaction. It has been transmitted orally, and may be nothing but lore, but for my purposes that is not particularly important, as I am interested precisely in how André’s story registered as myth in its circulation. The transcription I use for this exchange comes from Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire, and the World, 1600-1850* (New York: Anchor, 2002), 204.

identified with his foe. Or perhaps he saw neither friend nor foe, and heard in “*yours*” something that felt like an ontological truth. Can there be sides in a civil war? And more profoundly: if everything is accountable to something outside of itself, are not all worldly things in some sense of the same party? Once again, André seems to incite the proliferation of contacts between partitioned orders of meaning, which reveals that the ambiguity of “the neutral” is far from being empty.

Indeed, in the scene of André’s capture, neutrality actually appears to have powerful political dimensions that are inseparable from what I suggest is a kind of queer sociality in which none of the participants (yet) has a fixed identity. One man says “*yours*” to another, almost like a promise, and in the midst of war it both is and is not true—they are brothers and foes, fellow creatures and adversaries. The socio-politics of this queer exchange seem to arrive in a knowing without knowledge that flourishes in suspended judgment. Yet this way of knowing among strangers is not purely liberatory. “Of which party are you?” could also be construed as cagey and withholding, while “*Yours*” serves equally well as a flirtation and a trap. In contemporary terms, this could be a cruising scene, freighted doubly with the potential for danger and for pleasure. The fateful conjunction of these potentialities (danger, pleasure) may be fundamental to the scene itself, which takes place amongst lives that are ensnared in a web whose edges they cannot see. The scene of André’s capture on the neutral ground is “queer,” then, not in a state of perfect emancipation, but rather in the sense that it allows for the simultaneous availability of dangers and openings elsewhere construed as incompatible alternatives.

The spell was broken when André revealed his identity, thus initiating a chain of events through which he would become “British” and “enemy” on his way to becoming a

criminalized corpse. Lost in that process was the ineffable reality that he may in fact have been *ours*, to the extent that “we” could defer the necessity of choosing sides, or of having them define us absolutely. The circumstances of André’s arrest thus seem to dramatize a moment at which a glimpsed possibility for collective association allowed by the neutral ground was overtaken and destroyed by the irruption of the Political into its midst. What gets André killed is not a choice he makes but the arbitrary-necessity of choice itself. The story of André’s capture is a tiny parable which warns that modernity might be set into motion each time we have to say who we are.

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Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno argue that Enlightened modernity fulfills “the disenchantment of the world” that begins with classical myth, and in particular with the notion of tragic fate, which they see as activating a law of inexorability that levels difference and renders detail insignificant. They write of “the sanction of fate which, through retribution, incessantly reinstates what always was. Whatever might be made different is made the same.”<sup>34</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno’s account of modernity as an incessant conversion of difference into sameness helps to draw out an important paradox of André’s capture and death: as André becomes identifiable in Political terms as a subject with a chosen “side” (or one that is chosen for him), his identifications becomes more and more static. André, Briton, enemy, criminal, corpse. This cascade from name to corpse casts the entrance into political modernity as a scarring experience of legibility in which individuation amounts to a featureless death-trap. However, André’s story also turns Horkheimer and Adorno’s formulation on its head, because what actually seems to

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<sup>34</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno, *The Dialectic of the Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2002), 8

happen in the scene of his capture is that sameness (“We are yours”) gets converted into difference (“I am André”). Undifferentiation opened something up on the neutral ground; individuation shut it down at the gallows by isolating a solitary being from the world and forcing it to stand for something. Individuation and de-individuation are coextensive in modernity; what U.S. nationalism claims of Revolution—sovereignty, freedom, self—was nothing more than a noose about the neck.

Horkheimer and Adorno decry tragic fate for bringing about this state of affairs, but I take issue with their conflation of fate with modernity because it turns on the leveling of tragedy to a monadic rule. I think tragic fate is more mysterious than they propose. Freud sees fate as uncanny because it permits the “primitive” incursion into modernity of surpassed beliefs. It ruptures empiricism and leads back to animism, superstition, and enchantment.<sup>35</sup> For Freud, then, fate temporarily *re-enchants* the world by helping to create an uncanny environment that erodes the subject by baffling it with meaningful accidents. André got lost and met the militiamen in the dark, as it were: he was illegible, and his vision had been compromised. But this meant that André and the militiamen encountered one another on ambiguously relatable terms, as strangers who might have been of the same party, and as a result it became possible to see for a moment what was missing from Revolutionary history. Fate itself is ambiguous; it takes something away, but not without offering—it conjoins gifts with losses. In André’s case, fate seems to arise as a kind of environmental condition of the neutral ground that brings neutrality’s richness into focus as a flourishing of undifferentiated socio-political contacts

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<sup>35</sup> Freud describes the uncanny at one point as “the only the factor of unintended repetition that transforms what would otherwise seem quite harmless into something uncanny and forces us to entertain the idea of the fateful and the inescapable, when we should normally speak of chance.” Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny,” *The Uncanny*, trans. David McLintock (New York: Penguin, 2003), 144-147.

between men that liberal Politics declare to be unthinkable. André's fate proffers a tragic counter-memory of Revolution as an emotionally devastating scene of alienation, then, but not without offering. For fate also shows that men might hold one another in common on the neutral ground.

### III. Partying with the Enemy

André was a party planner. His job in the British army was to organize social events, and he seems to have put those skills to good use after death. Like any good host, André knows how throw a party without having to be the center of attention, so that Others can get to un-know one another. His ghost keeps coming back to America, though he is careful not to come too far out into the open. That's when exorcisms happen.

The word “party” means “to divide into parts” (*partiri*), or literally “that which is divided,” and it typically denotes a gathering that is parted, portioned, or sided against others. “Party” acquired its more familiar contemporary associations with gatherings devoted to pleasure and frolic in the early eighteenth century. A bit like the *unheimlich*, “party” thus seems to contain its antithesis within itself, evoking both a division that produces opposition and a coming together that produces fun. Like the *unheimlich* as well, “party” plays in undifferentiation by muddling boundary distinctions between insides and outsides, and especially between friends and foes. André has a knack for gathering divided parts into queer parties, revealing that they belong, or are party, to each other. He thus forms parties of ambiguous life by making familiarity seem strange

(*unheimlich*); he reshapes division as a *productive* limit for social life by showing that division makes us who we are in relation to things we do not know. We are possessed, we belong to (an)others. In that sense, “we” are always partying with the enemy.

Some of the most powerful expressions of the politics beyond Politics take shape around André through the relation his mourners formed with his body after death—the tender (un)knowing of the unknown. Commentators universally described André’s execution as a monstrous discharge of inordinate force. But some proposed that the foundational issue was that Washington resisted the fateful entanglements of the socio-political and responded violently as a result. For instance, in Anna Seward’s “Monody on Major André” (1780), Seward aligns Washington with Achilles and André with Hector, thus implying that André was the triangulated victim of Washington’s grief for an unnamed Patroclus. Seward is likely thinking of Benedict Arnold, with whom Washington was very close; the West Point treason was said to have come as a profound personal shock to Washington as a result. Seward’s use of *The Iliad* as an intertext for the André affair allows for compassion to be extended to everyone involved. However, Seward herself has little patience for Washington and argues that he is worse than Achilles because even Achilles returned Hector’s body to Priam. After a long and bitter recrimination against him, Seward writes:

Less cruel far than thou, on Ilium’s plain  
Achilles, raging for Patroclus slain!  
  
When hapless Priam bends the aged knee  
  
To deprecate the Victor’s dire decree,  
  
The Nobler Greek, in melting pity spares

The lifeless Hector to his Father's prayers,  
Fierce as he was;--'tis *Cowards* only know  
Persisting vengeance o'er a *fallen* Foe.<sup>36</sup>

Seward is protesting the fact that André's body was "dump[ed] in the Earth on Hudson's shore" without proper funeral rites (his remains were recovered from Tappan in 1821 and taken to Westminster Abbey). She thus appears to be aligned with Priam, and in that capacity she also speaks as, or on behalf of, André/Hector's "father." The Washington/Achilles and André/Hector pairings also strongly imply that Washington relates to André in this moment not hierarchically as commander to soldier, or as a "father" figure to a son—but rather horizontally, as a bereaved male lover to a peer who acts as a surrogate for the absent beloved. The socio-politics of Seward's mourning are queer the whole way around. Seward takes up the role of an aged king to urge the claims of the dead in a devastated scene of intergenerational eroticism between men.

What is it permissible to sacrifice in war? In Seward's account, Washington's treatment of André's body as other than itself enacts a ruthless denial of entanglement that produces André's mutilation as its remainder. André's alignment with Hector thus points to the politics beyond Politics. In her superbly beautiful analysis of *The Iliad*, Rachel Bespaloff refers to Hector as "the guardian of the perishable joys."<sup>37</sup> Hector is the "resistance-hero" to Achilles' "revenge-hero," a man for whom death would mean "consigning everything he loves to a life of punishment and torture." By contrast, Achilles is driven by a seemingly insatiable urge for destruction. Naturally gifted and

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<sup>36</sup> Seward, *Monody on Major André* (New York: Rivington, 1781), 17.

<sup>37</sup> Rachel Bespaloff, *On the Iliad* [1947], *War and the Iliad*, Ed. Christopher Benfey (New York: NYRB, 2005), 43.

almost invulnerable, Achilles risks nothing in battle. But the distinction between Hector and Achilles is not, for Bespaloff, one between peace and war, or even precisely between the home and the battlefield, for both men are conquerors. The distinction is that Hector fights on behalf of an otherwise politics beyond the rule of force: the politics of perishability. The significance of the moment in which Priam successfully entreats Achilles for the body of his son—a moment in which Achilles eats for the first time since his bereavement, and acknowledges his mortality—is that it is a moment in which the rule of force yields to the politics of perishability. The scene between Achilles and Priam gorgeously evokes how the cares of social life can soften rage into ambiguity. Achilles grieves for Patroclus and for his own father through Priam; Priam admires Achilles' body and grieves for Hector. Both are time-bound in the knowledge that “all men live in affliction,” which, while it does not repair the damage that has been done or prevent further blood-letting, allows for another relation to violence through common precarity.<sup>38</sup> Achilles is able to see with Priam what Creon cannot with Antigone, or Washington with André: the duties beyond what Seward calls “the Victor’s dire decree”—the impossible loves between victor and vanquished, our kinship with the dead. The material consequence of the hiatus in which these realizations blossom in *The Iliad* is that Hector’s corpse is washed, anointed, and returned to Troy. A strange but important concession: Hector is denied a good death and permitted a good burial. But I suggest that what is even more powerfully affirmed in Priam and Achilles’s untimely repast is the existence of a politics of suffering without sides in the party of the enemy.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 82.

The ethical claims made by André's corpse contest the absolute leveling of all difference by the law, but Washington refuses their demands. Seward thus links the cleavage of the Political from the social enacted by Washington to a distinctively "modern" problem of representation. Modernity makes things stand for one another singularly, thus treating life as other than itself; its preferred representational mechanisms are symbols and narratives. Triangulation provides a framework for describing how this works. Seward allusively implies that Washington scapegoats André because he wants to wreak vengeance on the grief of his ended love with Patroclus/Arnold, or perhaps even his jealousy that André was able to penetrate Arnold when he was not (Hector spears Patroclus in the lower belly, "ramming the point home"). James Rivington, proprietor of the *Rivington Gazette*, felt similarly that André had been used as a stand-in for Arnold. Rivington argued that Washington kills André because Arnold was out of his reach: "Supposing that General Arnold was guilty [ . . . ] was this a good reason why Major Andre, whom he deems innocent, should suffer, only because the former was out of their power?"<sup>39</sup> Both Seward and Rivington suggest that André paid the forfeit for a broken heart, or a jealous lover; they thus refigure the law as a principle of desire that generates violence in its attempt to overcome loss symbolically.

While it is possible to read these as homophobic arguments, my sense is that the frustrated homoeroticisms ascribed to André's sacrifice are not the core issue here. In fact, the problem Rivington and Seward may point to is that Washington failed to honor the passion he feels for Arnold *well enough* because he turned to the law in order to avoid the knowledge that the beloved is always a stranger to us. Washington is enraged

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<sup>39</sup> James Rivington, *The Case of Major John Andre* (New York: Rivington, 1780), 23-24.

because Arnold was not who he thought him to be. But to immure the beloved in the walls of our hearts as a species of the familiar is to kill love's perishable relation with the world. Washington's desire to fix his beloved to an image in order to keep him always the same leads Washington to cleave to the logic of sacrifice. Horkheimer and Adorno describe this logic as "the mark of an historical catastrophe, an act of violence done equally to human beings and to nature."<sup>40</sup> Sacrifice is the banner of the Enlightenment's grim dialectic, which insists that "each thing is what it is only by becoming what it is not." For both Seward and Rivington, then, André's execution represents the hideous emergence of force as the totalization of all politics, and in both cases they link this to the betrayal of affects (longing, hatred) that have been peeled away from their objects and unleashed as violence on a bystander whose body is made to signify in the name of another. André had to be individuated as himself, but only insofar as he could be used up completely in partial signification: Arnold, Briton, criminal, foe.

#### **IV. Grave Parties**

André appears as a spectral placeholder for queer social yearnings that have no proper place in U.S. times or spaces elaborated from a dualistic reckoning of the Revolutionary war—except, perhaps, in the grave. William Dunlap's *André* provides the most fully elaborated account of the disruptive charge André's counter-memory levies against nationalist Revolutionary historiography. Along with Seward's "Monody," it is one of only two full-length literary works to be entirely devoted to André, who otherwise tends to appear in glimpses and fragments. *André* was also the first, and possibly only, play to represent Washington onstage during his lifetime. This was an audacious move

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 41.

on Dunlap's part. In the first place, the André affair was widely considered to have tarnished Washington's reputation; it was a risky venture even to consider it as a subject for the stage while Washington lived. Moreover, Dunlap pulls no punches; the play's portrait of Washington is a searing condemnation (more on this below). And finally, Washington attended the opening performance in New York on March 30, 1798. Dunlap was backstage, watching from the wings as the drama denounced Washington to his face.

A tragedy in five acts, the action of the play is simple. A young Continental officer, Captain Bland, returns to his post at headquarters in Tappan to discover that Arnold has defected and that André is slated to die. Bland immediately panics, as André had nursed him during his own confinement aboard a prison-ship. Bland pleads with the General (an unnamed Washington) for André's life to no avail. Headquarters soon learns that the British intend to kill Bland's father, Colonel Bland, if André dies (Bland Sr. has been held as a prisoner-of-war by Sir Henry Clinton for some time). At this point, Captain Bland's mother appears in the camp to beg for André's life, and late in the action, André's former fiancée, Honora (brought back from the dead!), also appears as a supplicant before the General. André sues Clinton for Colonel Bland's release, but the Colonel is rescued from British captivity in a raid the same day. The General maintains, however, that "we must shew / That by the laws of war we will abide" (86), and refuses to commute André's sentence from hanging to firing squad. The drama ends with cannon firing to signal André's death off-stage, as Captain Bland lies prostate with grief on the ground, having declared that the André episode has destroyed the moral mandate for the cause of independence. Another officer in the Continental army named M'Donald stands

over Bland to deliver a steely defense of the rigors of necessity, at the same time acknowledging that succeeding generations may “abhor” them for what they have done.

As this overview begins to suggest, the emotional center of the drama is the friendship between André and Captain Bland, who credits André with saving his and his fellow soldiers’ lives when they were prisoners-of-war on a British ship. From the first, Bland’s feeling for André exceeds the abstract commitments of his partisan fealty to the Continental army. In the first scene of the drama, he learns that someone is to be hanged as a spy—he does not yet know whom—and says, “ ‘Tis well. Just heaven! O grant that thus may fall / All those who seek to bring this land to woe!” Yet as soon as he learns André’s identity from a watchman in the guard, he pulls an about-face as he recalls André’s kindness to him aboard the prison-ship:

[. . .] by benevolence urg’d, this best of men,  
This gallant youth, then favor’d in high power,  
Sought out the pit obscene of foul disease,  
Where I, and many a suffering soldier lay,  
And, like an angel, seeking good for man,  
Restor’d us light, and partial liberty.  
  
Me he mark’d out his own. He nurst and cur’d,  
He lov’d and made his friend. I liv’d by him,  
And in my heart he liv’d, till, when exchang’d,  
Duty and honor call’d me from my friend.—

Judge how my heart is tortur'd.<sup>41</sup>

André and Bland's friendship blooms in a scene of erotic nursing and curing in which the enemy takes sensual care of his opponents' bodies. Jeffrey Richards notes of this scene that André displays "distinctly unmasculine attentiveness normally assigned to the selfless woman."<sup>42</sup> Certainly from the perspective of a gender binary that forbids masculinity from cohabitating with "womanliness," André may be said to perform a womanly role here. But André is always more than one thing at a time; he defies such mutual exclusions and permits the slackening of rule-bound divisions in those with whom he forms parties. Indeed, Bland's telling also casts the soldiers in the prison-ship in a feminized, passive, or receptive position, lying in the hold and waiting to fall "victim to death." Curiously, then, André's expression of benevolence—"seeking good for man"—allows for relation between men who have *all* defaulted into femininity from conventional masculinity, or perhaps even more radically, between bodies that may not necessarily be reliably gender-identified in binary terms. Bland describes André as "an angel" and himself as a prospective "victim." These are beings of ambiguous determination.

Bland describes the love between enemies as one between persons who have needful, fleshly bodies that lie open to one another's mercy. André's tender ministrations thus seem to give rise to other forms of life through relation in suffering—"I liv'd by him, / And in my heart he liv'd." Bland's statement that he lives *by* André suggests a connection that is proximate in space as well as causally indebted: I lived alongside and

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<sup>41</sup> William Dunlap, *André: A Tragedy in Five Acts* [1798] (New York: Penguin, 1997), 72. All citations are page numbers from this edition, as the play had no act breaks or line numbers in its original printing.

<sup>42</sup> Jeffrey Richards, *Drama, Theatre, and Identity in the American New Republic* (Cambridge: CUP, 2005), 131.

near him, but also thanks to him. This double resonance of “by” suggests the entanglement of orders of association that are usually conceived as distinct: the horizontal relation of proximity (alongside-ness), and the vertical relation of gratitude (thanks to). The second part of the line, “And in my heart he liv’d,” connects these orders of space and time to the (meta)physical register of insides and outsides. Bland lived alongside André, Bland lived thanks to André, and André lived inside Bland—a powerfully queer erotic image that evokes André’s angelic and/or feminized penetration of Bland’s heart. Bland and André do not relate to one another, then, as autonomous and self-contained subjects, but through a kind of network of spatio-temporal, physical, and affective border crossings that defy individualistic explanation or strictly linear causality. Bland comes to love André ecstatically, near or beyond the edges of himself as a proprietary subject, and near or beyond the edges of war’s oppositional forces. André holds Bland’s life lovingly in his hands, and Bland takes the life of that man lovingly inside him.

The openness of bodies to wounding and healing—what Butler calls precarity, and Bespaloff perishability—creates forms of associated life that travel alongside, thanks to, and inside others. These politics entail reorganizations of personhood, time, and space, but they also seem to give rise to another epistemology of freedom: “partial liberty.” Indeed, liberty may not be absolute in the politics of perishability, as these politics are bound in the cares of the flesh in a manner that admits only of limited or partial abstraction. Hence, perhaps, a split appears in Bland’s comments above where the politics of his friendship for André comes into conflict with “duty and honor”: the names for the abstract forces of war that “call” Bland from his friend. The next line—“Judge how my heart is tortured”—could be taken to refer to the torture of the moment in which

this splitting first occurred, when Bland was “exchang’d” out of captivity and had to exchange André’s friendship for abstract idealisms in the process. From that moment, André and Bland’s friendship became excessive, because it could not be—and was not—actually “exchanged” away as Bland moved back across enemy lines. But the torture of Bland’s heart speaks likewise to the conflict of the present, in which Bland is faced with the possibility of watching his beloved die a criminal’s death. His first thought is to take up the role of the lover-nurse himself, asking Melville: “shew me where my André lies” (72). What follows between Bland and André is a passionate reunion in which André rises from his seat “with emotion” and cries as Bland embraces him: “I have inquir’d for thee—wish’d much to see thee— / Prithee take no note of these fool’s tears— / My heart was full—and seeing thee—” (77). The joy of be-holding (being held by and accountable to mutual embrace) conjoins happiness with tears. As always with André, however, the ambiguity of this conjunction (tears of joy) manifests fullness in the hemorrhaging of boundary distinctions. Love bursts the heart and arrives in the world to form parties through division: the breaking of joy into tears, the breaking up of language into dashes that connect what they separate. Division is a principle of relation as well as distinction. Love is party to the enemy.

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The core of the dramatic action in *André* arises in the conflict between Bland and the General on the subject of André’s fate, as they move into opposite corners in a debate over the meaning(s) of justice, obligation, and allegiance. For Bland, André’s extension of compassion to him and his fellows on the prison-ship evinces his unimpeachable virtue and ought to safeguard him from execution. For the unnamed “General”—clearly a

characterization of George Washington, who in this telling is the sole arbiter of André's sentence—the imperatives of national futurity trump any but a rhetorical acknowledgment of André's merits and demand André's death. In Act III, for instance, Bland pleads with the General for André's life, begging the General to "turn the rigour / Of War's iron law from him, the best of men, / Meant only for the worst" (85). The General replies:

I know the virtues of this man [André], and love them.  
But the destiny of millions, millions  
Yet unborn, depends upon the rigour  
Of this moment. The haughty Briton laughs  
To scorn our armies and our councils. Mercy,  
Humanity, call loudly, that we make  
Our now despised power be felt, vindictive.  
Millions demand the death of this young man.  
My injur'd country, he his forfeit life  
Must yield, to shield thy lacerated breast  
From torture. (86)

Bland champions the passionate bonds of perishability and insists that "War's iron law" (85) be calibrated to accommodate their claims. The General embodies the vertical scale of patriarchal power—the Law of the Father—and insists that the demands of the aspiring state preempt attachments that cross enemy lines. Bland appeals for a softening of the Law, and the General maintains that "rigor" must be upheld. But note that, in the moment above, the General's defense of André's sentence rests on a wildly abstract and

symbolic set of considerations that seem to be totally out of proportion with the issue at hand. According to the General, André’s death is mandated by “millions,” not only in the present but “yet unborn”: a statement he repeats again further down in the passage—“Millions demand the death of this young man.” This seems to suggest a view in which particular lives and loves do not matter; indeed, the General suggests as much by invoking and discarding his own admiration for André in the opening line. Yet his argument is precisely that *this* particular life must be sacrificed for the sake of those who have not yet been born. Within this logic is another displacement, too; André must be killed in order to chasten “the haughty Briton” who mocks colonial armies and councils. André’s death will either make an abstract point for a speculative future public, or it will make a bloody point for a homogenized national character—“the haughty Briton”—who has damaged the egos of colonial American patriarchs at the heads of armies and councils.

