

Transatlantic Vividness: Imagining at a Distance in Nineteenth-Century Poetry

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(English Language and Literature)
in the University of Michigan
2017

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Dedication

for Judy

for Will

for Joe

with love

Acknowledgments

For years now friends and mentors have been asking me to attribute less to other thinkers in my writing. In the remarks that follow, I hope to forget everything I've tried so hard to learn.

My committee at the University of Michigan was a marvel. I am deeply thankful for all the ways they helped shape this project, including giving it space and time to develop, and for all the small kindnesses — a national park recommendation, a blue cup, a photograph of a pond, a personal reflection, a joke, a wooden bird — they shared along the way. From our first conversation Julie Ellison responded with enthusiasm to my questions and topic, helping me trust that I was discussing something worth discussing. Her special combination of detailed rigor and abundant belief made this project better at both the sentence and conceptual levels, and as a lived experience. Yopie Prins shone a generous and steady light on my thinking, helping me to see which ideas were worth featuring. At an early stage in the project, she showed up for me in a wholehearted way, and it is thanks to her positivity, critical acuity, and imagination that this dissertation has been able to unfold. Danny Hack read and listened with an incisive attention, asking targeted yet generative questions that helped discover and clarify core positions throughout these pages. I admire his ability to make me laugh at my mistakes, but even more so his ability to make me feel invited always into a real conversation. Mary Kelley has been a source of intellectual generosity and warmth, gifting me with questions that continue to open new avenues of thinking long after she had posed them. Marjorie Levinson inspired, nurtured, and insisted upon the conceptual stakes of the project. She refused to let me ever treat my work

as small, and the pleasure of talking with her one summer about Hume remains a beloved moment for me in this process. Finally, Adela Pinch made this process both manageable and joyful. She has intuited surprising connections between chapters and texts that furthered the overall project while infusing it with new life. That the beginnings of the project emerged from books she recommended, would seem fitting if it didn't still feel so lucky.

During my time at Michigan, I have gotten to learn from more wonderful people than I can name. Jan Burgess patiently answered my many emails, helped me secure funding, and enriched our interactions with details from her latest art projects. Gillian White showed me what a rich gift it can be to let others see you think through an idea. Kerry Larson led one of the best literature seminars I ever had the pleasure of taking, in particular the two weeks we devoted to reading Emerson's essays. I will never read Emerson, Hawthorne, or Whitman without thinking of Kerry, and I thank him for always wanting the best for me and for my ideas. Finally, I celebrate and give thanks for Meg Sweeney. At both crucial and importantly quotidian points of my graduate school experience, she has buoyed me along. I work daily to bring the level of rigor and care to my work and interactions that Meg makes look both effortless and mindful at once.

At the University of Virginia, I offer special thanks to Rita Dove, Lisa Russ Spaar, and the Young Writers' Workshop in Charlottesville. Rita's workshop invited risk-taking. She modeled and encouraged trying this and reading that, reminding me never to rush past experimentation. Lisa opened a world of contemporary women poets to me, gifting me with a sense of belonging and a capacious set of reading practices. Gifted poets, gifted teachers, gifted readers, generous hearts. The Young Writers' Workshop, meanwhile, was the wildly welcoming and imaginative place I wish my high school self had known. All the teachers and students and staff with whom I crossed paths for those three summers deserve thanks for creating and

nurturing a place where writers could gather, feel accepted, and get seriously weird together about words.

At UNC-Chapel Hill, I owe particular thanks to Larry Goldberg, who modeled working to understand what you thought a writer thought or believed before going on to argue with those thoughts and beliefs; Robert Kirkpatrick, who persuaded me to spend a Friday night tapping out the syllables of “Frost at Midnight” on my wrist to understand the poem; and Alan Shapiro and Eliza Richards, who gave me the gift of taking my ideas seriously. Alan helped me see the writing of poetry as a means to discovering surprising ideas. He made poetic form and the stakes of writing visceral. And if I hadn’t found American literature such a dull prospect, I might have missed out on the chance of having my life changed by Eliza. Thank goodness for a long-put-off seminar that allowed my path to cross hers. She has supported me while challenging me ever since we met twelve years ago. Her scholarship sets the standard I hope my own can reach.