Where Seward and Rivington suggest that Washington’s blocked attachment to Arnold drives his overweening use of force in the André affair, Dunlap makes a different claim: the “bad object” of the General’s devotion is the speculative image of the U.S. nation-state. Nothing the General says seems to make sense. He invokes “mercy” and “humanity” in order to justify “vindictive” power. He also states in a slightly earlier moment that André’s execution will prove to the British that the colonists “have the power to bring their acts for trial.” This, he argues, will apparently “stem the flood of ills, which else fell war / Would pour, uncheck’d, upon the sickening world, / Sweeping away all trace of civil life” (86). In other words, by killing André, Washington proposes to *prevent* the augmentation of the violence of war. An astonished Bland counters that

pardoning André would “not encourage ill,” as André is universally esteemed—and yet the General presses on like a juggernaut.

The General’s final, bizarre argument to Bland is that André must die in order that Bland’s “lacerated breast” may be shielded from torture. But as Bland himself makes clear from the first scene of the play, what tortures Bland is the very logic of sacrifice that the General espouses. Bland likewise rejects the elision of sacrifice with honor when the General tells him that he will be receiving a promotion for his service. Boiling with outrage (the stage direction reads, “*with increasing heat*”), Bland snaps into open rebellion:

Pardon me, sir, I never shall deserve it.

The country that forgets to reverence virtue:

That makes no difference ‘twixt the sordid wretch,

Who, for reward, risks treason’s penalty,

And him unfortunate, whose duteous service

Is, by mere accident, so chang’d in form,

As to assume guilt’s semblance, I serve not:

Scorn to serve. [ . . . ]

Thus from my helm

I tear, what once I proudly thought, the badge

Of virtuous fellowship. (87)

The connection Bland seems to make here is that the honor accorded to his service takes the sacrifice of undifferentiated life as its necessary condition of possibility: he cannot deserve his promotion because merit is criminal within an organization that pegs its

legitimacy on the manufacture of “the unfortunate” (ambiguous) into the “sordid wretch” (individual). The stage directions for this moment indicate that Bland “tears the cockade from his helmet” and throws it on the ground.

On the night of the play’s opening performance (at which Washington was also present), this gesture very nearly caused a riot in the theater because veterans in the audience mistook Bland’s black and white cockade of the Franco-American alliance for the black and white insignia of the Federalists, who were engaged in the late 1790s in a bitter factional rivalry with the Democratic-Republicans. Dunlap seems to have talked the disgruntled audience members down during intermission, and he later wrote some additional lines in which Bland repudiates his own actions. In these added lines, Bland recants his abjuration of fealty, extols Washington’s “pious labors” on behalf of his country, and replaces the cockade. While they were never spoken onstage, Dunlap included them in the introduction he wrote for the publication of the play in April, in an edition bound with Seward’s “Monody,” André’s “Cow-Chace,” and the proceedings of André’s court martial from 1780.

The circumstances around the performance of *André* in 1798 suggest that the audience perceived the political audacity of Bland’s actions in strictly partisan terms, through the tunnel vision of late 1790s party faction. Dunlap appears to have anticipated this problem. In the Prologue to *André*, he tries to head it off by making an appeal that “no party-spirit [may] blast his views,” explaining that his attempt is to “sing of wrongs long past, Men as they were, / To instruct, without reproach, the Men that are” (67). What Dunlap means by “party spirit” is ambiguous, however. He might refer to the Democratic-Republican/Federalist debates, or to the contending “parties” of the

Revolutionary war. By Dunlap's own account in his editorial introduction to the text, *André* was a formal experiment in representing “a real transaction, the particulars of which are fresh in the minds of many of the audience” (64). Dunlap intended *André* as a “proof that recent events may be so managed in tragedy as to command popular attention” (66), a concern the Prologue addresses by underscoring the recentness of André’s memory, and its odd placement in bilateral accountings of the war:

Who has forgot when gallant André died?

A name by Fate to Sorrow’s self allied.

Who has forgot, when o’er the untimely bier,

Contending armies paus’d, to drop a tear. (67)

Judging by the response to *André* on its opening night, most had indeed forgotten “when gallant André died.” Perhaps this is why Dunlap does not appear to have attempted to stage *André* again, instead recycling portions of its dialogue into *The Glory of Columbia, her Yeomanry!* (1803), which Dunlap wryly described as a “holy-day drama [. . .] occasionally murdered for the amusement of holy-day fools.”<sup>43</sup> Dunlap seems to have been up against market pressures, then, and had to sacrifice *André*’s experiment in subverting nationalist ideology by recalling the deficit André introduced into visions of the war as a conflict of “contending armies.” Indeed, the cockade scene is a tipping point in Bland’s near-total disenchantment with the project of independence as such, and this entails a fierce criticism not only of Washington as a popular “father” of the nation, but also of the horrors of the symbolic logic that he wields in that capacity.

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<sup>43</sup> Dunlap, *History of the American Theatre* [1832] (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 227.

One of the courageous formal and political experiments Dunlap seems to have undertaken in *André* was a consideration of the entwinement of 1790s U.S. party factionalism with 1780s Revolutionary Politics. What Dunlap means by “party faction” ambiguously allows for this multiplicity. Indeed, *André* can fruitfully be read as a critique of “parties” in the first sense that ultimately converges with its historiographic meanings in the second. Using the coordinates of 1790s factionalism Dana Nelson provides in *National Manhood* (1998), the conflict between Bland and the General could be described as one between Bland’s anti-Federalist (and later, Democratic-Republican) insistence on *actual* representation through local forms of democratic practice; while the General embodies the Federalist ideal of *virtual* representation and what Nelson calls “rational distance”: the idea that political rationality operates away from local, democratic intersubjectivity and enlarges the prospect of government, allowing for “ongoing territorial and civic incorporation that will provide adequate space for dispersing dangerous difference.”<sup>44</sup>

In factional party terms, the Federalist brand of “national manhood” that the General embodies bases its claims to authority on the premise that political consensus can be achieved through the “ideals of a vigorous, strong, undivided manhood” as realized in the body of the president, which stands as “a guarantee of manly constitution *qua* national accord.”<sup>45</sup> Other characters in the play reinforce this reading to Bland—most notably M’Donald, another officer, who argues that Bland’s gratitude to André for saving his life is nothing but narcissism: “Gratitude, / That selfish rule of action, which

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<sup>44</sup> Dana Nelson, *National Manhood: Capitalist Citizenship and the Imagined Fraternity of White Men* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 40-41.

<sup>45</sup> In 1780 Washington was not yet the president, of course, but *André*’s audience in 1798 knows that he would be. Nelson, *National Manhood*, 34.

commands / That we our preference make of men, / Not for their worth, but that they did us service" (94). Like the General of whom he is a disturbing double, M'Donald claims that André "sav'd thy life, yet strove to damn thy country; / Doom'd millions to the haughty Briton's yoke; / [ . . ] His sacrifice now stands the only bar / Between the wanton cruelties of war, / And our much-suffering soldiers" (94). M'Donald thus chastises Bland for his passionate attachment to André on the grounds that it prevents Bland from seeing the bigger picture—which is apparently that André, as a symbolic individual, "doom'd millions to the haughty Briton's yoke" and must be destroyed in order to guarantee national unity. Exactly like the General whose language he echoes here, M'Donald's logic is that suffering has exchange-value within the symbolic system of sacrifice. But like the General, too, M'Donald's arguments rest on disproportionate relationships between causes and effects, means and ends, that are undercut by the actual circumstances of the drama.

Indeed, at this point in the play, Bland's POW father is being held as blood ransom for André; if André dies, Colonel Bland will be killed in reprisal. Hence M'Donald's statement that André's sacrifice is "the only bar / Between the wanton cruelties of war, / And our much-suffering soldiers" is patently false, especially from Bland's perspective, as Bland himself stands to lose both André and his father to the wanton demands of total war that the General and M'Donald claim to disclaim. Just as importantly, and for the same reason, M'Donald's argument does not work on Bland, who accuses M'Donald of "detested sophistry" and spends the remainder of the scene attempting (alas, without success) to provoke M'Donald to duel with him. Political consensus is *not* achieved through the ideal of "a vigorous, undivided manhood" in

*André*—least of all in the figure of General/future president Washington, who does anything but guarantee “manly constitution *qua* national accord.”

Because the General and M'Donald will not adjust the dictates of “War’s iron law” to accommodate affective kinships embedded in the politics of perishability, the model of governance they represents seem to *fail* in this drama—it produces discord because it is founded in symbolic violence. The General habitually denies his own power to alter André’s sentence. In his confrontation with Bland, for instance, he claims that he is able to “know and love” André’s virtues, but insists that he, the General, is acting as a symbolic advocate for symbolic interests, which in effect means that he is not speaking as an embodied person for other embodied persons, but rather as an imaginary *persona* for speculative “millions” yet unborn. The General seems to say that he is powerless to act because he a hyper-symbolic representative who exists beyond the time or touch of the world; he is limited by his transcendence. At other moments, he abdicates authority in the name of fate. Moved by Honora’s plea for André’s life, for instance, he says: “O, what keen struggles must I undergo! / [ . . . ] to have the power to pardon; / The court’s stern sentence to remit;--give life;-- / Feel the strong wish to use such blessed power; / Yet know that circumstances strong as fate / Forbid to obey the impulse” (103). In a grotesque contortion of reason, then, the General reserves the right to feel conflicted about having power he refuses to put into action while announcing that he is a kind of victim of “circumstances strong as fate” that forbid him from doing what he acknowledges he is in fact able to do.

The General’s woeful excuse for justification seems to me perfectly to illustrate why Horkheimer and Adorno deplore tragic fate as the forerunner for the leveling

abstractions of Enlightenment: “The principle of the fated necessity which caused the downfall of the mythical hero [ . . . ] hands down a single identical content: wrath against those of insufficient righteousness.”<sup>46</sup> For Horkheimer and Adorno, the connection between tragic fate and abstract Enlightenment articulates as a rote law of repetition in which both time and persons are stripped of texture and converted into interchangeable exemplars. “Abstraction,” they write, stands in the same relationship to its objects as fate, whose concept it eradicates: as liquidation.<sup>47</sup> While I maintain that fate is distinct from Enlightenment, people like the General are the reason they can sometimes look the same, as the logic of Enlightenment parrots fate to get what it wants. In this case the General resorts to the language of fate in order to liquidate his own authority. But he does so in the most cynical possible way, in order to secure his own freedom to see the outcome he desires—the liquidation of André as exemplar—through a cravenly opportunistic masking of power that is locked in with disavowal. However, this lurid corruption appears in the General’s speech as an explicitly jaundiced, or “bad,” deployment of tragic fate within the drama.

Dunlap in fact seems to go out of his way in *André* to demonstrate that the General’s conception of fate is flawed in its premises. Act I, scene ii, for instance, features a conversation between the General and two of his chiefs: M’Donald, a stern moral absolutist who distrusts the masses and insists on self-discipline; and Seward, an idealist who at different times delivers paeans on the glories of patriotism and descends into tormented reflections of the barbarity of mankind. (Seward’s name winks at Anna

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<sup>46</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 8.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 9

Seward's "Monody," suggesting that there is a kinship between their views). M'Donald refers to André as a "mercenary European" who has descended "to play / The tempter's part, and lure men to their ruin!" He refers to how André was captured while wearing a disguise, as well as to André's initial attempt to bribe his captors. Seward chides M'Donald: "What you suggest of one, whom fickle Fortune, / In her changeling mood, hath hurl'd, unpitying, / From her topmost height to lowest misery, Tastes not of charity" (75). M'Donald replies that André's fault lies in "misdeed, not fortune," and goes on to describe fortune and chance as "convenient words" that cover for ambition and falsehood—a rather apt observation in light of the fact that the General is going to use "fate" in precisely the same way four acts later. But in this earlier moment in Act I, the General intervenes in M'Donald and Seward's debate in order to check M'Donald's ungracious sentiments. Washington charts a course directly between Seward's vision of fate as Fortune (which is utterly capricious) and M'Donald's negation of fate in favor of "misdeed" (which is utterly individualized):

Yet ever keep in mind that man is frail;  
His tide of passion struggling still with Reason's  
Fair and favorable gale, and adverse  
Driving his unstable bark, upon the  
Rocks of error. Should he sink thus shipwreck'd,  
Sure it is not Virtue's voice that triumphs in his ruin. (76)

The General presupposes a split subject: one who is divided between passion and reason. Virtue is not identical with either of the extremes that Seward and M'Donald represent—idealistic passion on the one hand, stern reason on the other—because the subject's

attempt to negotiate between them is what produces the conditions for his triumph or failure (these are the only ways in which the subject understands outcomes).

This is *not* the animist magic of tragic fate as I understand it, in which persons are never so enclosed as to be split in half. Tragic fate is environmental and chancy; it turns subjects into “ghostly matters.” Ultimately, all Washington has done here is to neutralize his aides’ opposing views on fate by putting them into motion as a dialectic. The subject in fate is now tasked to “drive his unstable bark” between two contending forces (an image which evokes Horkheimer and Adorno’s reading of Odysseus and the Sirens). In other words, we’re still dealing with an agent pitched in opposition to nature, which he can only see narcissistically as a projection of an “interior” reality—the seas of fate are stormy, windy, rocky because the dualist subject’s contending reason and passions have put him in turmoil. For this reason, this subject is only capable of mercy as a function of identification, because he has no relationship to the world outside himself. The General has no compassion because he is incapable of compassion, which arises from a world of things held in common and not in likeness. He fails to grant mercy to André because he does not identify with André; after all, he, George Washington—the great and powerful Oz—has never crashed his bark. Finally, he does not identify with André because he already thinks he knows who André is: Briton, enemy, spy. His bad love object in the future of the nation-state (which exists only in his mind) has totally insulated him from the chancy offering of relation-through-suffering.

The flawed premises of the General’s dialectic conception of fate connect his espousal of the speculative futurity of nationalist time with his curious double insistence that André’s person both is and is not particularly important. The General, much like

Washington in Seward's "Monody," commits the great sin of modernity against nature in Dunlap's play: he will force something multiple to become singular. André will serve as a general example, and yet at the same time it must be him. It could be anyone, but it *must* be him, and just so—by hanging—even though it does not have to be, even though the General has the power to make it otherwise, and even though André asks only for "a trifling change of form" (91) in the manner of his death. Once again André must become himself, through the volitional exclusion of what exceeds himself, by becoming something he is not: a "haughty Briton," a bar to the wanton cruelties of war, the enemy to whose party we do not belong.

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Dunlap thus undifferentiates 1790s party factionalism and the nationalist Political account of Revolution as a war of contending parties by exposing their co-governance by the liberal assumptions underpinning the rule of thirds. We don't have to choose between party readings (factional, Revolutionary) because both arrive at the same place, at the same impasse, with the extortion of representation from ambiguity by the Law of the Father. In concrete terms, this looks and feels like the amputation of queer sensual multiplicity by Washington's unacceptable assertion that the subject is bound to choose.

Other readers of *André* have noted that it draws patriarchal authority into question, but they have argued that Dunlap resolves this tension either within the play itself or by recourse to the theater as a space for democratic debate. Jay Fliegelman takes the first of these positions, arguing that Dunlap ultimately teaches Bland (and the audience) to curb his passionate excesses and recognize Washington as his "true father." This reading implicitly identifies Dunlap with Federalism, and it also demands that André

stand as an honored sacrifice demanded by the Revolution in order to produce U.S. national union: “If the American children are to be liberated from their British parent, the good aspect of parent (embodied by Andre) must be sacrificed along with the evil (embodied by George III). Andre serves as such a sacrificial figure and the honors accorded him posthumously memorialize that sacrifice.”<sup>48</sup> Like Fliegelman, Lucy Rinehart reads *André* as an Oedipal drama between Bland and three “father figures”—André, Washington, and Colonel Bland (Bland’s biological father)—but she concludes that it evinces Dunlap’s disapproval of the Jay Treaty. This aligns Dunlap with anti-Federalist sentiment, and indeed Rinehart interprets *André* as “a meditation on the role of political spectacle in the new republic” which nominates the theater as a space of “actual” representation that offers a dialogic, dissensus model for working out questions of democratic governance.<sup>49</sup>

Note that Fliegelman and Rinehart take sides. Fliegelman has a Federalist reading, Rinehart an anti-Federalist one. They both read *André* in the Political context of the early republic, thus glossing the drama as a tale of Revolution that must lead to the nation-state. Significantly, they also both read *André* through Oedipal tragic lenses. Oedipalism is the single most likely of the classical traditions in tragedy to insist on catharsis and symbolic repair: the incorporation of the patriarchal enemy into the self by identifying with his demand for a sacrifice. It is no accident, therefore, that Oedipalism also governs U.S. nationalist historiographies of the Revolution; it aligns with the dictates of liberal modernity upon which those traditions have been founded. As I hope is already

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<sup>48</sup> Jay Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution against Patriarchal Authority, 1750-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982), 217-18.

<sup>49</sup> Lucy Rinehart, “‘Manly Exercises’: Post-Revolutionary Performances of Authority in the Theatrical Career of William Dunlap.” *Early American Literature* 36.2 (2001): 275.

clear from this chapter, the tragic genealogies I draw upon are not those of Oedipus, but rather of Antigone, Medea, and Clytemnestra: all of them women who radically refuse the separation of the *oikos* from the *polis* by violations of patriarchal prerogative. My influences are drawn strongly from Butler's reading of Antigone in this way. Indeed, I suggest that what we see in *André* is not an Oedipal drama in which every man is a father or a son, but rather one that regards Oedipalism warily from the perspective of what Butler calls "Antigone's claim" (the claim of precarity). Almost everyone in this drama except for high command regards Washington as Antigone does Creon, while high command unconsciously regards itself as Oedipus does his father. Much as Butler does in *Antigone's Claim*, then, Dunlap deploys one strain of tragic vision (Antigone) against another (Oedipus), internally within a single text. Dunlap thus unearths the buried history of Revolution from the place of its interment within the Oedipal (and liberal) narrative of Revolutionary success that U.S. national Politics take as a "necessary condition of life."<sup>50</sup>

*André* uses tragedy to diagnose the abuse of fate as Law in Enlightened thought which divides political from social life. The tragedy of *André* is the tragedy not of the identity between Enlightenment and tragic fate, but rather of Enlightenment's co-optation of fate for its purposes as it pushes aside the politics of perishability in pursuit of representation. This process manifests in *André* as a hardening of dialectic oppositions—friend and enemy, passion and reason, home and battlefield—but I suggest that these oppositions appear as traumatic effects of the General's abstracting, sacrificial logic rather than as absolutes which preexist and are subsequently cauterized by his

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<sup>50</sup> Raymond Williams, *Modern Tragedy* [1966], Ed. Pamela McCallum (Toronto: Broadview, 2006), 89.

enforcement of “the victor’s dire decree.” In other words, I suggest that *André* reflects on the Enlightened production of dialectic Revolutionary history that uses the exchangeability of suffering in order to drive the telos of national time forward. But this is not the method of *André* itself, which lays bare the arbitrary brutality of this development and speaks from the place of “nothing” that is produced as excess by its advancement. This split in *André* between Antigone’s claim and Oedipal drama is how Dunlap generates “temporal dissonance” in the play, which drags on national time with a terrible cry of suffering issued from the margins. But the cry is not all; *André* protests the elaboration of mutually exclusive alternatives by the likes of the General by grieving in and through counter-praxes of ambiguity which the assertion of the Political fails absolutely to exterminate.

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Choosing sides is out of the question; it is insupportable. And this is also the predicament in which young Captain Bland finds himself. As the General insists ever more ferociously on cleaving friends from enemies, he also reveals that what he calls his “strict regard to consequence” amounts to a revolting bonfire of the very countrymen to whom he claims to be accountable. In Act III, a messenger arrives to tell the General directly that his “cruel mockery, / Of war’s stern law” will only incite further strife, “bloody, / Unspared and remorseless.” The General responds rather shockingly by declaring that he is willing to sacrifice American captives like Colonel Bland (Bland’s father) in order to fire the country to resistance: “tho’ Columbians / Will lament his fall, they will lament in blood” (90).

While the General moves from force to force, leveling everything in his path, Bland's friendship with André dwells in the loving nurturance of multiplicity. In his prison cell, André regrets the error that led him to this pass:

Unhappy man! Tho' all thy life pass pure;  
Mark'd by benevolence thy every deed;  
The outspread map, which shows the way thou'st trod,  
Without one devious track, or doubtful line;  
It all avails thee naught, if in one hour,  
One hapless hour, thy feet are led astray;--  
Thy happy deeds, all blotted from remembrance. (78)

In his despair André has adopted the logic of the General, who insists that the circumstances of André's capture should blot out all other consideration in his sentencing. Bland responds: "Not every record cancel'd—O there are hearts, / Where Virtue's image, when 'tis once engraved, / Can never know erasure" (78). Bland knows André still as more (and other) than enemy. He affirms that love survives in the twilight of ambiguity: not every record can be canceled. André's virtue can be blotted (or "blacked") by error yet remain "engraved" on Bland's heart. Where André's initial comment—"all blotted from remembrance"—equates "nothing" with negation, Bland rejoins homeopathically by softening negation into an ambiguous image of an engraving (something etched or tattooed on the surface of the heart) that remains palpable after erasure: a ghostly mark, felt but not seen, absently present. Bland keeps love alive in relation to the unknown.

Bland's abiding with André in ambiguity leads to his terminal disillusionment with the General and the cause of independence. In many ways, this is the most extraordinary illustration the tragedy offers of the failure of the General's national manhood to guarantee accord, and among its most powerful stopgaps against catharsis. The General's obsession with the symbolic Law of sacrifice obstructs the bonds between André and Bland so forcefully that it destroys Bland's fealty not just to the General, but to the patria. Even before the cockade scene, in fact, Bland remarks to André:

If worth like thine must thus be sacrificed,  
To policy so cruel and unjust,  
I will forswear my country and her service:  
I'll hie me to the Briton, and with fire,  
And sword, and every instrument of death  
Or devastation, join in the work of war! (80)

Forget Federalist and Anti-Federalist: Bland is talking defection from the independence movement altogether. He has been driven to the point of U.S. national disidentification before the U.S. nation state even existed precisely because the Revolutionary conditions that bring the nation into being entail an unbearable sacrifice that Bland is unwilling and unable to accept.

The danger of this moment is that it flirts with reproducing the rule of thirds by switching to the other “side.” And it is true that the British camp seems serene by comparison with the emotional meltdown at Continental headquarters, where Bland picks fights with high command and everyone *except* high command seems to spend more and more of their time in tears. Meanwhile, André does not appear to have been betrayed by

his own commanding officers—nor does he lose faith in his allegiances, as I discussed above. André’s apparently undiminished British loyalty might thus seem to offer a viable and less doctrinaire alternative to the terrifying logic of Revolutionary modernity in the drama, especially because André abstract allegiances do not require the blanket homogenization of Americans as enemies. André can do more than one thing at a time, and he continues both to love his foes and to maintain his convictions all the way to the gallows. Indeed, one of the last things André does is to identify himself with unrealized potential. Just before he goes to his death, he says he is determined to “rise superior; / And with a fortitude too true to start / From mere appearances, show your country, / That she, in me, destroys a man who might / Have liv’d to virtue” (105). André is always more than one thing at a time; here he sounds himself out as a kind of impossible quantity that exceeds its death, a *might* that is both latent and manifest in the present.