Though each deserve a paragraph of their own, I thank key and beloved teachers in the humanities and fine arts: Beverly Fullinwider, Vicki Griffith, Patrick Jackson, Bruce Mackenzie, Fred Nelson, Bonnie Nicholas, Dan Piquet, and Chris Rappleye. Connie Copley deserves special thanks for making her classroom a lunchtime haven and for keeping a stuffed raven perched on the intercom—my fondest association for “Nevermore.”

Many hours of my education took place not in classrooms but in dance and yoga studios. Exploring or working through an idea kinesthetically was a mode of inquiry I apprenticed myself to for many years before focusing on writing. Even as the past decade has seen me devote more time to sitting and typing, these physical disciplines and art forms have not left me. I love in particular Kathy Massot and Karen Brewington, in Kirkwood, Missouri; Marian Turner Hopkins in Chapel Hill, North Carolina; Jennifer Elliott, Lydia Killos, and Katie Tully, in Charlottesville,

Virginia; and Aracelli Bieber and Rebecca Costa in San Anselmo, California. The highest and brightest in me salutes the highest and brightest in each and every one of them.

The University of Michigan invited me into a community of dedicated thinkers, readers, critics, teachers, and friends. For their guidance, presence, and friendship, I thank Annie Bolotin, Amrita Dhar, Rachel Feder, Kristin Fraser, Emily Howard, Emily Lind Johnston, Eliza Mathie, Adam Mazel, Ruth McAdams, Katy Peplin, Rebecca Porte, Aran Ruth, Alice Tsay, Christa Vogelius, Emily Waples, Pam Wolpert, and Cordelia Zukerman. I record my special admiration for Christie Allen, for always filling our shared office with the perfect mixture of laughter, reflection, industry, and candy; Daphna Atias, for making co-writing a paper the enduring highlight of graduate school; Kathryn Bevilacqua, for sharing drafts of writing and thinking with me at every stage of our post-prelims lives; Logan Scherer, for the quiet yet fiercely felt care he gives daily to prose and to friends; and Adam Sneed, for being an exemplary interlocutor, to the point where at times I have felt I owed it as much to Adam as to myself to see an idea through.

In Ann Arbor, I give thanks to and for Sara Brackenbury, who helped me find ways to get out of my own way; the community at Northside Presbyterian Church; and Ray McDaniel, Mindy Misener, Brooke Pickrell, and Chris Ridgard for their friendships and conversations, which have stretched beyond Ann Arbor. In California, I thank Greg Chanis and Polly Chandler — for the hikes, rangy conversations, and new sense of belonging.

For the friends that feel like family: David Ward and Joseph Ward; Angela Watrous; Jack Hartrich; Anastasia Barnett Ford; Stephen Hitchcock and Kendall Cox; Lilah Hegnauer Byers and Tony Byers; Jennifer Chang and Evan Rhodes. Fellow travelers, whether we have known each other for three or thirty years. I have also loved watching how the arrivals of Norah Ford,

Phinizy Hitchcock, Esther and Joseph Byers, and Henry Rhodes-Chang have enriched the living and loving of these already beloved friends. Lilah's texts from Massachusetts made the isolation in California feel less so. Esther's drawing of us flying on a kite to California reminded me to imagine at a distance with others and not only write about others' imaginings.

My very large family has filled me with large amounts of love. I thank in particular my aunt Jeanette for her attentiveness, and the Chapman and Diener families for their love, humor, and dedication to debating ideas. My life is fuller and better thanks to Mark and Janet Chapman; Kathryn and Patrick Diener, and their children Joseph, Charlie, Sophia, and Louis; Michael and Caitlin Chapman, and their daughter Ella; John Chapman; and Peter Chapman. I thank John in particular for a breathtaking time in Yosemite, and Peter for enriching two of our Ann Arbor summers with his presence.

During my five years in Ann Arbor, both of my grandmothers died. Cledith Hansen wrote and recited poetry throughout her life. Her "My Church By The Tree" remains a standard for me. Florence Walsh Hecker and her radiant smile made living feel like a celebration. She raised seven children, loved musicals, and never stopped delighting in language, even when macular degeneration deprived her of reading. I wish I could share this dissertation with them in person.

My brother, Andrew, reminded me to see the work as a kind of play. I admire and learn from his courage in making art with and for others. Even though he lives in SoCal, this NorCal resident couldn't be prouder of him.

I thank my cat, Theodora, for adopting us five years ago. Her creativity, belief in her own autonomy, and loving headbutts have made all the days and late nights occasions for happiness.

Will Hansen and Judy Hecker Hansen, from Indiana and Louisiana, modeled loving ideas and books, valuing learning, and dedicating themselves in service to their students, colleagues,

friends, siblings, parents, neighbors, and children. My dad first got me to love maps and Atlases; my mom sent me images of *Evangeline* placards from Nova Scotia. Even though they are not named beyond these opening notes, they are everywhere in and behind these pages.

In North Carolina, Virginia, Michigan, and California, in the southern hemisphere, the Mediterranean, and the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, Joe Chapman has made a home with me. I return the words he first wrote out for me over twelve years ago: "...I am by no means standing still. I have my whole life in it."

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Abstract

Transatlantic Vividness: Imagining at a Distance in Nineteenth-Century Poetry explores “the vivid” as a vernacular aesthetic category central to transatlantic Anglo-American poetics in the long nineteenth century. Grounded in Hume’s theory of vivacity, vividness is a peculiar kind of realism that accounts for readers ascribing the same force and reality to descriptions as they do to objects in the phenomenal world. To describe a poem as vivid is to claim that the distance between the world and its representation has been undone. In poetry that circulated widely on both sides of the Atlantic, we see how the heightened, unrealistic description of geographically distant places allegorized the distance between the reader and the page so as to turn that deficit into an asset. Often dismissed as idealized, these poetic descriptive styles in fact make visible a nineteenth-century desire: to imagine being affected, as if physically, by a poem.

Each chapter focuses on a distinct form of vividness, traced within a set of once-popular poems and their reception histories: *Gertrude of Wyoming* (1809) by Thomas Campbell, *Zóphiël; or, the Bride of Seven* (1833) by Maria Gowen Brooks, American responses to poems by Percy Bysshe Shelley, and *Poems of Places* (c.1876-1879) collected by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Imagined at a distance and set in exotic locations (“the East,” the Caribbean islands, colonial North America, the U. S. South), these poems produce verisimilar effects without a commitment to realistic description. Reading the poems and nineteenth-century readings of the poems, the dissertation fashions a fourfold system for analyzing vividness as inaccuracy, as amplified

temporality, as luminosity, and as reference. Both the introduction and epilogue feature poems by Lucy Larcom in order to reflect on past and future possibilities of “vivid” reading. The dissertation draws on a range of methods—primarily historical poetics, aesthetics, and transatlantic studies, but also reception studies, book history, affect theory and phenomenology—in order to explore the aesthetic and extra-aesthetic implications of vividness as a historical concept and theoretical category.

Introduction: Transatlantic Vividness

Distinguishing the Vivid

When we in the twenty-first century describe a poem as conveying a “sense of place,” we typically mean that the poem communicates aspects of a personally experienced, intimately known locality through precise observation. But in the nineteenth-century many people describe reading poems set in geographically distant, exoticized, and aesthetically defamiliarized places as affecting them on the level of the senses, as if the page had transmitted the effects of the place itself. They do this regardless of whether they or the poet had first-hand experience of the place, and regardless of whether the language used to describe Cuba seems particular to Cuba, or whether it is the same language used to describe ancient Egypt or Virginia. Further, many readers describe these poems and their readings of them with a language of impressions—not as in “impressionistic,” but as in “an effect produced by external force . . . on the senses or mind.”¹ This nineteenth-century discourse of poetic descriptions making physical impressions carries within it the legacy of empiricist epistemology, which suggests we form ideas through our sensory impressions of the world. As Hume insists, an idea or representation can never be quite as bright, forceful, steady, or vivid as an object we encounter through our senses. This distinction and the possibilities opened by its imaginative undoing allow a nineteenth-century aesthetic category—the vivid—to emerge.