André uncannily repeats Jefferson’s charge against the British in the draft of the Declaration that “we might have been a free and a great people together.” The effect is similarly destabilizing for nationalist Revolutionary history in that it introduces a conditional into a narrative that is ideologically considered as inexorable. *Might have* is not counter-factual—it points to something contingent in the past whose conditions (read: limits and opportunities) linger on. It is possible to read *might* as a pointing to the loss of the colonies’ imperial citizenship as Britons, for the empire—much like André, and differently than liberalism—was many things at the same time. However, the danger of Bland’s statement that he will “hie [ . . . ] to the Briton” does not seem to me to consist in nostalgia. It seems dangerous, in tragic terms, because it is a moment in which he looks like he might exchange ambiguity for ambivalence, which remains ensconced in the logic

of “sides” because it involves the bifurcation of the will in two directions. “Sides” are what produce the misery of war, and those who switch sides (Arnold) seem to bring chaos in their wake. This may be why André immediately counsels Bland to desist: “Hold, hold, my friend; thy country’s woes are full” (80).

Bland seems by play’s end to reach a more radical place of alienation that has broken with liberalism and British imperial citizenship alike. As André is led to the scaffold, Bland is hurried away by M’Donald, who reasons that Bland is in no fit state to watch the execution and will compromise André’s efforts to face his sentence with dignity: “would’st thou, by thy looks / And gestures wild, o’erthrow that manly calmness / Which, or assum’d or felt, so well becomes thy friend?” (107). It seems that in fact Bland *would* “o’erthrow” manly calmness—Bland has spent five acts losing his cool, upstaging even André’s ex-fiancée, Honora, in his increasingly overwrought, increasingly inconsolable throes of distress. Bland has in some sense ceased to be a “man,” which M’Donald levies as an insult but which we might be able to read more radically as a mark of Bland’s exit from proprietary subjectivity into a kind of undifferentiated creaturely life. Yet this life is not nothing; it is not solitary, because it touches the world; and it speaks. In this final scene, Bland delivers his last lines before throwing himself on the ground as cannons signal André’s death in the distance:

Farewell, farewell, brave spirit! O, let my countrymen,  
Henceforward, when the cruelties of war  
Arise in their remembrance; when their ready  
Speech would pour forth torrents in their foe’s dispraise,

Think on this act accurst, and lock complaint in silence.

(107)

The nature of Bland's disillusionment here does not seem to admit of repair through simple recourse to another partisanship—his attachment was to André, and André is gone. Indeed, a recalibration of allegiance at this point would be hollow, as it would convert allegiance itself into a symbol of Bland's love for André that would perpetuate the very sacrificial logic against which Bland has mutinied over the course of the drama.

What Bland articulates instead in the lines above is a disenchantment with the very “cruelties of war” that demand a bilateral accounting of friends and foes. That is to say, Bland ends up expressing a loyalty beyond allegiance to André, one that both exceeds and destroys the compensatory mechanisms of dualistic closure because it arises precisely from the bloodthirsty sacrifice that makes it possible for “foes” to emerge flatly as objects of dispraise. Bland commits, without choosing, to mourn without end—to a kinship with the dead—and he prescribes this endless sorrow as well to his countrymen in a manner that seems to ward off the elaboration of nationalist Revolutionary history. Bland suggests that the memory of André's death is a kind of temporal eddy that slows the simplistic “torrents” of condemnation which underwrite national celebration and advance the cause of linear time. However, the turn and return to André's memory seems not to end with the production of a counter-narrative, but rather with the silencing of narrative history itself: “think on this act accurst and lock complaint in silence.” Bland beckons the future into grief.

Locking complaint in silence is the image that blocks catharsis in *André*. But Bland doesn't get the final say; M'Donald stands over Bland's prostrate body to give the

last lines of the play. M'Donald begins with nationalist malarkey about how the moral of the tale is that Europeans should leave America alone (or else!), and concludes with a disquisition on memory:

Still may our children's children deep abhor  
The motives, doubly deep detest the actors;  
Ever remembering, that the race who plan'd,  
Who acquiesced, or did the deeds abhor'd,  
Has pass'd from off the earth; and, in its stead,  
Stand men who challenge love or detestation  
But from their proper, individual deeds.  
Never let memory of the sire's offence  
Descend upon the son. (108)

M'Donald's concluding remarks compel a "proper" relationship between Revolutionary memory and forgetting in the generations of the future. "Our children's children" might hate us, but now we're dead and they should move on. There is the tiniest scraping of a sense in M'Donald's words that something has gone wrong (else why would his children hate him?). But M'Donald mostly counsels forgetting. His speech is a proscription against national mourning (forget the past), but it's also a proscription against *haunting*: don't let the past descend on or through you. M'Donald's limitation of the relation of past to present to the patriarchal chain of transmission from father to son underscores the impoverishment of his historical imagination, but he further limits even this trickle by proposing that we can and should cut it off as we like. Because isn't that the dream—or rather, nightmare—that structures liberalism and Oedipalism alike? To be our own

fathers, to choose what we inherit, to accede to the sovereignty of our own thoughts and powers of identification. Volitional exclusion of the past, and of the world, except insofar as we can make mastery out of it. Possession by and through another? Never let it happen.

M'Donald's takes rather precise aim at the fateful magic of André's queer partying, which makes a knowing without knowledge that the touch of something outside of yourself makes you yourself. We are always partying with the enemy. André's visitations let us in on the open secret that we are not Cartesian monads floating around in the vacuum of space who are because we think we are. Something is transmitted to us through our mothers, for instance, that we can feel but not always see because they have been covered up by other names. But the descent of the past that is carried in the flesh is not just a matter of parentage. The tragic fate of the world made us before we were born—"our coming was expected on earth."<sup>51</sup> And the fate of the world entangles us with other things continually all the time we are in it; being is never done, because being is a back-formation of doing and getting undone. André's conjuring of the socio-political conditions of "descent" seem to me to chime with the way that Foucault describes "descent" (*Herkunft*) in "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" (1971) as something that "attaches itself to the body": "The body—and everything that touches it: diet, climate, and soil—is in the domain of the *Herkunft*. The body manifests the stigmata of past

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<sup>51</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken, 1968), 258.

experience and also gives rise to desires, failings, and errors.”<sup>52</sup> Read alongside *André*, Foucault appears as a theorist of tragedy.

M'Donald delivers his proscription against haunting, however, while standing over the weeping Bland, down in the dirt the whole time. The stage directions read: “BLAND *throws himself on the earth*” (107). So as an aural and visual experience, the final tableau would present the audience with a scene of Antigone on the ground and Oedipus standing over her as she “locks complaint in silence.” Two claims, but unsynthesized, and one of them refusing to speak. Curiously, what Oedipalism produces as excess around André’s death figures ambiguously as an absence of sound (“locking complaint in silence”), a muting or deafening that does not appear to have narratable content. It would be possible to read this locking into silence as a perversion that reconfigures the norms of U.S. national identity as they are extrapolated from Revolutionary history. Along these lines, Bland might be said to evoke a kind of gothic nationalism that is structured through incorporations—or failed incorporations—of non-narratable traumas rather than through the untroubled sacrifice of love to ideological ends. While this is I think one of the possibilities in play, it reminds me of Butler’s comments on the problems with “entombing” tragedy’s perversions at the heart of the norm, which may get us no further than a negative dialectic in which it may ultimately be we, as readers, who insist that the symbolic constitutes the horizon of discernible meaning. I wonder if the “silence” of grief to which Bland refers in his final lines may be taken as a quality whose significance may not be exhausted even within a gothic reformulation of U.S. national history—what if this locking away of silence constituted a

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<sup>52</sup> Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” *The Foucault Reader*, Ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 83.

politics whose contours might exceed a gothic nation? Could the collective locking of complaint in silence be a way of talking about kinship? What would that look (or sound) like?

An answer may lie with the women in this play: Mrs. Bland and Honora. Mrs. Bland arrives on the scene with her younger children because her husband (and Bland's father) is due to be released from captivity, but at the last minute he is restrained as blood ransom for André. She becomes one of Washington's supplicants as a result, pleading for André's life as it becomes entangled with her own and those of her children. (The social and political are fused once again—the livelihoods of the Bland home and André's well-being become inextricably related through perishability). In Act V, Mrs. Bland relates to Bland that her latest attempt to sway Washington has failed:

The tale of misery is told unheard.

The widow's and the orphan's sighs

Fly up, unnoted by the eye of man,

And mingle, undistinguished, with the winds.

[. . .] come let us home and weep. Alas!

I can no more, for war hath made men rocks. (101)

I think Mrs. Bland may be describing what “locking complaint in silence” looks and sounds like in practice, and it’s neither quiet nor still. Mrs. Bland has been “silenced” in the sense that “the social” has been banished to the neutral zone by the assertion of the Political through André’s sacrifice. Moreover, Washington has refused to hear her: *The tale of misery is told unheard.* This is important because the sighing, telling, flying, mingling, and weeping that Mrs. Bland’s mourning is doing and will continue to do is a

means without an end: a kind of political practice that Agamben calls gesture. “What characterizes gesture,” writes Agamben, “is that in it nothing is being produced or acted, but rather something is being endured and supported.”<sup>53</sup> He goes on: “the gesture is essentially always a gesture of not being able to figure something out in language; it is always a *gag* in the proper meaning of the term, indicating first of all something that could be put in your mouth to hinder speech, as well as in the sense of the actor’s improvisation meant to compensate a loss of memory or an inability to speak” (59).

Mrs. Bland’s gestures of mourning are gags. Something cannot be figured out in language; tales are told but no one is listening, so speech has been rendered as noise or sound. The gestures of mourning are neither spectacular or performative. They do not bring anything about as consequence or effect; they are the supporting of the insupportable (“I can no more”) in matter and energy. Likewise, Mrs. Bland’s gestural mourning is not *intended* for consumption; it is indifferent to consumption because it is simply the endurance of loss in flesh, sound, tears, and breath—sighs that “fly up, unnoticed by the eyes of man.” An ambiguous image, this last, of the sigh that no one sees. Sighing moves across the registers of the senses—if it *could* be seen, perhaps that means it is partly embodied, a party to the body. But a sigh might also be heard, or even felt. The word sigh is irreducible etymologically. It is from Middle English, *sihe* or *sighan*, but the OED notes that it is probably a back-formation from the verb-form, *sighe*. The word sigh is descended from the body because it makes the sound it means; it is “guttural” or “phonetic” (OED). Sighing is non-representational and ambiguous; it is a being derived anachronistically out of anterior doings (a back-formation). Sighing is

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<sup>53</sup> Giorgio Agamben, “Notes on Gesture,” *Means without End: Notes on Politics* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2000), 57.

what Gordon might call a “ghostly matter”; indeed, there is a kinship between sighing and ghosts, mediated by breath, to “spirit” (*spiritus* – breath, air; from *spirare* – to breathe)—which signifies ambiguously as a “vital principle...that which gives life to the physical organism” and “incorporeal or immaterial being” (OED). The spirit is breath, soul, and ghost at the same time because it is the unseen but bodily force that “gives life.”

The kinship between “sighing” and “spirit” cannot be figured out in language because there is no etymological root that joins them. Their kinship is gestural: quantum from the perspective of language yet material in the world as it is encountered by bodies. Sighs “fly up” unseen and “mingle, undistinguished, with the winds” which give life to the physical organism (air). Sighs are ghostly matters—partly physical, partly immaterial—whose “undistinguished” minglings with spirit gives notice that we are descended from griefs not our own. The politics of these griefs are not gothic but uncanny because they cannot be entombed. Indeed, participation in the politics of sighing is a basic condition of being alive because breathing is gestural and there is a finite amount of air in the world. Every breath in an endurance; every breath out a support. The gestures of mourning are elemental, undifferentiated forms of life held and expelled in common by us all: doings that undo and redo beings. Politics of the spirit.

While *André* is a tragedy (and André’s is a tragedy) that centers on the beauties and sufferings of queer male love, Mrs. Bland’s susurration of the politics of the spirit indicate that they form a radically feminist party between queer men and women that endures and supports our common inheritance of grief through queer maternal lines. The politics of the spirit are the inheritance of our mothers’ mourning that sustains life. But “our” mothers are also not *our* mothers. Mrs. Bland mourns for André, a son who is not

her biological son, because her life and his are entangled in multiple ways: through her husband and her children, through her own ethical revulsion at André's sentence, through a cruelly indifferent liberal patriarchy that neither hears tales nor sees sighs, and through the brutality of war "which hath made men rocks." Mrs. Bland does not go home to weep—not yet. She comes back for Honora, who has nowhere to go: "Come, lady, home with me" (106). Honora replies: "Go home with thee? / Art thou my André's mother? We will home / And rest, for thou art weary—very weary. [*Leans on MRS. BLAND*.]" Notice that Honora asks if Mrs. Bland is André's mother, only to continue without waiting for a response: *We will home and rest*. The kinship established here between women is ambiguous. Honora may or may not be accepting Mrs. Bland as a mother figure, but in any case she quickly accepts Mrs. Bland's home as home. Honora, who has just seen her ex-fiancé for the last time, then turns her attention to Mrs. Bland's well-being, for she can see that Mrs. Bland is "weary—very weary." Honora offers care to Mrs. Bland's endurance, and Mrs. Bland offers Honora physical support; Honora leans on her. It's a queerly "touching" exchange—both sensual and compassionate—that blends eroticism with friendship, and sisterhood with maternity, in a gesture between intergenerational women whose only unambiguous relation is formed through grief. They have been grieving for men all day; now it is time to go home and rest.

But the home where they are going to rest—and weep—will not be a cloister, and its silence will not be silent, or still. The nation will not be party to it. Home is *unheimlich*: a queer place of partying with the enemy where the grief of other peoples'

mothers for other peoples' children and lovers will be endured and supported, sighed out into spirit for "the making and unmaking of the world."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford UP, 1985).

## CHAPTER 4

### **Freedom and Other Everyday Objects: Black Petitionary Practice in Sierra Leone, 1790-1800**

#### **I. Sensible Politics**

In their 1795 annual report, the Directors of the Sierra Leone Company reserve some space, after a lengthy itemization of expenditures and a weary report on trade, to express their dissatisfaction with the settlers in the new towns perched at the mouth of the Sierra Leone River. The Directors are annoyed by a specific group of people they refer to as “the Nova Scotians” who, according to the report, are “rash and hasty in their judgments,” prone to making “vehement declamations [ . . . ] in the public streets,” unreasonable, ungrateful, and attached to “false and absurd notions [ . . . ] concerning their rights as freemen.”<sup>1</sup> They demand an increase in their wages. They nearly riot over the rising prices of dry goods. They insist that the Governor should be dismissed for watering down the whiskey (actually it was rum). When a Nova Scotian was fired on the grounds that he was being “disrespectful to his superiors,” his fellow workers petitioned for a law that no one “working under the Company should ever be turned off in future” without a verdict from a jury of their peers (82). Bleating that this is no way to make a profit, the Directors go on to say that the Nova Scotians’ “past lives” might offer some explanation for their behavior—for the Nova Scotians “were all of them at one time slaves” (86).

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<sup>1</sup> *An Account of the Colony of Sierra Leone, From its First Establishment in 1793. Being the Substance of a Report Delivered to the Proprietors. Published by order of the Directors* (London: James Philips, 1795), 80-81.

Indeed, the people to whom the Directors refer as “Nova Scotians” had only lived in Nova Scotia since 1783, the year that Anglo-American hostilities officially concluded with the Treaty of Paris. In that year, the British evacuated 3,000 men, women, and children of African descent—almost all of them self-liberated from slavery or indenture—from New York to Nova Scotia as free persons. This group of 3,000 refugees had been promised freedom in exchange for their services to the Crown during the official phase of the Revolutionary war, but the British had made those initial offers on highly conditional terms and then routinely broken them. Likewise, “British freedom” was a tenuous proposition for decades afterwards. Led by the formerly enslaved Thomas Peters, the refugees wrote a petition to the British government from Nova Scotia in 1790 asking for redress on the grounds that the terms of their settlement in Nova Scotia had not been honored. The Pitt administration responded by putting pressure on Nova Scotia to fulfill the refugees’ agreed-upon land allotments (a special point of contention for the petitioners), and at the same time offered to cover the cost of the journey for any refugees who wished to resettle in Sierra Leone, where another free black settlement had been in place at Granville Town since 1787. Almost 1,200 of the “Nova Scotian” refugees elected to leave Canada for West Africa. They set sail on 15 January 1792, and founded Freetown, Sierra Leone under the aegis of the newly incorporated Sierra Leone Company in February-March of the same year.

This chapter is about the letters and petitions written by the free black denizens of Freetown, Sierra Leone between 1792-1800, which document how they and their fellow black, East Indian, and white neighbors at Granville Town systematically resisted Company efforts to defraud and exploit them in a series of contestations that included a

mass uprising at Freetown in 1800. Yet these writings are not merely documentary records of resistance. I argue that they deregulate prevailing late eighteenth-century concepts of Revolutionary freedom by imagining and enacting forms of collective association that find their coordinates in shared experiences of need that pervade the ordinary substance of everyday life. The refugees write petitions about wages and quit rents, but also to obtain food, household supplies, or help with troublesome spouses. Their writings thus address ordinary matter(s) on political terms in ways that exceed the narrow domain of “the political” as the Directors seem to have understood it in their 1795 report.

The Directors contend that the experience of slavery has disposed the Nova Scotians to treat every expression of Company authority as though it represents a serious threat to their freedom. When they were enslaved, write the Directors,

They [the Nova Scotians] felt undoubtedly a strong sense  
of the peculiar hardships under which they labored, but it is  
probable they were little acquainted with the true nature of  
civil rights, or accustomed to think accurately about them:  
on the contrary, they may very naturally be supposed to  
have often confounded the unavoidable hardships of life,  
and the punishments needful in society, with all those other  
ills which a principle of arbitrary power imposes, and

which it can signify little to those who are involved in a state of hopeless captivity particularly to discriminate.<sup>2</sup>

The Directors reason that the absence of freedom which slavery represents was so total that it has left the Nova Scotians unable to tell the difference between necessary and excessive limits on what the Directors call “self-interest”: between the forces that protect them and the forces that might not; between the merely unpleasant stuff, the humdrum adversity, that makes up the bulk of existence (the “unavoidable hardships of life”) and truly menacing assaults on personal liberty that merit vigorous resistance (“those other ills which a principle of arbitrary power imposes”). In other words, the Nova Scotians’ “false and absurd notions concerning their rights as freemen” manifest themselves, according to the Directors, as a “confusion [ . . . ] dullness and inaccuracy of understanding” about the proper times and places for politics. To put this in terms of eighteenth-century political theory, the settlers do not seem in the Directors’ view to understand the social contract; they do not appear to have internalized the logic that liberty necessitates “minor” forms of sacrifice and privation.

The misunderstanding which the Directors attribute to the Sierra Leoneans, and to the Nova Scotians more specifically, seems to manifest itself in their language as a problem of indiscrimination: “confusion,” “dullness and inaccuracy of understanding,” “false and absurd notions.” These phrasings all suggest violations of categorical boundary distinctions. Indeed, this is what the Directors imply when they complain of the Nova Scotians’ making “vehement declamations in the public streets”: something is being done in a place that it shouldn’t, sound has escaped “proper” enclosure—and it

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 87.

therefore registers to the Directors as noise. The Directors' perspective is strongly suggestive of Jacques Rancière's description of the function of the police: "The essence of the police lies in *a partition of the sensible* that is characterized by the absence of void and of supplement: society here is made up of groups tied to specific modes of doing, to places in which these occupations are exercised, and to modes of being corresponding to these occupations and these places" (my emphasis).<sup>3</sup> Rancière argues that the function of the police is to police the parameters of the Political, conceived as a domain of specialized activity that is separate from work, domesticity, and social life (each of which is also seen to be specific to itself). Such a concept is "tantamount to the pure and simple reduction of the political to the state" because it refers political power exclusively to the principle of the *arkhē*, which conflates the logic of commencement (the power to begin, to initiate) with the logic of commandment (the power to rule), as Derrida also notes.<sup>4</sup> Like Derrida, Rancière observes that this reckoning of political power is rooted in tautology: "the partition that in fact forms the object of politics thus comes to be posited as its foundation."<sup>5</sup> (In other words, this concept of the Political stakes its legitimacy in the maintenance of categorical separations that its Foundation is supposed to have established). But what is especially useful about Rancière's account is his emphasis on

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<sup>3</sup> Jacques Rancière, "Ten Theses on Politics," *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, Trans. Stephen Corcoran (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 44.

<sup>4</sup> Rancière, "Ten Theses," 36; 37-8. See also Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Trans. Erick Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). For Rancière and others whose work has influenced my own in this chapter, Hannah Arendt is one of the most influential proponents of *arkhē* Politics, particularly where that intersects with the question of revolution. Arendt famously argues that the American Revolution was superior to the French Revolution on the grounds that the French made the mistake of attempting to address social questions politically. Neil Roberts does a terrific reading of Arendt with special emphasis on her thoughts (or lack thereof) on American slavery. See Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin, 1963); and Neil Roberts, *Freedom as Marronage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Rancière, "Ten Theses," 36.

how the tautology that separates the Political from other domains of experience depends upon the partition of the *sensible*: a term that connects questions of reason (what is available to thought), prudence (what is wise or practical), and sensory perception (what can be seen, felt, heard, tasted, and/or touched). Indeed, the Directors' direct reference to the feelings of slavery—"they *felt* undoubtedly a strong *sense* of the peculiar hardships under which they labored"—is what sets off their rumination on the Nova Scotians' troubled discernment of "the true nature of civil rights."

The Directors of the Sierra Leone Company describe the Nova Scotians' perception and management of freedom as perverse—the Nova Scotians overreact to minor concerns because they do not discriminate between what is really political and what is not. I suggest on the contrary that this non-compartmentalized, *indiscriminate* quality in the settlers' writings is exactly what marks those writings as profound and thrilling acts of political invention. Drawing on Rancière's redefinition of politics as "an intervention in the visible and sayable," I argue that the Sierra Leoneans' use of petitionary forms and conventions undermine—by simply ignoring—the Directors' fundamental assumption that Politics occur in a specialized domain of activity which is separate from other modes of relation.<sup>6</sup> That is, they ignore a concept of the Political that is supposed to be prosecuted by experts (politicians); concerned exclusively with weighty matters of citizens' property and representation; reducible to abstract questions of rights and allegiance; and unrelated to the contours of so-called "private" experience. Instead, the settlers' *use* of petitionary forms and conventions—what I shall call their "petitionary practice"—consistently affirms that soap, rum, goats, paper, and salvaged wood have as

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<sup>6</sup> Rancière, "Ten Theses," 45.

much to do with freedom as land ownership, suffrage, and judicial process. Indeed, I will suggest that the indiscriminate commingling of these concerns in the refugees' writings also transforms concepts of right, property, and labor that are customarily associated with the Political as such. By practicing petition in the twinned improvisatory spirit of making-up (imagination) and making-do (survival) the refugees' writings thus enact emancipatory politics that are embedded in the matter(s) of daily life. They make ordinary needs and desires differently sensible as robust political concerns, and politics differently sensible as matters of common care.