¹ "impression, n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, September 2016. Web. 15 October 2016.

Beginning with Hume, vividness names a historical aesthetic category describing artworks to which readers ascribe the same force and reality as they do to objects in the phenomenal world. To respond to a poem in the language of vividness is to claim that the distance between the world and its representation has been undone. Since vividness denotes a quality of reading as much as a quality in writing, this category is constructed through reception as much as production. As we will see, nineteenth-century Anglo-American poets, readers, and critics persistently turn to poems set in geographically distant places to allegorize the distance between the reader and the page. In these poems geographical distance stands in for aesthetic distance, by which I mean the reader's disinterested approach to literature due to the recognized difference between the reader's daily life and the autonomous world of the page. Surprisingly, even as these poems focus on geographical distance, they produce an effect of aesthetic immediacy.² When readers feel passionately involved with a poem, as if they have entered the world of the text or the text has entered their world, they imagine not only the aesthetic distance but the ontological distance between themselves and the page as undone. By "ontological distance," I mean the distinction between the place in which one reads (such as a grotto, library, region, or century) and where one feels one *is* while one reads. We tend to think of these "places" as existing on separate planes. But in tracing the relationship between poetic representations of geographical distance, aesthetic immediacy, and the undoing of ontological distance, we see instead a way of thinking of these "places" as existing on the same plane so that,

² See David Marshall, *The Frame of Art: Fictions of Aesthetic Experience* (2005), especially pp. 2-5, for an account of the standard critical narrative of aesthetic disinterestedness and how this narrative fails to account for eighteenth-century fictions' representations of extravagant aesthetic experience. Marshall argues that an eighteenth-century aesthetic perspective produced "not the separation of the realm of art but rather the blurring of the boundaries between the realm of art and whatever is defined in opposition to art: nature, reality, real life" (4). I am deeply indebted to Marshall's argument. For recent work grappling with distance as a general aesthetic problem, and the ways in which what seems distant can feel proximate, see also Kevis Goodman, *Georgic Modernity and British Romanticism: Poetry and the Mediation of History* (Cambridge UP, 2004) and Jonathan Kramnick's "An Aesthetics and Ecology of Presence," *European Romantic Review* Vol. 26, No. 3 (2015): 315-327.

like the part/whole relationships described via metonym, they are undeniably linked, locked in relation. Whether or not readers actually believed this, we must follow David Marshall's suggestion to "consider what was at stake in fantasies of aesthetic experience."³ I seek to understand the historical conditions and stakes of a specific fantasy: the fantasy of being affected, as if physically, by a poem. Vividness shows us that descriptions of geographical places that are unknown and that could not be known as described may nonetheless enable a feeling of intimacy between the aesthetic and readers' daily lives.

Lucy Larcom's "Bermoothes" exemplifies this frequent nineteenth-century coupling of real geographical places and heightened aesthetic representations. The poem, first published in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, draws on myths of Atlantis and *The Tempest* as well as geographically accurate natural history to describe the islands for US, and particularly New England, readers. Larcom had traveled to Bermuda earlier that year, and in her poem she marks shifts from description based on imagination to description based on memory.⁴ Yet, even as these descriptions of a real place draw on her actual visit, what Larcom presents as most striking about

³Ibid., 14.