As my emphasis on practice implies, key for me about the ways in which Sierra Leone's refugees use petition is that it re-organizes the relationship between connotative strands of "the sensible" through the expression of necessity. As the refugees use it, petition becomes a reconfigured technology of saying (sensible: reason/thought) that makes things seen, felt, or heard (sensible: feeling/perception) in a manner that has to do not with rights, but rather with *needs* (sensible: practical or prudent). Necessity, I shall argue, is what produces political relation in petitionary practice. I do not mean that petition is by itself a liberatory form whose deployment guarantees such insights. Instead, I wish to emphasize the creativity with which the refugees take up petitionary conventions under duress in order to meet their needs and desires. The distinction has to do with the uses and re-uses to which literary form is put: ones that are surprising, that break with certain kinds of expectations, even as they exploit something encoded in form—a kind of structural condition of possibility—in order to reach new insights.

In this way, I see the Sierra Leonean refugees' use of petition along the lines that Saidiya Hartman suggests in her discussion of "the subterranean politics of the enslaved"

in the context of U.S. chattel slavery: “small-scale and everyday forms of resistance [that] interrupted, reelaborated, and defied the constraints of everyday life under slavery and exploited openings in the system for the use of the enslaved.”<sup>7</sup> Hartman constellates her discussion through a wide range of scholarly contact points, from James Scott’s concept of infrapolitics (“the circumspect struggle waged daily by subordinate groups”); to Paul Gilroy’s invocation of politics “on a lower frequency”; to bell hooks’s discussion of margins as “both sites of repression and sites of resistance.”<sup>8</sup> Hartman preempts Rancière’s discussion of the politics of dissensus by many years, noting that majoritarian concepts of the Political as a site of power with a “proper locus” make the freedom practices of the oppressed invisible: “too often the interventions and challenges of the dominated have been obscured when measured against traditional notions of the political and its central features: the unencumbered self, the citizen, the self-possessed individual, and the volitional and autonomous subject.”<sup>9</sup> Like Scott’s, Gilroy’s, and hooks’s theories, Hartman’s discussion of “subterranean politics” emphasizes non-transcendent forms of emancipatory performance and knowledge production: for instance, “stealing away” time for worship or social gatherings, expressing hunger through encoded “nonsense words” in juba songs, and peregrinating without permission. All of these examples are forms of small-scale theft or re-appropriation; they all redress the pain and humiliation of bodies and spirits; and they are all contingent, repeated *practices*—their

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<sup>7</sup> Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford, 1997), 51.

<sup>8</sup> James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1990), 183; Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993), 37; bell hooks, “marginality as site of resistance,” *Out There: Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*. Eds. Russell Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Minh-ha (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990), 342.

<sup>9</sup> Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 61.

dimensions are fleeting and performative. “Subterranean politics” might therefore be described as fugitive in nature; they do not pertain to the compartmentalized representations of Politics with a proper locus.

Many of the fugitive elements Hartman identifies with “subterranean politics” are present in the refugees’ petitioning, which I also argue for, in Hartman’s terms, as a subversive performative practice that is oriented toward redress. I do not mean to suggest that the situation in 1790s Sierra Leone was identical to what Hartman calls the “scenes of subjection” under U.S. chattel slavery, or that the settlers’ petitionary practice is flatly comparable to the practices Hartman describes. I only wish to underscore the non-identical kinship I see between petition and these other practices as contingent enactments of freedom based in need: a kinship that is elaborated in method rather than resemblance. However, it is also true that many of the people living in Granville Town—and almost *all* of the people who settled Freetown in 1792—had escaped from American chattel slavery during the official phase of the Revolutionary war. In their writings they frequently identify continuities between Company policy and the experience of enslavement. For instance, in a long collective petition to Chairman and Directors in 1793, the petitioners write that the acting governor, August William Dawes, “seems to wish to rule us just as bad as if we were all Slaves which we cannot bear.”<sup>10</sup> They write to former governor Thomas Clarkson in 1794 that “we wance did call it Free Town but

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<sup>10</sup> “Petition and Representation of the Settlers at the New Colony of Sierra Leone” [26 October 1793], Ed. Christopher Fyfe, *Our Children Free and Happy: Letters from Black Settlers in Africa in the 1790s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1991), 38.

since your Absence We have A Reason to call it a Town of Slavery.”<sup>11</sup> And in another collective petition in 1795, they write to the Governor and colony Council: “we yet do not know upon what footing we are upon wheather to be made Slaves or to only go by the name of Freedom.”<sup>12</sup>

One of the ways in which the refugees take up petition as “an intervention in the visible and sayable,” then, is by using it to identify continuities between modalities of experience that the Company administration perceive to be distinct: in this case, slavery and freedom. A key assumption underlying the refugees’ diagnosis of this particular continuity seems to be that neither “freedom” nor “slavery” can be contained in a “proper locus”—these are relational, contingent conditions that time and geography do not necessarily guarantee, and that words cannot hold in place. In the 1794 petition, for instance, the issue is precisely that the name of Freetown may no longer describe its truth: “we have reason to call it a Town of Slavery.” Names have to follow felt realities that may not be sensible—and indeed, were *not* sensible—to the Company’s white administrators, despite the fact that Freetown and Granville Town were situated in actual, physical sight of a slave fort at neighboring Bance Island.

The close proximity of the Bance Island slavers to Freetown and Granville Town was understandably a source of constant concern, particularly after August Dawes and Zachary Macaulay took over the administration of the settlements from John Clarkson in 1793. Clarkson’s governorship had been contentious as well; he had engaged in a power

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<sup>11</sup> Luke Jordan, June Jordan, Moses Wilkinson, Rubin Simmons, America Tolbert, Isaac Anderson, Stephen Peters, Jas. Hutcherson, and A great many More the Paper wont afford to John Clarkson [19 November 1794], *Our Children Free and Happy*, 43-44.

<sup>12</sup> “To the Honourable Governor & Counsil of Sierra Leone” [22 April 1795], *Our Children Free and Happy*, 48.

struggle with Thomas Peters, whom Clarkson accused of disseminating among the refugees “strange ideas as to their civil rights.”<sup>13</sup> But the refugees appear to have become fonder of Clarkson in his absence, perhaps in part because his replacements were appalling by comparison. Dawes was an avaricious disciplinarian who did everything with an eye for the bottom line; Macaulay, his second-in-command, was a zealous former plantation overseer. Under their watch, slavers harassed the refugees at the wharf with impunity. Luke Jordan and Isaac Anderson write of this in a letter to Clarkson: “our present Governor allows the Slave Traders to come here and abuse us & the Governor up holds them in it [ . . . ] a captain of a Slave Ship [ . . . ] came in here on his way home & began to threaten some of the people working at the wharf & saying in what manner he would use them if he had them in the West Indies And some of the people told him if he came there to abuse them they would not allow it & on that account the Governor thought proper to turn them from the Company’s service.”<sup>14</sup> Dawes’s response here was to be characteristic of his management style. If the refugees protested injustice, he denied them a living.

The 1795 petitioners’ statement that “we yet do not know upon what footing we are upon wheather to be made Slaves or only go by the *name* of Freedom” captures the provisionality of their freedom under the oppressive circumstances of Company rule, which they link with the experience of enslavement. This suggests first of all that freedom is up in the air, or yet to be decided, which the petitioners convey through the sensual metaphorics of “footing” (we yet do not know upon what footing we are upon).

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<sup>13</sup> Qtd. in Cassandra Pybus, *Epic Journeys of Freedom*, 154. From Clarkson Journal, June 26, 1792, NYHS.

<sup>14</sup> Luke Jordan and Isaac Anderson to John Clarkson [28 June 1794], Ed. Fyfe, *Our Children Free and Happy*, 43.

This wording evokes physical practice, as though freedom were part of an ongoing dance, or a flight on foot, in which the petitioners do not necessarily know what the next “step” will be. The 1795 petitioners thus suggest that freedom might be a kind of doing rather than a having, just as they suggest that Slavery is a “making” (whether to be made Slaves) and not a totalizing state of being, secured by right. Likewise, the “name of Freedom” may just be a name; it is not the same thing as the experience of freedom. In this way, the alternative possibilities that the petitioners propose—will you make us Slaves or will we go by the name of Freedom—may not be stark alternatives at all. Whether they are made into slaves or given “only the name of Freedom” amounts to unfreedom in both cases because true freedom appears to be antithetical to codification. Freedom escapes linguistic enclosure; it is what is *misapprehended* by the name of Freedom. Likewise, freedom is what is not fully destroyed by the “making” of Slaves, as this making—though horrific—does not have the power absolutely to enclose being. What the petitioners mean by freedom, then, might be a fugitive quality glimpsed or overheard in the syntax of their statement but not reducible to it. Freedom is, in part, the ability to sense the differences between words and truths, makings and beings, doings and havings: a “sensing” that the petitioners’ statement feels out in the texture of its illocution.

The juxtaposition of Hartman’s “subterranean politics” with Rancière’s definition of politics as an “intervention into the visible and sayable,” then, demands a more precise calibration of what might be meant by the “sensible” in the context of Afro-diasporic traditions in fugitive freedom practice. In this context, it seems to me that the “intervention into the visible and sayable” that the petitions enact is *not* one that turns

simply on the making-visible of something that was previously invisible, or the saying of something that was previously unsaid. Fugitive freedom practice does not seem to be a matter of acceding to the representational terms of the partitioned Political order, but rather of continually disrupting those partitions by making freedom *differently* sensible than it is in the Politics of the *arkhē*. Indeed, in Hartman’s account as in those of Scott, Gilroy, hooks and more recent work on Afro-American and Afro-diasporic traditions, the terms that scholars use to describe “minor” and fugitive emancipatory politics tarry with reorganizations of the sensorium through which those politics take shape. Scott’s notion of “infrapolitics,” for example, suggests a form of open subversion that is not visible in white light. Gilroy’s “politics on a lower frequency” evoke sub- or hyper-sonic hearing that is sensitive to key, tonality, inflection, and rhythm. Hartman’s “subterranean politics”—like Moten and Harney’s “undercommons”—emphasize different orders of tactile experience: the material density of dwelling in a cramped underground, felt but not necessarily seen.<sup>15</sup> As these and many other scholars have noted, moreover, reorganizations of the sensorium entrained by black fugitive politics are not always confined to a single sensory order of meaning, but often involve synaesthetic modes of experience that void, modify, or supplement the primacy of the visual in forming

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<sup>15</sup> This bibliography is immense; indeed, it might reasonably include the entire field of Black Performance Studies and its subspecialties, especially Sound Studies, dance, queer of color critique, and studies in media and visual culture. Work that has helped me to think through some of these questions includes Thomas F. DeFrantz and Anita Gonzalez, eds., *Black Performance Theory* (Durham: Duke UP, 2014); Daphne Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850-1910* (Durham: Duke UP, 2006); Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Duke: Duke UP, 2014); on sound, the classic Leroi Jones (Amiri Baraka), *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* [1963], (New York: Harper, 1999); Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 1994); Imani Perry, *Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip Hop* (Durham: Duke UP, 2004); Alexander G. Weheliye, *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity* (Durham: Duke UP, 2005); and Fred Moten’s holosensual *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Durham: Duke UP, 2003).

judgments. In other words, if black fugitive politics ask us to hear what is not sounded in a major key, or to see what is invisible to broad spectrum light, they also ask us to feel what is (un)spoken, hear what is felt, sound what is seen, and so on.

This fugitive quality of freedom practice in the Sierra Leonean writings—their tendency to “fly” across the partitions of the sensible policed by the Politics of the *arkhē*—is one of the reasons I have chosen to refer to the inhabitants of Freetown as “refugees” in this chapter, rather than by using geographic nomenclatures (Sierra Leoneans or Nova Scotians), or the term settlers. This is not to deny that the inhabitants of Freetown and Granville Town were, of course, involved in a settler project in Sierra Leone, or that they identified themselves as such at different times. Granville Town was situated on land that had been purchased in 1787 by St. George’s Bay Company agents from the indigenous Koya Temne clan in exchange for rum, weapons, tobacco, cloth and beads. However, the Koya Temne believed that they were making a tenant-lessee agreement, not a permanent sale of property, with the result that when the Koya named a new chief, King Jimmy, Company-Koya relations deteriorated for several years before King Jimmy burnt Granville Town to the ground in 1790. The original St. George’s Bay Company that founded Granville Town had been a philanthropic organization spearheaded by the Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor (CRBP) in London. After 1790, it reincorporated as the proprietary Sierra Leone Company—now a profitable venture—and sent Alexander Falconbridge (a former slaving ship’s surgeon) as its representative to renegotiate the terms of the land deal. It was under the terms of that agreement that the refugees arriving from Nova Scotia founded Freetown in 1792.

What I would like to emphasize about this complex history is that the participation of the refugees in the settlement of Sierra Leone was itself substantially unfree, heavily negotiated for them by the very people who would systematically oppress them in the guise of protection during the initial settlement period. Moreover, refugee-Koya relations were quite complex, and while there is evidence that the refugees skirmished with the Koya on several occasions, there are other moments, too, when refugees and Koya seem to have forged temporary alliances in order to oppose Company authority.<sup>16</sup> Without dismissing the significance of their embeddedness within a colonial structure of power in Sierra Leone, therefore, I would like to suggest that one of the (supposed) partitions the refugees were continually negotiating was the highly porous one between colonialism and slavery, as David Kazanjian has also suggested in his work on Liberia.<sup>17</sup>

Another reason that I have opted to call Freetown's residents refugees in this chapter is that this term also seems to me to describe their condition as they made their harrowing flights through the so-called "Age of Revolutions." Indeed, the people who made it to Sierra Leone from Nova Scotia in 1792 were only a tiny group among the estimated 80-100,000 people of African descent who fled their bondage during the Revolutionary war. The American Revolution was the scene of the largest slave rebellion in (what is now) U.S. American history, and one that has been silenced in U.S.

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<sup>16</sup> A prominent instance was in 1795-96 when a French ship burnt the Company warehouse. The Koya appear to have participated in the refugees' raids, and Nathaniel Snowball and James Hutcherson moved to Pirate's Bay with a breakaway group of refugees. Snowball and Hutcherson write that they moved to their new site with King Jimmy's permission, but the Company tried them for unjust occupation of Company land. Happily, on this occasion Snowball and Hutcherson were tried by a jury of their peers who refused to convict them. See Nathaniel Snowball and James Hutcherson to John Clarkson [24 May 1796], Fyfe, ed., *Our Children Free and Happy*, 52.

<sup>17</sup> David Kazanjian, "The Speculative Freedom of Colonial Liberia," *American Quarterly* 63.4 (2011): 863-93.

historiography of the Revolutionary period.<sup>18</sup> For this reason, I suggest, the refugees' movements through the Revolutionary war and beyond evince insurgent revolutionary politics—a restless movement towards common freedoms—that cannot be cognized by the partisan orthodoxies which came to underwrite narratives of Revolutionary history both in the late eighteenth century and in our own time. Yet it is precisely in terms of these orthodoxies that existing scholarship on Sierra Leone's early free black settlements has interpreted their significance, and I would like to dwell for a moment with this problem, as it sharpens some of what I feel is at stake in my argument for black petitioning in 1790s Sierra Leone as a fugitive freedom practice in its own right.

Scholars have tended to address the history of 1790s Sierra Leone in one of two ways: either as a remote extension of the American Revolutionary war, or as an illumination of shifting British imperial commitments in the wake of the Treaty of Paris (1783). The critical bibliography on Sierra Leone thus falls roughly into two camps—American/republican and British/Loyalist—whose division reproduces the widely accepted view that the politics of the American Revolution as such were binary in nature: one was either American (Patriot) or British (Loyalist), unless one was “neutral,” and therefore disclaimed politics entirely. For the most part, the history of black fugitivity in the Revolutionary period has been absented from U.S. historiography, with most of the

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<sup>18</sup> Marxist historian Herbert Aptheker was the first to estimate the total number of enslaved persons to have self-liberated during the war at 80-100,000 and to insist that the majority of those who opted for military service did so behind British lines. Prior to his study, both black and white American historians had either ignored (in the latter case) or significantly deemphasized (in the former) the scale of the exodus and the much higher number of black persons aligned with the British. Aptheker's conclusions were subsequently embraced and confirmed by the two historical studies to which this chapter is most indebted: Benjamin Quarles's *The Negro in the American Revolution* (Williamsburg: Omohundro/UNCP, 1961) and Sylvia Frey's *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991). See also Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts, 1526-1860* (New York: Columbia UP, 1943). See also n. 19.

focus falling on the 5,000 black men who served in colonial militia and a handful of other representative figures such as Crispus Attucks.<sup>19</sup> However, some scholars have suggested that the people who settled at Freetown in 1792 espoused republican ideals carried with them from the newly independent U.S. In *The Loyal Blacks* (1976), for instance, Ellen Gibson Wilson writes that the Freetown settlers were “men and women inoculated with the revolutionary virus [ . . . ] the natural agents of another revolt involving typically American notions of free land, political rights and religious liberty.”<sup>20</sup> Similarly, the editor of the only published collection of the refugees’ writings, Christopher Fyfe, remarks in his introduction that the refugees’ use of petitions “demonstrate[s] clearly that they [the Nova Scotian settlers] understood the political concepts and vocabulary of contemporary Britain and America and could use them to maintain their own interests. It also illustrates [ . . . ] that they were familiar with the formal style of submitting petitions to authority usual at the period.”<sup>21</sup>

Though these claims evince different degrees of ideological emphasis, they share an assumption that the Sierra Leonean refugees’ politics are remittances from the earlier transactions of colonial unrest in Revolutionary America. As a result, the refugees tend

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<sup>19</sup> For an excellent discussion of the silencing of black Revolutionary fugitivity in U.S. Revolutionary historiography, see Gary Nash’s introduction to the Omohundro reissue of Quarles’s *Negro in the American Revolution* (1996, p. xiii-xxvi). U.S. historical treatments of the mass escapes of the enslaved during the Revolution were characterized until the 1940s by what Nash resonantly describes as a “combination of white indifference and strategic black myopia” (xviii) due to the fact that early professional black historians were anxious to leverage Patriot black Revolutionary history for projects of uplift. See also William C. Nell, *The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution* (Boston: Robert F. Walcutt, 1855); William Wells Brown, *The Negro in the American Rebellion: His Heroism and Fidelity* (Boston: Lee & Shepard, 1862); George Washington Williams, *History of the Negro Race in America* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1883); Carter G. Woodson, *The Negro in Our History* (Washington, D.C.: Associated Publishers, 1922).

<sup>20</sup> Ellen Gibson Wilson, *The Loyal Blacks*, New York: Putnam, 1976, 1. Note the pathological metaphor of infection and inoculation by Revolutionary “virus,” which renders the refugees as pathological “carriers” of Revolutionary politics.

<sup>21</sup> Christopher Fyfe, Introduction, *Our Children Free and Happy: Letters from Black Settlers in Africa in the 1790s*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1991, 7.

to appear in each case as passive carriers of U.S. Revolutionary legacies that they are thought to recapitulate without changing: whether as “natural agents” of “typically American ideas” (Wilson), or as able clients of Revolutionary history whose use of petitionary technology demonstrates that black people “understood” American Revolutionary politics (Fyfe). These evaluations espouse a view of Revolution as a singular, original event of two sides (“Britain and America”) within which black historical actors can *only* figure as non-contributing participants. Black actors appear instead merely to absorb and to reproduce “Revolutionary politics”—where that term indicates a privileged domain outside any particular expression whose contours the refugees’ writings do not work to reconfigure or differently establish.

A similar pattern emerges in scholarship that approaches Sierra Leone through British imperial history. By far the most common tendency among historians of Sierra Leone’s early settlements has been to subsume Britain’s wartime black allies and their subsequent movements around the Atlantic rim into broader narratives about the emergence of British abolitionism and recalibrations of British imperial governance moving into the nineteenth century. For instance, Stephen J. Braidwood’s *Black Poor and White Philanthropists* (1995) and Simon Schama’s *Rough Crossings* (2005) both highlight the role of British abolitionists in bringing black refugees to the shores of Sierra Leone in the 1790s.<sup>22</sup> While Braidwood and Schama weave together many strands in the complex events leading up to the establishment of Granville Town and Freetown, their

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<sup>22</sup> Simon Schama, *Rough Crossings: Britain, the Slaves, and the American Revolution*, London: Ebury/Random House, 2005. Stephen J. Braidwood, *Black Poor and White Philanthropists: London’s Blacks and the Foundation of the Sierra Leone Settlement, 1786-1791* (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 1995). See also Maya Jasanoff, who evaluates the “Black Loyalist” diaspora as a part of broader patterns in Loyalist dispersal after the war. Jasanoff, *Liberty’s Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World* (New York: Knopf, 2011).

narratives can reproduce well-worn pieties of the white abolitionist discourses that form their ostensible subjects by telling stories of black freedom that find their origin and point of focus in the moral vision of exceptional white British figures. For instance, the title of Braidwood's first chapter, "Founding Fathers," refers not to the figures with whom Sierra Leoneans identify that term to this day—self-liberated black leaders Thomas Peters, David George, and Moses Wilkinson—but to the abolitionist Granville Sharp, and Henry Smeathman, the botanist turned confidence man who suggested Sierra Leone to Sharp as a possible location for free black settlements. For Schama meanwhile, the historiographic significance of Sierra Leone seems to rest to a considerable degree in the revelation it affords of Britain's superiority to U.S. America on the matter of black liberation. In the introduction to *Rough Crossings* entitled "British Freedom's Promise," Schama writes: "However awkward for the orthodox history of the Founding Fathers and their revolution, the genesis of African-American liberty is, then, inseparable from the British connection during and after the war. If free black politics were born from the fires of that conflict, so were many of the distinctive forms of their Christian gathering."<sup>23</sup> Rehearsing the logic of what Christopher Leslie Brown calls "moral capital," Schama describes Britain as being vanquished in battle but victorious in moral spirit, emerging from the Revolution in Schama's telling with a patent on "African-American liberty" and the spiritual pathways through which it has often found expression since the late eighteenth century.<sup>24</sup> Braidwood and Schama's "free black politics" is, in other words, a

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<sup>23</sup> Simon Schama, *Rough Crossings*, 21.

<sup>24</sup> Brown identifies the Revolutionary War as a turning point in British imperial self-conception toward a humanitarian ethos that would set the tone for their imperial projects into the nineteenth-century. Writes Brown: "The British would discover in the course of this conflict [the American war] what in the nineteenth century they came to recognize as a truism. Support for slavery could become an

Politics from which black people are largely absent: the special property of Britain, born of Anglo-American conflict and British abolitionist conscience. They thus tell stories that are sympathetic to black historical actors, but which I suggest install them *for that reason* as second or third parties in narratives that identify black freedom with the blessings of British intervention.

The tendency within existing historiography on Sierra Leone to cast the Revolution's black refugees as non-participatory participants in their own freedom struggle is in my view compounded by scholars' universal adoption of the term "Black Loyalists," or "Loyal Blacks," to describe them. The moniker can be traced back to British generals Sir Guy Carleton and Lord Dunmore, who were the first to ascribe loyalty to Britain's black wartime allies after Cornwallis's surrender at Yorktown. This seems to me to be a problem in itself. Britain's wartime treatment of enslaved and fugitive people of African descent was abysmal. The tens of thousands of black refugees who fled to British lines seem to have been taking advantage of two British wartime proclamations—Dunmore's Proclamation (7 November 1775), and Clinton's "Philipsburg Proclamation" (30 June 1779)—that made highly conditional offers of freedom to the enslaved in exchange for defection and service to the Crown. Both of these pronouncements represented emphatically strategic calculations on the part of British command; the terms of their eligibility were restricted to rebel-owned slaves, and required labor from fugitives in the form either of military service (Dunmore) or of

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embarrassment if and when the virtue of imperial rule became a public question. At the same time, moral capital might be accrued by framing antislavery initiatives as an emblem of the national character. The American Revolution did not cause abolitionism in Britain. [ . . . ] The crisis in imperial authority did, however, make the institution of slavery matter politically in ways it had never mattered before." Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: Omohundro/UNC, 2006), 27.

drudgework in the camps (Clinton). For Dunmore and Clinton alike, conditional emancipation was a weapon of warfare and a prosthesis for creole obedience; it promised to swell British ranks and provide sources of military labor as well as to undermine the morale and material security of rebel slave-owners. If refractory southerners could not be brought to their senses by other means, then their loyalty would be coerced through economic necessity.<sup>25</sup>

But if the British were making strategic bets on black desires for freedom, the enslaved may also have seen the Dunmore and Philipsburg Proclamations as gambles worth taking for their own reasons—though they were by no means easy wagers. The proclamations triggered a massive response that the British were both unprepared for and largely unwilling to deal with. The scale of the exodus collapsed the plantation economies in the south. An estimated one-third of the enslaved population escaped from Georgia, and a quarter from South Carolina, which ultimately drove many white southern slaveholders into the arms of the rebels.<sup>26</sup> But the tens of thousands of enslaved persons who fled for British lines did so knowing that they might never see their friends and families again. And if they survived long enough to reach British encampments, there was no guarantee that they would find sanctuary there. Escapees were often turned back,

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<sup>25</sup> My interpretation of the Dunmore and Philipsburg proclamations follows that of Sylvia Frey, whose work on the Revolution's southern theater has been invaluable to my own in this chapter. "The tacit purpose [of Dunmore and Clinton's proclamations] was to weaken and demoralize southern rebels by depriving them of their labor force and of their resources; to accommodate Britain's perennial needs for pioneers and military laborers in North America and for recruits for service in the West Indies; and to cement their local alliances and to keep the loyalty of their troops by distributing captured slaves after military victories." Frey, *Water from the Rock*, 114.

<sup>26</sup> See Sylvia Frey's brilliant discussion of the "triangular war" in the south in *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991), esp. Chapters 3-4. The Dunmore Proclamation in particular is one of the contexts for the expurgated passage in the Declaration of Independence on the subject of slavery; Jefferson's paranoid language about George III inciting the enslaved to rebellion seems to me to be an effort to capture the sentiments of enraged South Carolina and Georgia slaveholders.

indentured, distributed as “prizes,” or re-sold into slavery. If they remained with the British, they received no pay for their labor either as combatants or noncombatants, and lived in overcrowded encampments separate from the white army and its retinue.<sup>27</sup> Poorly provisioned and subject to horrendous labor conditions, black refugees were highly susceptible to disease and died in the thousands. At the scene of Cornwallis’s surrender at Yorktown (October 1781), Hessian diarist Johann Ewald recorded how Cornwallis expelled 4,000-5,000 of the British army’s black followers in order to preserve food rations. Writes Ewald: “[we] drove back to the enemy all of our black friends, whom we had taken along to despoil the countryside. [. . .] I would just as soon forget to record it. [. . .] We had used them to good advantage, and set them free, and now, with fear and trembling, they had to face the reward of their cruel masters.”<sup>28</sup>

The 3,000 “Black Loyalists” evacuated from New York to Nova Scotia in 1783 had survived this litany of horrors. But by this time, the British were instrumentalizing them somewhat differently as pawns in a tense and reluctant peace process. Confronted with the humiliation of military defeat in the mainland colonies, Carleton and Dummore had begun in 1782 to marshal Britain’s wartime record of black emancipation as evidence of her moral superiority. What had quite clearly started as an attempt on the part of the British to use black bodies to their advantage as weapons of warfare was now cast as a humanitarian enterprise in which Britain played a starring role as the patron and guarantor of black freedom. It became (rather suddenly) a matter of principle that Britain

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<sup>27</sup> See Sylvia Frey, *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991); Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Williamsburg, VA: UNCP/Omohundro, 2006), esp. Chapter 5; Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution* (Williamsburg: Omohundro/UNCP, 1996).

<sup>28</sup> Captain Johann Ewald, *Diary of the American War. A Hessian Journal*, Trans. Joseph P. Tustin (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979), 335-336.

should honor her obligations to the men and women of African descent who had served during the war, provided that they were not enslaved by white Loyalists.<sup>29</sup> After all, wrote Dunmore, they were “perfectly attached to our sovereign”—so very loyal.<sup>30</sup> As an anonymous author was to put it in the *Public Advertiser* some years later, it would not do to betray such “humble assertors of [Britain’s] rights.”<sup>31</sup> By 1783, British evacuations of black refugees had become a major point of contention in Anglo-American diplomatic exchange; as Benjamin Quarles notes, it would “affect American diplomatic relations with Great Britain for nearly half a century.”<sup>32</sup> In a meeting on the subject with General Washington on 6 May 1783, commander-in-chief Sir Guy Carleton refused point-blank to return black men, women, and children into American custody who had entered the ranks under promises of freedom, as he claimed this would constitute a “dishonourable Violation of the public Faith.”<sup>33</sup> In this particular game of diplomatic obstruction, at least, the British emerged the victors. “I have discovered enough,” Washington wrote, “to

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<sup>29</sup> “Black Loyalists” were evacuated from New York in 1782-83, while enslaved men and women were evacuated from Charleston and Savannah to other British-controlled territories as the property of their white Loyalist owners. These evacuations took place in July-December 1782.

<sup>30</sup> Dunmore to Sir Henry Clinton, Feb. 2, 1782. Qtd. in Lt. Colonel Michael Lee Lanning, *African Americans in the Revolutionary War* (New York: Citadel Press, 2000), 214.

<sup>31</sup> “And shall these poor humble assertors of her [Britain’s] rights be left to the agonies of want and despair, because they are unfriended and unknown?” The specific context for this piece was the plight of the so-called “Black Poor”: black veterans who settled in Britain after the war but were frequently impoverished because they were not eligible for parish support. “Z,” *Public Advertiser*, Jan. 19, 1786. Cited in Stephen J. Braidwood, *Black Poor and White Philanthropists: London’s Blacks and the Foundation of the Sierra Leone Settlement, 1786-1791* (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 1994), 68; see also Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2006), 311. See also n. 50.

<sup>32</sup> “Years after the war Americans were still hammering the point that the payment of pre-war debts in London and Glasgow should be withheld until His Majesty’s government made restitution for the lost blacks.” Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution*, 171. Ellen Gibson Wilson notes that the issue contributed “to the bad feeling which brought about the War of 1812” and re-emerged at the 1814 Treaty of Ghent. *The Loyal Blacks* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1976), 56-57.

<sup>33</sup> Qtd. in Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution*, 168. From “The Substance of the Conference between General Washington and Sir Guy Carleton at an Interview at Orangetown, May 6<sup>th</sup> 1783,” in *Washington Papers*, CCXX, No. 71, Library of Congress. Also “Extract from the Substance of the Conference between General Washington and Sir Guy Carleton at an Interview at Orange Town, 6<sup>th</sup> May 1783,” in *Thomas Jefferson Papers*, IX, Nos. 1471-72, Library of Congress.

convince me that the slaves which have absconded from their masters will never be restored.”<sup>34</sup> Washington’s self-liberated former bondsman, Harry Washington, sailed to Nova Scotia in July. He was to journey from there to Freetown in 1792.

In light of this history, the main issue I take with the label “Black Loyalist” is that it makes the manifold expressions of black political desire across the Revolutionary period both consistent with, and subordinate to, British imperial authority. This is how Cassandra Pybus, for example, interprets black refugees’ allegiances through their writings. Her study, *Epic Journeys of Freedom* (2006), breaks with the convention established by Schama and Braidwood by dispensing with the British imperial ur-narrative, but she maintains that the “Black Loyalists” were motivated by their “cherished belief in themselves as dutiful subjects of the king.”<sup>35</sup> While I do not mean to suggest that I know what the feelings of the Sierra Leonean refugees were, or what their partisan allegiances may or may not have been, it seems to me important as well not to assume that they fit easily into a notion of the Political that is fully adducible in national, imperial, or partisan terms, as this forecloses the possibility that black refugees throughout the war and in its aftermath might have been acting tactically in pursuit of their freedom by aligning with the British. I hearken here to the work of black Marxist historian, Benjamin Quarles, who made this argument in his 1961 study, *The Negro in the American Revolution*: “The Negro’s role in the Revolution can best be understood by realizing that his major loyalty was not to a place or a people, but to a principle. [. . .]

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<sup>34</sup> George Washington to Benjamin Harrison, 6 May 1783, in Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of Washington*, XXVI, p. 401. Cited in Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution*, (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1996), p. 169.

<sup>35</sup> Cassandra Pybus, *Epic Journeys of Freedom: Runaway Slaves of the American Revolution and their Global Quest for Liberty* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), 193.

Whoever invoked the image of liberty, be he American or British, could count on a ready response from the blacks.”<sup>36</sup>

A central contention of this project is that we continue in subtle and not-so subtle ways to internalize a binary historical design of the Revolutionary war that curtails our ability to describe or even to see politics and constituencies that might not conform to its values. The histories of black fugitivity across the Revolutionary period seem to me to bring the costs entailed in this view, as well as those of its recuperative remedies, into particularly sharp focus. While I am indebted to all of the existing historical scholarship on 1790s Sierra Leone, I have concerns that it is driven by a powerful imperative to recovery, structured by a politics of visible inclusion, that makes black freedom sensible by rescuing it from its supposed oblivion at the margins of Revolutionary Politics. This scholarship’s very desire to grant historical representation to the refugees can thus manifest as a historiographical vanishing act which winnows the scope of fugitive black freedoms in the 1770s-90s to a single point of Revolutionary genesis with the U.S. or Britain that is not primarily shaped by black political desires, creative expressions, or spiritual promptings. In other words, historical scholarship on Sierra Leone tends to assume that the politics of the enslaved are derivative of implicitly more sophisticated modes of white thought and action, which brings with it another assumption that the refugees’ use of the petition is merely taken from their observation of their oppressors. As David Kazanjian has noted in relation to Liberian letters from the 1820s-40s, this problem strongly manifests as one of historicist methodology in relation to black writings. Writes Kazanjian: “a historicist approach to black settler-colonial discourse on

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<sup>36</sup> Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution* (Williamsburg: Omohundro/UNCP, 1961), xxvii.

Liberia privileges [ . . . ] descriptive form” in a manner that seems to mandate unequivocal leaps to ideological conclusion.<sup>37</sup> In a very similar way, scholars of 1790s Sierra Leone take up the refugees’ writings as *proof* either that they were “natural carriers” of U.S. liberal ideals or that they were in fact loyal subjects of the King, thus treating the refugees’ writings as mere evidence of preconceived political identifications within broader historical narratives of the Revolutionary period that are subtended by a partitioned (and in this case, binary) model of the Political. The refugees’ petitions have not been seen as imaginative productions in their own right which might reframe the politics of revolution, but rather as raw materials around which Revolutionary history must continue to be spun.

The espousal of this method requires a reading of the refugees’ writings as flat transcripts of a reality that is external to them, thus recapitulating in the scene of *reading* the petitions a series of splits between text and context, abstraction and materiality, the political and the quotidian, which the petitions themselves seem to me actively to undermine. But the issue is not only one of method; as Hartman, Kazanjian, and many others have also noted, the culprit is the conception of History itself as a linear narrative which takes an autonomous, willful, self-possessed subject as its darling. And part of what seems to lie at the root of this problem is the assumption that something called Politics is sensibly partitioned from the world of ordinary matter(s): an assumption we have inherited from the Age of Revolutions that continues to impact the way we “do” history no less than everyday life, and which can make it very difficult to listen differently to what is right before our eyes.

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<sup>37</sup> Kazanjian, “The Speculative Freedom of Colonial Liberia,” *American Quarterly* 63.4 (2011), 867.

## II. Seen for Dirt

The Freetown refugees' petitions interrupt ideas about the itineraries of revolutionary freedom, both in the eighteenth century and in our time, by imagining and enacting forms of collective association that are not based on abstract questions of rights but bound in shared experiences of need. To some extent, this is conventionally true of petitions, which are flat, non-narrative forms whose structure of address is capable of investing the act of complaint with political import without making stipulations about what the substance of complaint ought to be (petition is a formal procedure, not a genre). Classically, petitions stage dramatic scenes of entreaty in which a volubly wretched supplicant addresses an aloof figure of authority with a heady rhetorical mixture of extreme deference and extreme desperation. The governing conceit of petition is that it is a strategy of last resort—petitioning is what you do when every other recourse has failed, when the normal channels are closed or unresponsive, somewhere near or beyond the limits of the law. However, this is increasingly *not* how the form was used in late eighteenth-century Revolutionary contexts, where it seems to have partially shifted into the terrain of the manifesto.

In the American colonies after the independence movement emerged in 1776, for instance, creole elites appear to have co-opted petitionary convention in order to press abstract universal claims to rights, representation, and sovereignty. Along those lines, the U.S. Declaration of Independence might be considered as a strange elaboration of the form, as it combines traces of petitionary appeal with the proclamation of inalienable rights (the document makes *a case* for the colonies' secession, thus justifying the independence which it also claims to be an incontrovertible and accomplished fact). The

intersection of petition with liberal ideology in the Declaration thus yokes petitionary convention to the power of Revolutionary commencement/commandment: the sovereign self-recognition of subjects. It may be possible to describe this deployment of petition in the mode of what Michel de Certeau calls “a strategy”: “A strategy assumes that a place can be circumscribed as *proper* and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it.”<sup>38</sup> De Certeau identifies strategies with the prerogatives of willful power, and characterizes them as proprietary conquests of time by space: efforts to abolish temporal context or situation. In these terms, strategic petitions are ones in which the petitioner speaks from a proper locus (rights discourse), or works to create a proper locus from which he will speak from thenceforward (the nation-state). In the same period, however, black petitioners take up petition in what I would like to suggest is a *tactical* mode, using De Certeau’s description of the tactic as “a calculus which cannot count on a ‘proper’ (spatial or institutional) location.” Where strategies are undertaken by willful subjects in pursuit of Founding, tactics do not have a proper places or subjects, and are therefore “on the watch for opportunities that must be seized ‘on the wing’ ” (xix).

Black petitioners in the American colonies responded tactically to the shift toward liberal universalism in creole whiggish political discourse. Black constituencies petitioned the Massachusetts government on at least four separate occasions in the 1770s (Jan. and Apr. 1773, May 1774, Jan. 1777), urging their claims at different times using different approaches. The first of the black Massachusetts petitions, signed “FELIX” on

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<sup>38</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: UC Press, 1984), xix. De Certeau identifies strategies with the Politics of the strong, and tactics with the politics of the oppressed, or “weak.”

behalf of “many slaves” in January of 1773, makes no specific request for general emancipation. The petitioners ask Governor Hutchinson and his representatives to take “their [the enslaved’s] unhappy State and Condition under your wise and just Consideration” and concludes with a prayer for “such relief only, which by no Possibility can ever be productive of the least Wrong or Injury to our Masters; but to us will be as Life from the dead.” Four years later, in 1777, “A Great Number of Blackes” petitioned the Massachusetts House of Representatives for manumission at twenty-one. But this time, the petitioners did so with much more assertive deployments of natural rights discourse which echo the language of the Declaration of Independence: “Your petitioners apprehend that they have in Common with all other men a Natural and Unalienable Right to that freedom which the Grat Parent of the Universe that Bestowed equally on all mankind.”<sup>39</sup>

These examples illustrate how enslaved and free black constituencies within the colonies took up petitionary form with a keen feel for the ideological expectations of their intended audiences. Liberal ideology appears in the 1777 black petition, I suggest, because it made sense to use it tactically at that point; the petitioners were addressing a whiggish Massachusetts State Assembly after the independence movement had taken off, whereas the petitioners of 1773 had been addressing Governor Hutchinson as a representative of the king. But while the 1773 and 1777 petitions are quite different in their tactics, they are both virtuosic rhetorical performances that ironize and subvert the authority of their addressees even as they seek redress. The 1773 petition grounds its claims to justice in expressions of Christian faith, subtly but powerfully critiquing both

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<sup>39</sup> Howard Zinn, ed., *Voice of the People's History of the United States* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2004), 54-57.

the institution of slavery and Hutchinson's power over the petitioners' fates by appealing to God's law. The 1777 petitioners take a different approach by unmasking the internal exclusions of creole liberal rights discourse, calling the state government to account for its blatant hypocrisy and to reckon with black peoples' erasure within the nominally equalitarian order.

The Sierra Leonean refugees' petitionary practice is different again than either of these 1770s examples, except in the tactical approach that it shares with them. Strikingly, the refugees' petitions never invoke either natural rights discourse or imperial obedience as the bases for their requests. Instead, the Sierra Leonean petitioners form relation to their auditors and with one another through expressions of common need. For instance, Susanah Smith's petition from Sierra Leone (1792) grounds its claims in the discomfort entailed in ordinary, unfulfilled desires.

Sierra Leone May 12<sup>th</sup> 1792

Sir I your hum bel Servent begs the faver of your  
Excelence to See if you will Please to Let me hav Som  
Sope for I am in great want of Some I have not had aney  
Since I hav bin to this plais I hav bin Sick and I want to git  
Som Sope verry much to wash my family Clos for we are  
not fit to be Sean for dirt.

Your hum  
bel Servet

Susanah Smith

Smith activates petition's conventional openness to raw expressions of necessity while moving that convention in a surprising political direction: soap. She thus audaciously disregards partitions of the sensible that would disqualify the having or not-having of soap as matters of acute political urgency, and she does this by using a form that was increasingly identified with "high" Political claims in this period in order to get the laundry done. By using the petition in a way that runs contrary expectations both in her time and in our own, Smith thus redraws the parameters of politics so that they include the everyday needs and cares of the flesh. She has used petition to reframe the material substance of mundane domesticity in a revolutionary way.

However, there is more going on here than a simple nominalism, a naming of soap as a political concern. Ordinary necessity becomes sensible in Smith's petition as the substance of political discourse, but it simultaneously transforms the terms by which political personhood are constituted in her appeal. In the first place, Smith's petitionary expression of necessity is collectively oriented. This particular petition is somewhat unusual among the refugees' writings in that it is individually authored, but note that Smith is not asking just for herself—she wants to "wash my family Clos." Bodies appear here in want, both individually and collectively. Smith herself has been ill, and her whole family "is not fit to be Sean for dirt." The necessity that drives Smith's petitionary utterance is the quality within the petition that constitutes Smith as a political person because she wants something ordinary that she cannot get. Likewise, necessity (in)coheres the image of her family she evokes. Dirt is what makes the family "visible" to Smith's auditor, just as their ordinary desire to be clean ("we are not fit to be Sean for dirt") draws them into relation with one another. Yet this is not a politics of recognition.

Smith's family are not abstract subjects who demand recognition as such in order to win their entitlement to soap; instead, Smith and her family come into "view" as a function of unmet needs which are physical and near-at-hand. And when Smith and her family do become "fit to be seen," their restoration to social visibility will be just that: material, embodied, and relational—not abstract.

Political visibility in Smith's petition is a function of need, then, but it is also *heard* rather than seen. She prosecutes political argument entirely on the basis of articulated necessity. Foregoing any external appeal to Political rights or fealty, Smith's method of political argumentation is thus immanent in the repetitive invocation of need and the desire that it evokes. She offers a series of reasons for her petition that seem to go as follows. Please "Let me hav Som Sope" *because*: 1. "I am in great want of some" (I want it/I have had no soap); 2. "I have not had aney since I came to this plais" (I have had no soap); 3. "I hav been sick" (I need it/I have suffered/[I have had no soap]); 4. "I want to git some sope verry much..." (I want it); 5. "...to wash my family Clos because we are not fit to be Sean for dirt" (we need it). The petition repetitively restates small-scale need, discomfort, and desire, so that what it seems to be is a sequence of expressive material absences that form their own collective justification for redress. Please get me some soap because I want the soap because we need it. Perhaps it is an obvious point, but the implications of Smith's gesture are extraordinary: she forces her auditor to redress her and her family's need not because she is a rights-bearing subject or because she is a loyal subject, but simply because she and her family's need for soap is repetitively unmet. They should get soap because they need soap.

One of the many things I find interesting about Smith’s petition is that it seems to theorize political desire in direct relation to needs with such force that they appear to be radically continuous with one another. Her use of the word “want” in the first expression of her request sounds out this overlap: “Please to Let me hav Som Sope for I am in great *want* of Some.” The word “want” seems to be doubly intoned as a verb (I want soap) and an adjective that expresses a condition of lack (I am in want of soap). Smith thus sounds herself out simultaneously as a political subject who has ordinary desires and one who is *subject to* need; in other words, the sense of Smith’s political personhood is heard as an inextricable relation to material precarity. Smith is for this reason not a subject in the sense that liberalism has conditioned us to think of that term: a self-possessed proprietary being with outsides that contain something on their interior. Smith’s petitionary person seems “flat” because she is open to need—she exists in relation to need, there is no “inside” that is held intact in defiance of fleshly necessity. Likewise, this petitionary person is not on a linear, acquisitive course to futurity. Indeed, in Smith’s and other refugees’ petitions, the object of her political desire—soap—has little value as an item of appropriative exchange. The soap, once acquired, will be used up; Smith will presumably do the laundry with it, not hoard it away in a cupboard somewhere. And soap dissolves quickly.

This is important because the political aspiration Smith expresses (for soap) does not seem to be driven by linear acquisitive ambition in the sense that it is not about the accumulation of wealth or renewable resources. The object that Smith wants may not be related to Smith as an object is to a subject, then, but as a perishable thing is related to other perishable things. Indeed, just as Smith and her family’s bodies “appear” in the text

of her petition as a function of unmet needs—just as they appear open to the small humiliations of dirt and disease—the thing Smith asks for (soap) is absent in the first place and short-lived even when in hand. The vulnerable political relation that necessity produces in the absence of soap (dirt) is thus continuous with the material vulnerability in which the soap takes part (dissolution). Consequently, Smith does not appear as a “subject” in a proprietary sense—she only has need, and what she wants is to redress that need in a way that cannot be permanently guaranteed or converted into wealth. Such being the case, the material impermanence of soap also has important implications for the temporality of political struggle in Smith’s petition. Soap is always disappearing; it must continually be sought. Smith may get soap today, but next week is another story, and tomorrow she may need something else. Soap can be used up, but the need for it cannot. The temporality of political desire as it is expressed in Smith’s petition is thus the temporality of necessity that is everyday, repetitive, never done. The need for soap cannot be dissolved for all time by a Founding of Soap.

If the soap is not a commodity *per se*, however, it is also not a gift. Smith submitted this petition to Governor John Clarkson, the highest legal authority in the colony. Why ask the governor for soap? Or rather: what is entailed in asking the governor for soap? As I mentioned above, petition classically stages a scene of entreaty, but it is also a complex rhetorical performance of power and powerlessness. Indeed, the etymological history of the word “petition” includes at least two frictional strains. From the fourteenth century, it seems to derive from Old French, *peticion*, “request or prayer.” However, the Latin root *peticionem* is much more complicated; it means “a blow, thrust, attack” or “seeking, searching.” Two very different meanings, then. On the one hand,

begging or beseeching—and on the other, attacking in close conjunction with seeking: a forceful demand, perhaps even a *command*. It may be possible to think of petition as a kind of sado-masochistic script in which the petitioner's performance of her own abjection acts as an invitation to her auditor to fill her with his power. But the open secret of that scenario is that the petitioner has already gathered power to herself and any other objects she puts forward for consideration by virtue of having drawn attention to them in the exigent mood.

Smith twice identifies herself as being at Clarkson's service, at the beginning and at the end of the petition: "Sir I your hum bel Servent" / "your hum bel Servet." However, by asking the governor for soap Smith also calls his power to her, bringing him to heel as *her* servant as she summons him to account for her need. Here is where "the attack" seems to me to come in Smith's petition, as part of what is entailed in the exposure of her need to Clarkson is the exposure of his neglect in bringing it about. There is just the slightest, subversive twitch here of an accusation—*why* hasn't Smith had soap since she arrived? As it so happens, Clarkson was obsessed with hygiene, and had implemented a highly organized schedule for washing and cleaning on the journey from Nova Scotia to Sierra Leone in a scrupulous effort to ensure that the trip did not recall the Middle Passage. Writes Schama: "His [Clarkson's] list of printed rules, distributed to all the masters, was, in effect, a comprehensive reversal of everything that he and his brother Thomas had learned about slave ships such as the *Brookes*. [ . . . ] There were to be three daily sweeps of, and between, decks. [ . . . ] the lower decks were to be swabbed three times a week in the mornings (to give time for drying) with vinegar scalded by a hot iron [ . . . ] for effective fumigation. Every day that the weather permitted, bedding was to be

aired on deck, and two days a week were to be allowed for washing of clothes.”<sup>40</sup> Smith had made this journey—she was well aware that Clarkson already thought about laundry in politicized terms. This does not mean that her need for soap is any less pressing, of course. But it might suggest that part of what she is doing when she calls Clarkson to account for such a “minor” need is to underline how near a thing like soap might be to slavery, or freedom.

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The refugees who traveled from Nova Scotia to Sierra Leone in 1792 were self-organized by congregation: Baptist (led by David George) and Methodist (led by Daddy Moses Wilkinson). The churches were independent of Company authority, and as a result they may have provided spaces in which the refugees could collectivize in order to resist Company policy. In addition, Freetown had a structure of micro-democratic governance, organized through voting, that handled matters in the colony which did not pertain to trade. This is how the refugees determined who would serve on juries; it is also one of the ways that they organized to write petitions throughout the 1790s and—in 1799 and 1800—their own laws, as I shall discuss below. Heads of households voted in annual elections for tithingmen (one per ten households) and hundredors (one per ten tithingmen). Under normal circumstances, the heads of household would automatically be male—but in Freetown, this did not necessarily have to be the case. If a household had lost its men to war, disease, or recapture (as many of them had), women became heads of household and were entitled to full voting rights in consequence. Women in Sierra Leone may thus have been the first to vote for public office anywhere in the world,

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<sup>40</sup> Schama, *Rough Crossings*, 354.

during in Sierra Leone's 1792 election.<sup>41</sup> Women's signatures also appear consistently across the whole body of the 1790s petitions, and there are two surviving petitions that bear individual women's names: Susanah Smith's, and Rose Morral's. Here is Morral's petition:

November 5<sup>th</sup> 1792

Mr Clarkson Sir if it please to Grant Rose morry her  
request She have no peace with her husband Sir if it please  
your eccelet honnah as to part us or bound him over to the  
peace Before your honnah go home to London in so doing  
your honnah will oblige your humble Servent Rose morral

On the same day he received Morral's petition, Clarkson wrote in his journal: "Rainy day. I was occupied a great part of the morning in trying to convince a woman that I had not the power to dissolve her marriage; she would persist that I might do it if I chose."<sup>42</sup> Clarkson appears to have published the banns for the Morrals' wedding, but church congregations retained authority over marriage itself in Freetown as part of their agreement with the Company. Why Morral went to Clarkson instead of to the church is thus somewhat mysterious; it's possible that Morral felt her case would not be served by church leadership, or not quickly enough. Clarkson does report that Morral was insistent: "she would persist that I might do it if I chose." This may imply that Morral went to Clarkson because she was applying to the expedient power of the law that Clarkson

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<sup>41</sup> Schama, *Rough Crossings*, 431.

<sup>42</sup> Fyfe, *Our Children Free and Happy*, 71.

represented. But he did not grant her request. He writes: “I told the woman to return home, and I would take an opportunity of calling upon her husband, and of doing what I could so to reconcile them to each other.”<sup>43</sup> It seems from this encounter that Clarkson’s hearing was gender-impaired. He evinces a patriarchal assumption that the person he really needs to talk to is Morral’s husband, and his suggestion that she go home and wait for men to sort things out indicates that he had gendered expectations for the enclosure of women in domestic spaces that the fact of her petition refutes. Morral’s appeal gives notice that petitionary re-drawings of politics across the “domestic” can encounter gendered limits in the ears of the auditor when a woman is speaking.

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I have suggested that petition is itself a feminine or feminizing form of address to the extent that its conventions classically require the performance of powerlessness or the opening of need to an implicitly masculine authority (one who is “masculine” not by virtue of his biological sex *per se*, but in the sense that he bears initiative power by the petitioner’s own account). I have also suggested that there is nothing inherently disempowering about petition’s performance of powerlessness—which is conventionally just that: a performance, and one that tends to play with the hierarchical dualities which draw femininity into alignment with flat receptivity. Petition is precisely about figuring out how to bend power to feminized persuasion, perhaps dabbling in a grey zone between influence and authority by revealing that what typically counts as power in the strategies of the strong (force, authority, initiative) is in the first place open to the tactics of the meek (subversion, influence, receptivity) and in the second, not absolutely distinct from

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<sup>43</sup> Fyfe, 71.

those tactics. In these ways, I suggest that all the refugees' petitions might be considered feminine. But what makes them radically feminine, I want to suggest, is that in the whole course of the 1790s they never abandon their small-scale concerns (they are not of course *exclusively* bound to those concerns either, as the petitions move across partitions). Not even when the refugees broke from the Company in 1799-1800 and wrote their own laws did they announce themselves as abstract subjects, instead addressing price points for comestibles and issues of lot maintenance. The reason I suggest this makes the refugees' writings radically feminine is that their petitionary practice does not resolve into a strategic project that aspires to a future Politics of the strong: they are minor, they are repetitive, they dwell in matters at hand, and they therefore resist the normative teleology from "minor" to "major" that concludes with the autonomous and implicitly male subject who Found his authority in proprietorship. There is no claim in the refugees' writings either to a sovereign model of proprietary subjectivity or an assumption of guaranteed linear historicity.<sup>44</sup>

Take for instance the following petition, written by Thomas Peters and David Edmon on 23 December 1791, just before the fleet that carried the refugees to Sierra Leone departed from Halifax, Nova Scotia.

halifax           december the 23 1791

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<sup>44</sup> I draw here on Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's reflections on "minor literature." Deleuze and Guattari wonderfully insist that in the "minor," everything is political and "everything takes on a collective value"—ideas I am pursuing through petition in this chapter. I'm particularly interested in Deleuze and Guattari's insistence that "there is nothing major or revolutionary except the minor." Deleuze and Guattari, "What is a Minor Literature?," *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, Trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 16-27.

the humbel petition of the Black pepel lying in mr wisdoms  
Store Called the anoplus Compnay humbeley bag that if it  
is Consent to your honer as it is the larst Christmas day that  
we ever shall see in the amaraca that it may please your  
honer to grant us one days allowance of frish Beef for a  
Christmas dinner that if it is agreabel to you and the rest of  
the Gentlemon to whom it may Consern

thomas petus

david Edmon

Why petition? Because it is Christmas, and the last day “the Black pepel lying in mr wisdoms Store” will ever see “in the amaraca,” and they want to mark its passage in fellowship with one another, whether in grief for those they lost or leave behind, or in celebration of their survival, or in observation of their faith, or in prayer for their safe passage, or all of these, or others, or none of them—it is not for me to say. But once again, the request is collectively oriented; it has a collective subject not simply because it is co-authored, but also because Peters and Edmon are petitioning on behalf of a group that wishes to gather around food which they do not yet have: “frish Beef.” Ordinary necessity is the occasion for petition, whose pertinence will expire as soon as the beef is eaten, or (in the event that it is not granted) when tomorrow comes. Beef is of course not the same as soap or a quarrel with one’s partner *except* in its contingency. We do not have the beef. Why should we get it? Because we want to eat the beef and because it is Christmas and because it is the last day that we will ever see the America. All of these

are highly conditional conditions. Tomorrow it will not be 23 December 1791, “we” will not be laying in Mr. Wisdom’s store, we will or will not have eaten beef, and America will be behind us. “We” do not have a proper locus. We will have to petition again when we are hungry for more than we have at hand.

So here once again, the refugees’ petitionary practice is geared to micro-temporality, to exhaustible things, to common need. These features are remarkably consistent across the refugees’ writings, sometimes appearing alone (as above), sometimes running alongside “major” concerns of judicial process, quit-rents, and labor conditions. For instance, in November 1792 the refugees wrote several petitions to Clarkson both individually and collectively in protest of the cost of provisions at the Company store. In a collective petition to Clarkson from this time, a large group of refugees write:

we Could wish as we only works for three shillings pr. day  
to have our provision free or else have our wages raised [ . .  
. ] there is one thing more that is our allowance in liqr. in  
our time of working for the Climate has a very Requisite  
Call for it.

In this petition, wage structure and the cost of rations are the ostensible “major” subject of discussion, but the petition takes care of life in a capacious way by appealing for more liquor on-site. Bodies suffer in the heat; they need refreshment. Wages and fair access to Company rations are important, but not necessarily more so than the needs of the flesh,

the allowance for liquor. Liquor and wages are connected by necessity across partitions of the sensible.

There are times, of course, when the refugees' petitionary practice invokes a temporal extension longer than that of the everyday. Perhaps their most notable expression of a more extended future politics appears in a collective petition that they sent to the Company Directors in 1793, and it concerns their children. Here is an excerpt.

Health and life may it please your Honrs is very uncertain  
and we have not the Education which White Men have yet  
we have feeling the same as other Human Beings and  
would wish to do every thing we can for to make our  
Children free and happy after us but as we feel our selves  
much put upon & distressed by your Council here we are  
afraid if such conduct continues we shall be unhappy while  
we live and our Children may be in bondage after us<sup>45</sup>

This first line of this passage establishes a sense of time that is still characterized by ephemerality even though its scope is longer than that of soap or beef. Children are political concerns in this petition: another common matter entirely, and one that we have today perhaps come to associate with reproductive futurism.<sup>46</sup> However, the sense of

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<sup>45</sup> Settlers' Petition [October 1793], Ed. Fyfe, *Our Children Free and Happy*, 37.

<sup>46</sup> Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke UP, 2004), 3-4. Edelman delivers a furious critique of heteronormative structures of time in which "The Child remains the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmatic beneficiary of every political intervention."

time in which the petition is couched is not one of progressive linearity; indeed, the refugees' conviction that freedom cannot be guaranteed indefinitely, that time and freedom are provisional, is precisely what has led them to protest in the interests of their children. While the focus on children might be taken to suggest a genealogical principle of succession, then, it seems to me that even here the refugees express something like a variation on that notion.

In the first place, this is because the sensible oppression that petitioners endure in the present and the potential oppression of their children in the future are directly connected. The refugees are advocating for their children, but this is not separate from the advocacy they make for justice in the present against the Company's abuse. One does not come at the expense of the other: "we are afraid if such conduct continues *we shall be unhappy while we live* and our Children may be in bondage after us." This is a collective politics, and a politics of intergenerational struggle, in which the refugees' advocate simultaneously for the world they live in and for the one that their loved ones must live in after them. These worlds overlap (they are not sensibly partitioned); what we feel now—"we feel our selves much put upon & distressed"—will be felt in time to come, as injustice will not be compartmentalized in time or space. Indeed, there is a strongly reciprocal relation, or series of recursions, between promises made in the past, injustice in the present, and the conditions of possibility for injustice in the future that the refugees state and restate throughout the body of the text. They write, for instance: "we are doubtful about our Fate and the Fate of our Children as the Promises made us has not

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Edelman resists this construct on the grounds that The Child becomes "the emblem of futurity's unquestioned value" and supports views of history that are teleological.

been perform'd." And again: "for as we have not Justice shewn us we do not expect our Children after us will."<sup>47</sup>

The petition of 1793 is unique in its invocation of the refugees' children, but also in that it is the only one of their collective petitions in which they invoke humanity as a category of being, and it appears only once, in the passage I cited above. Again, though, it seems to me that this is a variation on "the human" that has to do with a potentially specific re-signification of what is sensible in "feeling," which seems to comprehend the refugees love of their children, as well as the feeling of oppression ("we feel our selves much put upon & distressed by your Council"). These are linked forms of feeling that stand in contrast to the Education of White Men. Because it is juxtaposed against formal education, the "feeling" of human being seems here to suggest an alternative form of knowledge that derives from an almost literal, tactile encounter with force ("put upon")—indeed, the refugees may be suggesting that the felt knowledge of oppression may be a kind of knowing that exceeds the narrow vision of vaunted reason, which is to say that the knowledge of oppression may constitute a different kind of human subject than the one White Men lay claim to by partitioning reason from the sensible. The feeling of oppression is in the first place a non-proprietary effect of having endured something—it is not a kind of knowledge that comes from having been autonomous, willful, etc., but rather from having been on the receiving end of force that was out of one's control.

To the extent that the feeling of oppression is about receptivity, it is feminine in the classic sense. To the extent that the feeling of oppression is bound up with the love and nurturance of children, it is also feminine in the classic sense. To the extent that the

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<sup>47</sup> Settlers' Petition [October 1793], Ed. Fyfe, *Our Children Free and Happy*, 38.

connection between loving your children and feeling oppressed are contrasted with the Education of White Men, moreover, this connectedness is implicitly black. Indeed, the connection between feeling oppressed and feeling love for one's children seem in the petition to be precisely what is *not* available to the knowledge represented by the Education of White Men. At one point the refugees suggest that this knowledge is what they are bringing to bear on the Directors: "We at last feel ourselves so oppressed that we are forced to trouble your Honrs that your Eyes as well as ours may be open."<sup>48</sup> The feeling of oppression and the knowledge it entails are not the same as what the Directors mistake for being able to see clearly. The Directors think they are Enlightened, but only by listening to what the refugees' feel (and by the refugees' feeling this out for themselves) will everyone be able to see, or perhaps more accurately, to see differently.

While their children and the human feelings of oppression are powerful concerns in the refugees' 1793 petition, they are also not the only ones. The grievances the refugees put forward for the Directors' consideration are about land allotments, prices charged on Company goods, the watering of rum, and poor wages. For instance, they write:

We know of a very bad dishonest action which was done  
Mr Dawe's order which was to put Thirty Gals. Of Water  
into a Pun<sup>n</sup> of Rum not one Punch<sup>n</sup> but several & then sell  
it to us for a Shilling a Galln more than we had ever paid  
before And please your Honrs we have no Place to Work

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 36.

but in the Company's Works and we are just at the mercy  
of the People you send here to give us what Wages they  
Please & charge us what they like for their Goods.<sup>49</sup>

How do the refugees know that their and their children's freedom is in danger? Because Dawes is willing to defraud them by watering down the rum, because he overcharges them for that watered-down rum, because he has too much control over their employment status ("we have no Place to Work but in the Company's Works"), and because they are not guaranteed fair wages. The refugees and their children experience justice reciprocally across time, but so too do they evaluate that reciprocity in "minor" ways—in relation to the near-at-hand—which demand repeated petitionary practice. The injustice the refugees feel in the present, the injustice their children may feel in the future, and the injustices of watery rum and poor wages are all connected across the partitions of the sensible by the feeling of oppression. You should answer our petition because we fear for ourselves and for our children, because it is dishonest to water down rum, because you should not be able to deny us a living, and because we need a fair wage. The refugees never appeal to rights, though they do call attention to broken promises: "the Promises made us has not been perform'd." At the end of the petition they appeal to the Directors' decency: "take compassion on us and look into our case and see us done Justice." Why should you grant our request? Because compassion and justice are sensible. The Directors didn't listen.

## II. Service

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 37.

One of the openly subversive features of petition's feminized S/M scene of entreaty is that petition makes declarations of obedience or gratitude extremely difficult to parse as evidence of felt allegiance beyond the text. Such assertions are pro forma, and underdetermined as such, but the petitioners also have a very sharp sense of possibilities for command embedded in petition's conventional disposition toward the expression of powerlessness or fealty. Smith and Morral's assertions that they are Clarkson's "hum bel Servets," for instance, say very little about their partisan politics, which neither they nor their fellow refugees invoke as a justification for redress. The invocation of humility and service may actually work just as easily in Smith's petition, in particular, to question or expose Clarkson's exercise of authority, and seems in any case to draw his power into *her* service.

The seemingly uneven structure of address that petition stages can thus move in more than one direction and operate in more than one way. Service might not simply entail a unilinear form of obligation, and petitionary assertions of powerlessness, fear, or gratitude can rather quickly acquire a subversive tonality. Indeed, as refugee-Company relations worsened in Sierra Leone in the early 1790s, petitioners turn the administrators' expectations of their dependence and devotion on their heads, displaying a particularly keen talent for the art of wrapping threats in solicitation. On a visit to London in 1793, Cato Perkins and Isaac Anderson attempted without success to lodge the long petition I discussed in the previous section with the Company Directors. Perkins and Anderson wrote two letters to Clarkson (who was by this time living in London recovering from what we might today call a nervous breakdown), asking that he "might see justice done us." On 26 October 1793, Perkins and Anderson wrote to Clarkson: "the Gentlemen have

not used us well, and we are sorry for it as we are there things will not go well in the Colony unless the people you brought with you from nova Scotia have justice done them.”<sup>50</sup> Having been turned away from the Company a few days later, they write again (with my emphases):

[. . .] they [the Company] will not give us any answer but send us back like Fools and *we are certain Sir that if they serve us so that the Company will lose their Colony* as nothing kept the People quiet but the thoughts that when the Company heard their grievances they would see Justice done them—and we should be sorry any thing bad should happen but *we are afraid if the Company does not see Justice done to us they will not have Justice done to them* so we want to see you very much as we think you wish us so well that you could keep us from being wronged if you can

We are Hon<sup>d</sup>. Sir  
Your Obedt Serts  
Isaac Anderson  
Cato Perkins<sup>51</sup>

Perkins and Anderson bind service to Justice in this letter. Their opening formulation is that if the Company “will *serve* us so [they] will lose their Colony.” Service in this case

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<sup>50</sup> Fyfe, 35.

<sup>51</sup> Fyfe, *Our Children Free and Happy*, 41.

is about how people treat one another; the Company has refused to listen to the refugees, sending Anderson and Perkins away with their petition “like Fools.” They have been served as fools, but they are not fools—they have been served badly. Bad service appears here as a refusal to listen that forecloses collectively negotiated realizations of justice across partitions of the sensible. The Company is supposed to serve the refugees well by hearing them and then seeing justice done: “nothing kept the People quiet but the thought that when the Company heard their grievances they would see Justice done them.” (Note that service is about hearing, and justice is about seeing). Justice therefore begins with good hearing, which is in turn a form of good service. When hearing is denied, justice will be seen one way or another, but the possibility for the mutual relation entailed in hearing may be lost. Justice can—and will—part ways with service when service itself is unjust. Justice thus entails a strongly collective, reciprocal structure of relation as Anderson and Perkins invoke it—if we do not see Justice, you will not see Justice—which I will suggest is characteristic of the ways in which the petitioners resignify what constitutes “service” throughout their petitions.

By contrast, the Colony administrators appear to think about service as a kind of bilateral quid pro quo, a structure of debt and credit, that amounts to a hierarchical imposition of obedience: be quiet, be loyal, do what you’re told. This problem goes back to the 1770s-80s, of course, when the British had offered freedom to the enslaved in exchange for patently exploitative service to the Crown. Britain’s approach to black fugitives during the Revolutionary period was organized from the outset by grossly unjust logics of patronage that turned on the violent capitalization of black desires for freedom. But even after British command had decided to recast Britain in humanitarian terms,

British discourses of black freedom seem pathologically to insist upon the identification of black persons as potential sources of exploitable labor. A key illumination of this logic is in *The Book of Negroes*, a ledger kept by the British during the evacuations of the “Black Loyalists” from New York in 1782-83.

*The Book of Negroes* expresses a British Politics of black emancipation that is constitutively bound up with the logic of slavery. One might easily mistake *The Book of Negroes* for a document of the slave trade: a slave ship manifest, for example, or an insurance claim. For like those obscenely rationalized accounts of lives turned to commodities, *The Book of Negroes* uses formal and descriptive taxonomies that frame its subjects as chattel, or potential chattel, though its purpose was to collect evidence of each refugee’s claim to freedom in order to honor the stipulations of the provisional treaty, which forbade the British from “carrying away any Negroes, or other Property of the American Inhabitants.” Laid out in tabular form and written in elegant manuscript, the header on the first page reads, “Inspection Roll of Negroes.” The pages are divided into columns ruled neatly by hand, with entries for “Negroes Names,” “Ages,” and “Description,” as well as for the names of the ships on which they will embark, and their intended destinations. There is also a column labeled “Persons in whose possession they now are,” which may have been included to provide a series of counter-claims against American slaveholders who descended on New York in droves to recover fugitives whom they insisted had been seized illegally.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> It is unclear to me what the relationship of these persons is (or was understood at the time to be) to the refugees. The name of every black person in this book was inscribed there as a condition of their “freedom,” which suggests that they were not considered to be in anyone’s “possession” as property (it is in some sense the purpose of this document to demonstrate as much). Following Cassandra Pybus’s digitized database on the people named in *The Book of Negroes*, I surmise that these are the names of “guardians”:

Today, historians use *The Book of Negroes* as a documentary source of demographic information about the refugees who traveled to Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone in the 1780s-90s; it is one of the reasons that the number and names of the refugees are known. However, the formal and taxonomic arrangements of *The Book of Negroes* also reveal the extent to which the British were unable either to imagine or to account for black freedom in ways that were not structured by logics of racial capital. Here is only a small selection of the entries from the first page on the ship *Aurora*, recording the names, ages, and descriptions of the ship's passengers, followed by the "Names of the persons in whose possession they now are."

Billy Williams ... 35 ... Healthy Stout Man ... Richard Browne  
Rose Richard ... 20 .... Healthy Young Woman ... Thomas Richard  
Daniel Barber ... 70 ... Worn out ... James Moore  
Sarah Farmer ... 23 ... Healthy Young Woman ... Mrs. Sharp  
Barbarry Allen ... 22 ... Healthy Stout Wench ... Humphry Winters  
Elizabeth Black ... 24 ... Mulatto from Madagascar H[eal]t[h]y ... Mr. Buskirk  
Bob Stafford ... 20 ... Stout Healthy Negro ... Mr. Sharp  
Harry Covenhoven ... 24 ... Ditto ... Mr. Buskirk  
John Vans ... 39 ... Healt[h]y blind of his right eye ...Mr. Buskirk, Jr.  
Anthony Haln ... 27 ... Stout Negro ... Nicholas Beckle

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sponsors, hosts, or employers either within the ranks of the army or elsewhere in New York. The salient point for me, differently than Pybus, is that while the British may have included these names as protective counter-measures against the recapture of black refugees, they used the logic of possession to do so: protection and property are inextricably bound up in this imagination of black freedom.

<http://www.blackloyalist.info>

Note the persistence with which *The Book of Negroes* identifies its subjects with their capacity or incapacity for labor: “healthy,” “stout,” “worn out,” “blind of his right eye.” This attention to the readiness of bodies for work is a consistent feature of the book’s entries—more systematic, even, than their ascriptions of race and gender. For while gendered and racialized descriptors seem to bestow a kind of specificity on their subjects (one that is at the same time generic, even serialized, as the repetition of the word “Ditto” suggests), the apparent health of bodies is not only noted with greater uniformity across entries, but also seems to form a kind of threshold or prerequisite for knowing those bodies. Hence, perhaps, nothing is noted about Daniel Barber’s body besides that it is “worn out.” *Worn out*. As if this explained everything; as if, having failed to meet the minimum value requirement, nothing else about Daniel Barber could be worth knowing; as if his body doesn’t even qualify for the dubious distinctions of gendered and racialized particularity; or worse—because negation is the essentializing maneuver at the heart of this entire grotesque configuration of knowledge—as if, in his physical exhaustion, Daniel Barber had come to typify what may have appeared to the British clerks to be the broken destiny of black embodiment.

The structuring logics of *The Book of Negroes* which posit “black freedom” as a quality that is constitutively related to slavery—a quality, that is, which is never “free” from the presupposition that black bodies are available for seizure and exploitation—highlight the way in which black persons figured in British Political calculus as laboring properties of the empire. This is what “service” entails; it is never far from exploitative,

racialized labor value—service and serviceability are inseparable. It is little wonder, then, that Company officials served the refugees badly in the 1790s. They were simply the latest to assume that black service was something that was owed to them and something that belonged to them rather than something that could move in more than one direction at a time.

The refugees' writings re-signify "service" as a mutual and reciprocal relation that is contingent upon sensible requitals that are unguaranteed by linear time or Political promises. Service cannot be held in place indefinitely by abstract allegiance, but shifts in response to unmet needs. The words "service" and "servant" appear in most of the valedictions to the refugees' writings: "from Sir your humble Servant all," "from your servant Anton Zizer," "Your most Obt humble Servt James Liaster," "your honour most humble servts." Of course, as with petition itself, these valedictions are highly conventional, but as words that have to do with labor and the conditions of relation formed through labor, they seem to me to demand careful attention in this context. In the first place, "servant" has a troubled relationship to the word "slave." The former denotatively describes one whose labor is free, while the latter does not, but this distinction is highly unstable; indeed, these words were often used synonymously in the eighteenth century. Scipio Moorhead uses the word "servant" in the caption to his famous frontispiece engraving to Phillis Wheatley's *Poems on Subjects Religious and Moral* (1773): "Phillis Wheatley, Negro Servant to Mr. John Wheatley, of Boston." In Wheatley's book, it seems to be doing (at least) double duty, both covering "slave" as an ironic synonym and quietly suggesting that Wheatley is able to smuggle her intellectual labor and devotion in directions other than that of John Wheatley. John Wheatley claims

Phillis Wheatley as his slave, but she *serves* God, the Muses, and her patroness, the Countess Huntington. However, in her dedication and poems, Wheatley's devoted service to God, to poetry, and to her patroness do not appear to be “free” or “freely” chosen. Service is still a form of binding, but it allows for Wheatley to exist in some kind of reciprocal relation with whom or what she serves—and to serve in more than one way, and in more than one direction, at the same time. Service suggests a mutual binding, then, that feels differently un-free than enslavement; meaning can be trafficked away in different directions and in different modalities under its cover. Servants can be commanded, but they can also command—the Muses can be called to serve their servant, much as the Governor can be called to intervene in a domestic squabble. In service, power may not have a proper locus.

As for Wheatley, the devotional meanings of service—the service one offers to God—seems to be very closely associated with what it might mean to be a humble servant in the refugees’ petitionary practice. The refugees often close their petitions with a variations on the formula “bound to pray” that seems to gloss “service” in this devotional direction. An extrapolated version of this appears in the children’s petition of 1793 that I discussed above: “And if your Honours will take compassion on us and look into our Case and see us done Justice by we will always pray to God to bless you and everything belonging to you and we will let our Children know the good you do us that they may Pray for you after it.”<sup>53</sup> What is the relationship between binding through prayer and service? In order to approach that question, I think it is perhaps worth looking again at the valediction of Rose Morral’s petition to Clarkson: “in so doing your honnah

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<sup>53</sup> Fyfe, ed., *Our Children Free and Happy*, 40.

will oblig your humble Servent Rose morral.” As in many other cases throughout the petition, Morral refers to herself as Clarkson’s “Servent” in her petition even as she summons him to her service. But Morral does something else too. She says that if Clarkson grants her request, he will “oblige” her: “in so doing your honnah will oblige your humble Servent Rose moral.” In Rose Morral’s petition, the word “obligation” seems to unpack some of what might be entailed in service’s reciprocally binding relation. Obligation comes from the Latin *ob* – “toward” and *ligare* – “to bind.” It is a curious word, as it can mean “to please,” “to require,” and “to obey.” Obligation simultaneously produces indebtedness, provision, and delight; it is both a call and a response, and it does not have a neatly bilateral formula of mastery and servitude. Something is simultaneously given, received, and incurred.

So when Rose Morral says to Clarkson that by doing as she asks he will oblige his humble servant, she could quite possibly be saying three things at the same time: you will please me, you will obey me, and you will have me in your debt. Part of what interests me about this is that, much as in the structure of petitionary appeal (which takes “prayer” as one of its meanings), it is very difficult when servants oblige their humble servants to tell who is calling the shots. What is it humbly to serve one’s humble servant? It is quite possible that in devotional service, no one is in full control. For the same reason, it seems difficult to discriminate who is holding debt under conditions of obligation. The indebtedness of obligation is incurred as a function of good service in which resources are borrowed and lent provisionally (lend me your ears, lend me the power of the law, get me some perishable soap). Obligation might be described as a quantity of uncodified debt, binding but held in common—a debt that does not belong to any one person, but

constrains at least two in mutual hearing of one another, which seems also to be part of what is entailed in binding through prayer. If you oblige us by listening to us, we will make some noise for you with the Lord. The binding duty of prayer incurred by obligation seems in fact to be an exchange across partitions of the sensible—the petitioner calls, the auditor hears her and sees to her justice, and she serves him in turn by giving him a hearing with God, who may or may not see to his justice. Obligation cannot be discharged transactionally as it seems necessarily to entail the production of debt that cannot be individually accounted for; God appears to be the only creditor in the sequence, and God is a very mysterious creditor. Hence obligation does not seem precisely to guarantee outcomes any more than prayer can guarantee results. Obligation manifests through listening and the performance of kindness. It is not proprietary debt, then, but a drawing or binding *toward*: it is a way of moving in the direction of justice that is relational, performative, contingent, and—in the refugees' writings—quite often practiced through the exchange of small necessities and favors that include but are not confined to prayer.

Miles Dixon asks Clarkson for “a bolt of Lining & 3 Good Hatts” in a letter from 1793, because “goods is scare in the Colony.”<sup>54</sup> Daniel Cary asks Clarkson to perform his marriage service.<sup>55</sup> And in a letter Boston King wrote to Clarkson in 1797, King sends news and trades favors:

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<sup>54</sup> Miles Dixon to John Clarkson [14 October 1793], Fyfe, ed., *Our Children Free and Happy*, 34.

<sup>55</sup> Daniel Cary to John Clarkson [16 June 1792], *ibid.*, 25.

Hon<sup>d</sup> Sir I will take it as a grate favour if you will me a  
Quire of Paper for the Paper they sell is not fit to rite on I  
bage lso for a few pends. I shall try to Send Mrs Clarkson  
some nuts when I can find Convaance.

I remin Your sincere  
Friend Boston King  
June the 1 1797 Sierra Leone  
Free Town Africa  
PS Give my kind Love to Mr Witbread

Like Dixon and Cary, King addresses Clarkson in a personal letter, not a formal petition. Yet the partition between epistolarity and petition does not appear to be strictly observed in these cases. Petitions are often quite intimate affairs, as in the Smith and Morral examples. Likewise, letters often include requests for small things that are needed or desired. Here, the reverend Boston King is in need of some decent paper and some pens. And he asks for these things not as gifts, but as favors which indebt him in turn. He promises to send Mrs. Clarkson some nuts when it is convenient (or possibly when there is conveyance). Like the Smith and Morral petitions, the obligation incurred here does not appear to be symmetrically partitioned, as paper and pens are not comparable to nuts except in their common inaccessibility. King cannot get paper, and the Clarksons cannot get Sierra Leonean nuts. King needs something ordinary in an unevenly distributed world in which ordinary things are sometimes scarce. Petitionary address *redresses* this need through the reciprocally binding relations of service. Send me some paper because I need them; I'll send your wife some nuts because she likes them. There does not seem to be any question of paper and pens being equal to nuts, nor is there a strict timeline for the

observances of obligation. King proposes that he and the Clarkson serve each other by sharing what is near-at-hand.

The labor of petitionary service is never done, but it is also mutually sustaining. It creates relation as a condition of meeting unmet needs, not as an absolute function of allegiance that can be guaranteed for all of time. Service reconfigures justice as binding through obligation, but it is not a dry contractualism. Indeed, just as the petitioners make service differently sensible as reciprocal obligation, they suggest that the affective network in which service occurs (and which it produces) is not one of permanent fealty, but of ongoing, intimate care. In King's letter, other things travel beside ordinary necessities through the pathways of service's uncodified debts. King sends news, but also friendship (I remin Your sincere Friend). And in the post-script to Mr Witbread, he sends love.

### **III. The Care of Ruin**

Who speaks with the voice of the petitioner, the one with unmet needs? I have suggested that the refugees' petitionary practice does not base its appeals on the recognition of abstract subjects or immutable loyalties. In the refugees' writings, political personhood is a function of need and not of property. Moreover, the service that petition demands from its auditors takes the form of mutual obligation in shifting, ongoing relation to necessity. This is important because it means that the politics of the refugees' petitionary practice are not available either to the model of U.S. liberal subjectivity, in which petition announces the sovereign autonomy of its subject; or to the model of British imperial citizenship, which demands that service be linked to slavery as an immutable condition of obedience and exploitable labor. So far I have tried to show

that black petitionary practice in Sierra Leone eschews both of the Political templates that have been ascribed to it, and instead theorizes radical politics of common necessity. Here I would like to dwell for a moment on the collective dimensions of these politics, which I suggest also eschew any simple identitarianism.

The collective petitions submitted by the refugees to the Company over the course of the 1790s use a dizzying array of identifying markers to describe the petitioners as groups. In 1792, for instance, they call themselves “we the humble pittioners we the Black pepol that Came from novascotia to this place under our agent John Clarkson.”<sup>56</sup> Later that same year, they refer to themselves triply as “we the Children of faith,” “[Mr Bebrote’s] Dear and Sinceir Children of Faith,” and “We the Chldren of St John New brumswick.”<sup>57</sup> In the very long collective petition they sent to the Company Directors in 1793, they call themselves “the Black Settlers of this Place.”<sup>58</sup> In 1794-5 the refugees got into a serious confrontation with the Company over the burning of Company stores by a French ship; the refugees had refused to douse the fire in protest, as the Company was gouging prices and refusing people employment for non-compliance. While the warehouse burned, the refugees saved what they could from the flames, at which point the Company men accused them of theft (something they had also done when refugees had gathered jetsam from the waves for their own use). The refugees submitted a petition in the aftermath of this crisis in which they refer to themselves as “the people of the

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<sup>56</sup> Farewell Petition [28 November 1792], Ed. Fyfe, *Our Children Free and Happy*, 30.

<sup>57</sup> Beverhout Company [11 December 1792], Ibid., 32. This particular petition was submitted in protest of Mr. Bebrote’s being dismissed from his position and subjection to slander. Mr. Bebrote appears to have been a minister.

<sup>58</sup> Settlers’ Petition [October 1793], Ibid., 36.

Methodist connection that are calld people of a ranglesome nature.”<sup>59</sup> In the same petition, they write: “we are a sett of people in the Colony, but may it please your Honours Gentlemens of the Council we are a sett of People wish not to rule with envy of empresson, but are willing to be under the complement of any propshall that is just.” As matters deteriorated in the next four years, the refugees eventually formed their own bicameral parliament based on the voting democratic structure of hundredors and tythingmen that they had used since 1792. This parliament issued resolutions in August-September of 1799 in which they identified the “Propriatives of the Colenny” as: “the Nova Scotia who com with Mr Clarkston adjoining the Granville People with them.”<sup>60</sup>

What strikes me about this range of appellatives is that the basis for collective identification has a radically fugitive quality to it, emerging at different times in terms of faith (the Children of faith, the Methodist connection), racial identification (we the Black Pepol), movement *across* space and time (we that came from Nova Scotia), geographical dwelling (the Nova Scotia adjoining the Granville People; the Children of St John New Brumswick; settlers), and even disposition or values (ranglesome nature; wishing not to rule with envy). Each of these markers is true and significant in its own way, of course, but they do not seem individually or even in combination *absolutely* to enclose who the “pitioners” are by their own account. The borders of their collective life are unenclosed, always moving; they have many loci, and no proper one. This is the primary reason that I chose to adopt the term “refugees” to describe them in this chapter’s discussion. By their own account, they are in flight, on the wing.

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<sup>59</sup> Minutes of Governor and Council from Sundry Settlers [16 April 1795], *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>60</sup> Resolutions of the Hundredors and Tythingmen [August-September 1799], *Ibid.*, 60.

As Saidiya Hartman suggests in her discussion of “subterranean politics,” one of the possible implications of this radical collective fugitivity is that while it is of course critically theorized and enacted by Afro-diasporic people, it may also move away from the terms by which “blackness” is thought to constitute an identitarian prescription or organic community. Writes Hartman: “can the instances in which the dominant is used, manipulated, and challenged be read as disruptive or refigured articulations of blackness?” She goes on:

[. . .] the networks of affiliation enacted in performance [. . .]  
. . .] are defined not by the centrality of racial identity or the  
selfsameness or transparency of blackness nor merely by  
the conditions of enslavement but by the connections  
forged in the context of disrupted affiliations, particular to  
site, location, and action.<sup>61</sup>

The refugees in Sierra Leone refer to themselves as “Black Pepol” at several points in the petitions. But I would like to suggest that the meanings of Blackness and Whiteness in the petitions are elaborated through a theory of power not wholly reducible to phenotype or descent: one that has to do with the identification of Whiteness with acquisitive ambition and exploitative structures of labor and justice. In a petition from 1792, for instance, the refugees set conditions on the forms of service they are willing to undertake in relation to the Company: “we are all willing to be govern by the laws of England in full but we donot Consent to gave it in to your honer hands with out haven any of our own Culler in it.” They are willing to be ruled by English law, then, but not if it is

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<sup>61</sup> Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997), 58-59.

entirely in the hands of white Company administrators. In particular, they press for mixed representation on juries: “when theur war aney trial thear should by *a jurey of both white and black and all should be equel* so we Consideren all this think that we have a wright to Chuse men that we think proper for to act for us in a reasnenble manner.”<sup>62</sup> By the time Company-refugee relations had completely broken down in 1800, the refugees submitted a list of grievances to the Governor and Council in which they stated, “we cannot get justice from the White people.”<sup>63</sup> “A White man,” they wrote, “will always follow a Blackman Because it is for their own ends they expects gains Because we are ignorant.”<sup>64</sup>

In the above examples, I suggest that Whiteness appears as a vector of unequal access to education, unequal access to legal representation, and obsessive concerns with profit that come at the expense of those who are rendered as Black because they are disadvantaged for the same reasons. This is not the same as reducing either Blackness or Whiteness exclusively to phenotype or descent. Indeed, Sierra Leone was not homogeneously black even by those standards; some of the people living at Granville Town were white, working class British women who had come to Sierra Leone as spouses or partners. Others were “lascars” from the East Indies who had come to London in the 1780s as mariners or servants of East India Company officials.<sup>65</sup> These

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<sup>62</sup> Beverhout Company [26 June 1792], *Ibid.*, 25-26.

<sup>63</sup> Nathaniel Wansey, Hundredors and Tythingmen [13 February 1800], *Ibid.*, 60-61.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>65</sup> Granville Town was different than Freetown in that it had been founded as a result of Granville Sharp’s work with the Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor (CRBP) in order to address the plight of London’s urban “black poor” in London during the 1770s-80s. The term “black poor” comprised a motley group: veteran mariners and fugitives of African descent who arrived in the capital on British ships, East Indian lascars, and white working-class women. The “black poor” were in a catch-22 in 1780s London. Often unable to find work due to racial prejudice, lascars and blacks did not qualify for parish support

constituencies seem to have been included without exception as “Propriatives of the Colenny” in the Resolutions published by the hundredors and tythingmen in 1799: “the Nova Scotia who com with Mr Clarkston adjoining the Granville People with them.”

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The refugees drafted their own resolutions and laws in 1799-1800 as they broke from Company authority. But neither the 1799 Resolutions nor the Paper of Laws that the refugees drafted in 1800 mention racial identification at all in connection with the rules of belonging in Sierra Leone. In fact, there is no “we the people” at the beginning of either document, which both launch directly into discussions of common things. For example, the Resolutions of 1799 open with a discussion of lot maintenance, setting a timeline for cutting grass. And the Paper of Laws of 1800 starts like this:

Paper of Laws stuck up at Abram Smith’s house by the

Hundredors and Tythingmen.

Sept. 3<sup>rd</sup> 1800. – If any one shall deny the Settlers of any thing that is to be exposed of in the Colony, and after that shall be found carting it out of the Colony to sell to any one else, shall be fined £20 or else leave the Colony, and for

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through the Poor Laws because they could not claim a parish of origin. At the same time, as Braidwood points out, they were barred from claiming parish settlement rights because this required “by apprenticeship or one year’s continuous paid employment within a given parish” (32). As a result they were forced to beg, and became so conspicuous on the streets of London that they became the focus of a charitable media campaign. Ultimately Sharp and the CRBP would determine that emigration offered the only lasting solution to the crisis, which is how the initial settlement at Granville Town, Sierra Leone, was established in 1787. Stephen J. Braidwood, *Black Poor and White Philanthropists: London’s Blacks and the Foundation of the Sierra Leone Settlement, 1786-1791*, Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 1995, 32-33.

Palm Oil 1/-<sup>2</sup> Quart, whoso ever is found selling for more  
than 1/- Quart is fined 20/- [ . . . ]<sup>66</sup>

What does it mean that “things” are connected with “exposure” in the first line? If you deny someone something that is *exposed of in the Colony*. I suggest that this is a theory of property drawn through necessity—things exist in the colony as a condition of their exposure, which is in turn a condition of their use. To “cart off” such things is to violate the refugees’ salvage of them because it is to make them property when they need to remain common in their exposure. The first article, following immediately from this point, talks about how much one has to pay in fines for taking such things away: 6 shillings per pound of salt beef, 9 shillings per pound of salt pork, and so on. The same paragraph also sets reasonable prices on comestibles. For instance, rum is to be 5 shillings a gallon, and anyone who sells for higher than that must by a fine of 3 pounds. There is a £2.10 fine for “lying and scandalizing without proof” as well as “Sabbath breaking.” There is a massive £20 fine for serving a warrant or execution without authority of the tythingmen and hundredors. If any one “shall kill a goat, hog, or sheep or cause her to slink her young,” that carries a £5 penalty. Another article establishes basic guidelines for social behavior. If a man leaves his wife for another woman, he must pay her £10 pounds. If a woman leaves her husband for another man, the other man must pay £10. If children misbehave, they must pay a fine of 10 shillings, “or be severely

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<sup>66</sup> Paper of Laws [3 September 1800], Fyfe, ed., *Our Children Free and Happy*, 63.

corrected by their parents.”<sup>67</sup> This is not a Founding; it’s a revolutionary exercise in ordinary justice.

Hartman argues that blackness can be refigured through “the connections forged in the context of disrupted affiliations, particular to site, location, and action.” In these terms, what may be black about the refugees’ petitionary practice is that it forges connections in the context of disrupted affiliations produced by slavery, war, colonialism, and flight. Blackness on this reckoning does not have a proper locus any more than politics, obligation, or freedom do. Instead, blackness is immanent in the disruptive creativity that moves across partitions (and petitions), and it can only be provisionally figured or (mis)apprehended because it is the knowledge that things can be used and inhabited differently than they are “supposed” to be at a given place or time. In this refiguration, then, blackness may be provisionally described as a kind of method, and the re-purposing of petition to meet ordinary need as a site of blackness’s inventive irruption of Order. Key about Hartman’s suggestion is that her refiguring of blackness as method is non-proprietary and non-identitarian; it proposes that doing and re-doing as the bases for enactments of personhood and forms of associated life that cannot be held within the confines of subjectivity or the romance of community. If blackness is method(s), its methods are ones of re-petition, re-use, and en-commoning that are neither prosecuted by a consolidated entity nor oriented toward a final “end.” But there is a second strand entailed in such refigured blackness that has to do with the presence of risk and constraint that I have been calling necessity. The (re)petitionary methods of blackness do not transpire in a liberatory zone in which action is already free; they have powerful

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<sup>67</sup> Paper of Laws [3 September 1800], Ed. Fyfe, *Our Children Free and Happy*, 63-64.

relationships to material and physical need that cannot simply be abolished. This may also mean that blackness operates not in a utopian domain of fantasy, but in the world as it exists in its ruin, and in history as a force of ruin that cannot be repaired. The space and time of blackness are those in which life is repetitively opened to necessity. As Stefano Harney and Fred Moten put it: “blackness is the site where absolute nothingness and the world of things converge.”<sup>68</sup>

Harney and Moten arrive at that formulation through Nathaniel Mackey. I meet them by way of Walter Benjamin. The phrase they use—“the world of things”—chimes to my ear with Benjamin’s description of allegory re-discovering itself “playfully in the earthly world of things.”<sup>69</sup> In Chapter 1, I discussed how Benjaminian allegory can be construed as a “blotting” or blackening in which matter converges with what it endures; it is strongly bound to ruin, but returns materially to the world that symbolism merely represents. For Benjamin, Mackey, Moten and Harney alike, blackness is a site of incalculable universal suffering, but it is also one in which it may be possible to improvise, or play, among “things”—a seemingly unspecific term that they, Benjamin, and other theorists invoke in specific counterpoint to “objects,” and in resistance to the logic of commoditization. What happens when the world is run on ruin—and more importantly (for only the Politicians would dispute this), when we embrace or cannot escape the knowledge of the world’s ruin—is that “things” appear again as material entities whose significance is not available to symbolic expropriation by art, capital, or the Political order. Another way of saying this, perhaps, is that objects cease to be

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<sup>68</sup> Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (New York: Minor Compositions, 2013), 95.

<sup>69</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Origin of German Tragic Drama* (London: Verso, 1963), 232.

bearers of abstract value and are restored to the common(s), where they take part with other thingly forms of human and non-human life in the profane joys and pains of mundane existence. (Do not convert our exposed common things into acquisitive property by carting them out of our reach). I do not of course suggest that the Sierra Leonean refugees' petitions are allegorical, except perhaps in the sense that Benjamin identifies that term with a "black" experience of Messianic time.<sup>70</sup> What is useful about Benjamin in conjunction with Harney and Moten is that this conjunction underscores a connection between the time/space of blackness and the en-commoning use, or re-appropriation, of commodities as things. Yet a crucial distinction between the refugees' petitionary practice and Benjamin's meditation on allegorical aesthetics is that the refugees know that "things" can be made out of symbolic forms through method as well as *force majeure*, and that things can support life, and one other, in this capacity. The refugees' emphasis falls on creative practice and mutual sustenance rather than on the total absorption of matter by force that characterizes Benjamin's reflections. But the petitions might share with Benjamin an outlook on historical being that is alive and loving in its non-transcendence, even in the inescapable presence of history's ruinous passages.

This brings me to my favorite of the petitioners' collective self-identifications, from a petition they wrote to the Governor and Council following the French sacking of Company stores in 1794: "we are the Distressors." An amazing statement. We are the

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<sup>70</sup> I invoke "Messianism" in the specific sense that I understand Benjamin to elaborate it in "Theses on the Philosophy of History" as a theory of catastrophe. For Benjamin, Messianic time is not the same as "millennial" time; it is a temporality in which the question of redemption is indefinitely deferred as we wait for the arrival of an emergency that is at once expected and unforeseeable, "for every second of time was"—and is—"the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter." In *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken, 1968), 264.

Distressors. Who or what are Distressors? Those who are distressed, clearly, and those who are bound to one another in their distress because they take a collective pronoun: we. “Distressors” might be taken as a near synonym for petitioners in this sense; we are together because we are distressed together. But already implicit in this, and made clearer by the form of the noun, is that Distressors “do” distress or distressing with a kind of active passivity that recalls the etymological strand of “petition” that is concerned with attacking or seeking. We will distress you in our distress. A Distressor suffers, but also distresses other things. Indeed, “distress” comes from the Latin, *distringere* – “to stretch apart.” Distressors thus traverse the partition between pulling apart and pulling together because they are bound by stretching. But in being bound by stretching, they also stretch their auditors—there is something disruptive about Distressing together because its method of redress calls what distresses it into its experience of distress. Unexpectedly, perhaps, Distressing seems to emerge in this way as a multivalent figure for care, as it describes what it is to have common cares, what it is to care for one another in care, and what it is to redress common care methodologically by en-commoning it further—drawing what produces care into care. Distressing has a powerfully creative dimension that is inseparable from suffering but not reducible to it either. And Distressing is binding. It might be a way of talking about love without a proper locus, recalling what Derrida describes as passion’s “duty beyond duty” (the duty that is not rule-bound), here in the face of harm that is at once arbitrary and omnipresent.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> “Would there thus be a duty not to act *according to duty*: neither *in conformity to duty*, as Kant would say, nor even *out of duty*? In what way would such a duty, or such a counter-duty, indebt us?” (7-8). “Pure morality must exceed all calculation, conscious or unconscious, of restitution or reappropriation. This feeling tells us, perhaps without dictating anything, that we must go beyond duty, or at least beyond duty as debt: duty owes nothing [ . . . ]” (133). Jacques Derrida, *On the Name* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1995).

Distressing may also proffer a way of talking about how the refugees use form (by stretching it), and how they talk about material things (by putting them to ordinary use), as manifestations of care. This is a paradoxical possibility, but I think an important one. What if it was possible to care for stretched things by stretching them differently, or addressing them with care because they are stretched and not in spite of it? What if we cared for things in their stretching, which is to say, what if distress was full of “interdicted, outlawed social life”?<sup>72</sup>

In the aftermath of the French attack on Company stores, Luke Jordan wrote a letter to John Clarkson about the injustice of the Company’s accusations that the refugees’ salvaging of goods from the fire constituted theft:

[. . .] if any man see Aplace is to be Destroyed by fire and  
Run the Risk of his life to care of that Ruin Afore it is  
Destroyed do you not think the Protector of these articles  
have a just right to these property altho the Articles is not  
of much Consequence which is a few Boards and one little  
Notion A Nother.<sup>73</sup>

Note Jordan’s beautiful formulation, “to care of that Ruin.” Jordan does not rescue what he rescues from the flames because it has a great deal of commodifiable value. He grabs things that do not have “much Consequence”: “a few Boards and one little Notion A

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<sup>72</sup> Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons*, 93.

<sup>73</sup> Luke Jordan to John Clarkson [19 November 1794], Ed. Fyfe, *Our Children Free and Happy*, 44.

Nother.” His use of the word “notion” to describe some of his salvaged goods suggests that part of what he has saved is an inkling of invention—he might put ruined things to different use.<sup>74</sup> Things have other kinds of value in their ruination (ruin is not totalizing; ruin *is not* the only meaning of ruin). What is perhaps most striking to me about Jordan’s reflections here, however, is that he elaborates a theory of property ownership that originates with the care entailed in salvage: it starts with an aleatory act of protection. If a man sees a place is about to be destroyed and risks his life “to care of that Ruin,” then—as ruin’s protector—he has a right to “these property.” The right that Jordan describes has nothing to do with the sanitized abstractions of liberal proprietary subjectivity, nor with the rights of conquest on which it is not-so-secretly built. Nor again is this about kingly sovereignty. Jordan had no right to these things in advance of their rescue. He risked his life to save some ruined things because they had value for him in their ruination, and Jordan is thus bound to his salvage not in lordship, but along the double edge of care.

Jordan’s emphasis on care calls renewed attention to the current of affection that runs through the petitions’ invocations of service as a relation of mutual binding. In light of Jordan’s reflections, it seems that service is a form of labor that occurs in conditions of privation, ruin, or necessity which set commodified exchange off its axis, producing another kind of relationship to property through distress (or exposure). The refugees often link service to suffering, for instance in John Liaster’s salutation to Clarkson in a letter from 1796: “To the honourable Jn. Clarkson, honoured Sir this is from me your

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<sup>74</sup> I am drawing on the insights of Bill Brown who, like Hartman, argues that commodities are not necessarily exhausted by their commoditization. Commodities can become things again by ceasing to work “properly” or being put to different use. Bill Brown, “Thing Theory,” *Critical Inquiry* 28:1 (2001): 1-22.

humble Servant and fellow sufferer.”<sup>75</sup> What is the relationship between humble service and fellow suffering? What kind of labor does service entail in relation to suffering?

Among the most wonderful meditations on this issue is in Isaac Anderson’s 1798 letter to Clarkson. Here is an excerpt.

I have sent Your Hon<sup>d</sup> a small Barrl of Rice Of my own produce, which I hope your Hon<sup>d</sup> will Except of for it is said Thou shall not mushel the ox that Treadet out the Corn & If so how much More is Your Hon<sup>d</sup> ought to be Estened More them an ox hond have sheaw the same affection with ous all in this Place as well as in Amarica then for in all thing it is Rasonable that the Husbanman ought first to Pertak of the Fruth<sup>76</sup>

Anderson refers in this passage to Deuteronomy 25:4, “Thou shalt not muzzle the ox while he treadeth out the corn.” The reason thou shalt not muzzle the ox is that the ox is doing all the work—the ox must be free to eat the fruits of her labor. This passage has been interpreted as a defense of the rights of laboring animals, but it has been extrapolated more generally to cover the fair compensation of all labor. It is in this last sense that it is taken up as a proverb in 1 Corinthians 9:9 and in 1 Timothy 5:18—“For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, the

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<sup>75</sup> Fyfe, *Our Children Free and Happy*, 49.

<sup>76</sup> Fyfe, *Our Children Free and Happy*, 56.

labourer *is* worthy of his reward” (KJV). The ox must work; work is an unavoidable necessity after the Fall. However, by allowing the ox to eat what she produces, Anderson suggests that the husbandman shows esteem for her labor in a way that transforms it, I suggest, from suffering in exploitation to service in fellowship. The key distinction for Anderson seems to be that when she performs labor as service, the ox is bound in mutual obligation to the corn as the handler is bound in mutual obligation to the ox. Esteem is shown to the ox, and the ox shows esteem to the corn. Compassion suffuses every level of production, and pleasure enters the equation. The ox can enjoy her work because she is able to “Pertak of the Fruth.”

Anderson is delivering a remarkable treatise on the nature of labor as service by reading the original prohibition of Deuteronomy 25.4 as a rule of compassion. The scripture is not explicit about the nature of the handler’s obligation to un-muzzle the ox, but Anderson is: he interprets this verse to be about esteem and affection. In his letter, Anderson tells Clarkson that he is sending Clarkson a barrel of rice “of my own produce.” This is because Anderson wishes to honor Clarkson as the husbandman of the rice, in the specific sense that Clarkson “have sheaw the same affection with ous all in this Place as well as in Amarica.” Anderson posits first that the laborer should not be alienated from her work, implicitly aligning himself with the ox in the process (Anderson, as the cultivator of the rice, is the one who has done the threshing). Then comes a rather tricky line due to the original orthography of the letter: “If so how much More is Your Hon<sup>d</sup> ought to be Estened More them an ox hond have sheaw the same affection with us [ . . ].” I read this in two different ways. The similar spelling of Hon<sup>d</sup> and “hond” suggest that may both be abbreviated forms of “honoured,” in which case the

line might read in standard contemporary English roughly as, “how much more does your Honour deserve to be Esteemed than an ox [for your] Honor has shown the same affection with us.” Another possibility is that “hond” reads as “hand,” in which case the line might read something like, “how much more does your Honour deserve to be Esteemed, more than an ox-hand[ler], [for] having shown the same affection with us.” Anderson is comparing Clarkson either to the ox or to the ox handler, and the refugees either to the corn or to the ox.

In the first instance, Anderson proposes that Clarkson has shown affection to the refugees in the same way that the ox shows affection for the corn through her threshing. In the second instance, Anderson might be saying that Clarkson has shown affection to the refugees in the same way that the ox-handler shows affection to the ox by unmuzzling her, leaving her free to eat the fruit of her labors. *Either way*, Anderson theorizes the rights of labor as being inextricably bound up with affection in a manner that disrupts conventional proprietary logic: when labor takes the form of service, the produce of labor belongs to those who introduce esteem into work so that it can be pleasurable as service. This means that produce belongs to everyone (and every thing) involved in service; it belongs to the ox and to the ox-handler as well as to the corn and to those who eat the corn, because they are all mutually bound through the affection that makes service possible. Anderson thus honors Clarkson as a husbandman not because he gave labor a proper place by settling the land per se, but because he shared affection with the refugees, helping to transform labor into service, and rice into edible esteem.

#### IV. Love

In the nationalist model of Revolution associated with the “birth” of the United States, freedom is won: it’s a kind of condition or sum attained at the end of a heroic struggle that is heralded in Declarations and fought on battlefields. In the British Revolutionary history of black emancipation, freedom is a bequest: a gift that is given magnanimously by the free to the unfree. This last formulation is made painfully clear by *The Book of Negroes*, and by Cato Hemingway’s 1783 “certificate of freedom,” an item he was issued around the same time, during evacuations from New York (fig. 1). Here Hemingway’s freedom comes with the condition that he be identified as a “negro.” In the British logic of Revolutionary emancipation, freedom is invested in a racialized identity that is always-already reducible to its capacity for unfree labor in a model of service that is bound up with serviceability. Hence, in both of these cases—U.S. national on the one hand and British imperial on the other—freedom appears to be an organized kind of property or possession: something one acquires as an identity at an exceptional moment in time through highly regulated channels.

By contrast, I have argued that the refugees’ petitionary practice recalibrates the scale as well as the temporality in which revolution is ordinarily considered to unfold. Revolution does not appear here as an exceptional interruption of temporality—a peculiar eventfulness that breaks from the dreamy torpor of the everyday. Rather, revolutionary freedom emerges in the refugees’ petitionary practice as a kind of “everyday object,” a phrase I invoke here because it signifies doubly as a “thing” and a goal that is near-at-hand but just out reach. Buffeted by necessity in a world of exhaustible and perishable

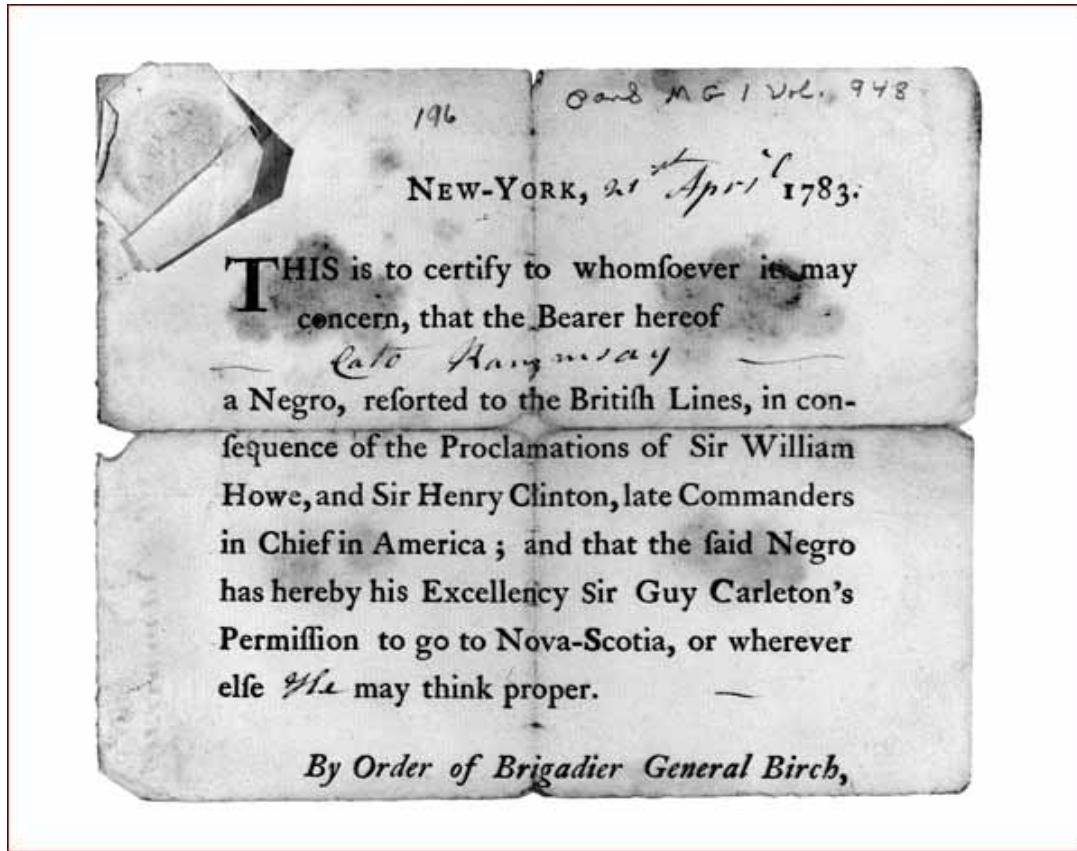


Fig. 1 Freedom Certificate of Cato Hemingway (1783). Nova Scotia Museum.

things, freedom is a project that always being re-made, engaged through ordinary matters and in the pursuit of common justice that may or may not be forthcoming.

In a ruined world, common things are dispersed, scarce, not always near-at-hand. Ruin is distressing; it pulls us apart. But in the refugees' petitionary practice, ruin is not all. Ruin is always a condition of possibility for service, for justice, for inventive freedoms, and for togetherness in care—it is not the bar to their realization. For the petitioners, who were deeply committed to their Christian faith, justice is ultimately the work of God.

we take upon ourselves to write unto you by way of  
petition begging that we all may become as people united

togather as one—dealing lawfully just & right one to another—knowing justice are the works of God--& let us with godly freedom maintain that which is just doing no injury.<sup>77</sup>

But justice is not for the same reason unattainable or beyond the ken of ordinary matters. To “deal lawfully just & right one to another” is to serve God’s justice in mutual obligation and with the possibility for pleasure. Freedom is “godly” because it maintains “that which is just.” The freedom to practice freedom is a need that must be met, and a doing that must be done and re-done, for justice to be seen. And justice is that which is held in place by good service, listening, doing no harm. How can we be together “as one people”? By serving one another well, and “with godly freedom maintain that which is just doing no injury.” People have something to say, and something to do, about the maintenance of justice within the world of earthly things. Justice is the work of godly freedom, but it can be served in the care of ruin.

The Company was not listening. In the aftermath of the refugees’ break from the Company in 1800 and the publication of the Paper of Laws on the door of Abram Smith’s house, the Company suppressed what they pleased to call a rebellion with the help of 500 Jamaican maroon warriors who arrived in the colony in the fall of that year. The maroons were isolated from the refugees and not told what the refugees were protesting; later, they, too, came to resist Company policies—particularly the quit-rents that had been a source of contention almost from the moment that the refugees from Nova Scotia

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<sup>77</sup> Sundry Settlers to the Governor and Council [16 April 1795], Fyfe, ed., *Our Children Free and Happy*, 45.

had arrived in 1792. In the fall of 1800, the refugees armed themselves and fought with the Company. Many were jailed. Two men were hanged: Frank Patrick, and Isaac Anderson, author of the treatise on the esteem of oxen. Here is the last thing Anderson wrote from Company custody.

September Sunday Mr Ludlow Sir we we de sire to now  
wether you will let our Mends out if not turn out the  
womans and Chill dren

Anderson petitioned on compassionate behalf of his fellow prisoners, and the Company used it as his death warrant. They did not have the power to prosecute him for treason because the Company was not yet a Crown colony, only a proprietary one. As a result, they tried him on a technicality: “he [Anderson] was charged with one of the numerous statutory offences which under English law at that date carried the death penalty— sending an anonymous and threatening letter to the governor.”<sup>78</sup> An “anonymous and threatening letter” for compassionate release. They hanged Patrick on the grounds that he had carried away a gun during the battle.

If there is a single episode that shatters the view of the refugees in 1790s Sierra Leone as the beneficiaries of “British freedom,” the Company’s brutal suppression of their experiment in ordinary justice and the horrific state-sanctioned murders of Anderson and Patrick in 1800 perhaps ought to be it. But I have tried to show what I think was there all along in the refugees’ petitionary practice: the revolutionary redress of common

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<sup>78</sup> Fyfe, *Our Children Free and Happy*, 78.

needs, repeated, never done, always having to be made and re-made, *never* guaranteed by British promises, never in the form of “service” that the Crown or the Company had demanded. The refugees are in flight, on the wing, because freedom belongs to nobody and cannot be held in place by words, or time. The losses of 1800 are irreparable, but they were neither the beginning nor the end of the refugees’ struggle. Sierra Leone became a crown colony on 6 November 1800 and its British governor continued to complain of the inhabitants’ dispositions toward insurgency, referring to them in 1809 as “negro *sans-culottes*” who used even the name of Freetown for “purposes of insubordination and rebellion.”<sup>79</sup>

I have suggested that the refugees’ petitions proffer a differently sensible account of revolutionary freedom as something that is taken or claimed in the face of uncertainty: something that you can’t *have*, but which you do and re-do without guarantees on a recurring basis. In the fugitive mode, freedom does not consist in the acquisition of desires, or perhaps even in the hope of that acquisition. Freedom is what happens *to* you when you make a demand that might not be met, or a gamble that might not pay off. The re-petitions required by inexorable contingency may also make available a different understanding of the kind of *person* who undertakes revolutionary action: one who is not autonomous and self-contained, but inseparable from the cares of the flesh—one who is not one, but many, and whom I have described as being both radically black (refigured) and radically feminine (non-binary) in the course of this discussion. The subjects of fugitive revolutionary politics find common ground without a proper locus in predicaments of mundane suffering—the exposure to necessity, to pain and

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<sup>79</sup> Qtd. in Pybus, *Epic Journeys of Freedom*, 205. Thomas Perronet Thompson to Castlereagh, 8,17 February 1809; 2 November 1808.

diminishment, that is the common lot of earthly things: soap, beef, rum, boards, paper, nuts, notions, children, oxen, workers, laundry, comrades, friends.

I have talked about how the refugees use petitionary practice to redraw the parameters of politics through necessity. I have talked about the feeling of oppression, and reciprocal binding through service's uncodified debts. But what I might have said more simply is that the refugees practice petition as protest that is moved by love. Isaac Anderson's last petition was deliberately misinterpreted as a threat by the Governor and Council, but it may well have seemed terribly threatening to them, because it is delivered in the anonymous voice of a collective that advocates on behalf of others' suffering—will you let us out, and if not, will you release the women and the children? As in all the other petitions I have discussed here, the radical force of this request moves through the revolutionary idea that it is possible to care for ruin, it is possible for Distressing to pull us apart and pull us together. We can ask for things because we need them, but also because the re-petitionary search for redress is itself an expression of the indiscriminate love that dwells in necessity. Ruin is not the only meaning of ruin.

On 24 August 1792, love addresses necessities that took the form of molasses, sugar, candles, nutmeg, and wine. Because Andrew Moor's wife had given birth, performing labor as service, and she and her daughter were hungry:

To the Right Honourable John Clarkeson Esq Captan  
General and Commander in Chief In and Over the Free  
Colony of Searra Leone and Its Dependancys and Vice-  
Admaral of the Same etc etc

Whareas your Honours Memorilist Andrew Moors Wife  
being brought to bed this morning and Delivered of a  
Daughter and now Stands in need of Some Nourishment for  
her and the Child your Excellancys Memorialest begeth  
that out your Humanity Geantle Goodness you Will take it  
Int your honours Consideration to Give Orders that She and  
the Child have some Nourishmen Such as Oat meal  
Molassis or Shugger a Little Wine and Spirits and Some  
Nut mig and your Memorialist as in Dutey bound Shall  
Ever Pray

NB and one lb Candles for Light

Andrew Moor's wife has labored. Her labor is magical; it produces renewal, an addition of want to want that associates life with itself. Now she and her daughter hunger together in the world. This hungering is a force of need that the petition serves with love by seeking. It petitions for the needs of mother and child with a rhetorical ecstasy that enacts the re-birth of desire. There's a proliferation of energies around the figures of mother and daughter, who appear once together, and once not, as though testing out their separateness after birth, hungering together alongside and apart from one another.

The petition as a whole has a proliferating quality, beginning with the more formal announcement of the header, which lists all Clarkson's titles and concludes "etc.

etc.” The nota bene for candles adds want to want (“and another thing!”). Bustling, pouring out top and bottom with excess, the petition thrills with ordinary affordings. Nourishment appears twice, the second time setting off a shower of wishes over “She and the Child.” These wishes spill near the bottom of the petition, starting with a humble suggestion (such as oatmeal) that moves on to rarer things. Oatmeal to molasses or sugar (sweetness doubles and splits), wine and spirits, and spice. The Moor petition shows common need as the excess of dearth. Something is absent in wanting and also desiring and hungering. Want is a division that is also a relation: the relation of scarcity to desire. Love is what dwells in the needful conjunctions between common things, and it is also the force that propels need into material proliferations of desire.

Notice the connectors between the items in the petition’s wishlist, followed by the addition of the nota bene (note well!). Sweetness splits and doubles—molasses/sugar, mother/child. Then a riot: *or, and, and, and...and!*

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