⁴ For a thorough history of Bermuda's maritime communities and colonial economies, see Michael J. Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade: Bermuda, Bermudians, and the Maritime Atlantic World, 1680-1783* (Chapel Hill: U. of NC Press, 2010), especially the chapter on the Somers Islands Company, including the wreck of the *Sea Venture* in 1609, and later sections exploring the American Revolution's impact on Bermuda. Bermuda's colonial economy originally relied on tobacco, but after a collapse in tobacco crops in the 1620s and 1630s, the colony switched to shipbuilding (Bermudian cedar was revered for ships) and maritime expansion (Jarvis). Salt-raking emerged as another important economy in the early eighteenth-century (Jarvis), and nineteenth-century readers might have known something about the brutal salt-raking conditions from Mary Prince's *The History of Mary Prince* (1831). Belletristic essays of the 1870s, when "Bermoothes" was published, emphasize the climate and natural history. In 1877, Major-General J. H. Lefroy's *Memorial of the Discovery and Early Settlement of the Bermudas or Somers Islands, 1515-1865* was published, and received notice in periodicals on both sides of the Atlantic. It was not uncommon for periodical articles to reference the islands as "the still vex'd Bermoothes," or to mention the *Sea Venture*'s wreck as the source for *The Tempest*. See for example "Bermuda," *Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine*, vol. 7, no. 2 (Aug. 1871): 138; and "The Bermuda Islands," *The Ladies' Repository; a Monthly Periodical, Devoted to Literature, Art and Religion* 31 (Sept. 1871): 172. The latter anticipates Larcom's poem and emphasizes how Bermuda is conveniently close to the US while making one feel that one is in an entirely new world: "It seems strange ... that there should be a cluster of islands resting on the bosom of the Atlantic, like a set of emerald gems on sapphire seas—so singularly beautiful, so pleasant to be visited, so salubrious in climate, so comparatively nigh to principal ports of the United States coast—and yet these islands be almost a *terra incognita* to the citizens of the United States" (172).

Bermuda is how it seems unreal—how being there seems to confirm the reality of mythic and literary places. Here are the first four stanzas:

Under the eaves of a Southern sky,
Where the cloud-roof bends to the ocean-floor,
Hid in lonely seas, the Bermoothes, lie,—
An emerald cluster that Neptune bore
Away from the covetous earth-gods' sight,
And placed in a setting of sapphire light.

Prospero's realm, and Miranda's isles,
Floating to music of Ariel
Upon fantasy's billow, that glows and smiles
Flushing response to the lovely spell,—
Tremulous color and outline seem
Lucent as glassed in a life-like dream.

And away and afar as in dreams we drift
Glimmer the blossoming orange groves;
And the dolphin-tints of the waters shift,
And the angel-fish through the pure lymph moves
Like the gleam of a rainbow; and soft clouds sweep
Over isle and wave like the wings of sleep.

Deepens the dream into memory now:
The straight roads cut through the cedar hills,
The coral cliffs, and the roofs of snow,
And the crested cardinal-bird, that trills
A carol clear as the ripple of red
He made in the air as he flashed overhead. ... (ll.1-24)

Larcom directs us to notice how her dream “[d]eepens ... into memory now,” but she refuses to draw a firm line between the two. This is not because Larcom’s descriptions are “wrong”—in fact, her poem attends closely to Bermudian flora, such as mangroves, cedars, and maidenhair ferns. But even precise natural history is rendered in the rapturous language of gemstones, shimmers, and mirage. To enter a real cave is to see “[c]orridors zigzag from light to light.” The tide is “a shimmer of beryl” that can change to “topaz” or “shade[] into delicate opaline bands / Dreamily lapsing on pale pink sands.” Even a line such as “away and afar as in dreams we drift /

Glimmer the blossoming orange groves,” which emphasizes that both orange groves and dreams gleam at a distance from *Harper’s* readers’ daily lives, amplifies its low-intensity gleam by stacking other gleaming things—dolphin-tinted water, angelfish, rainbows—together. This real place is infused with heightened aesthetic features, a stylistic hallmark of the vivid. A writer for *The Literary World* described Larcom’s poem as “inspired by the semi-tropical scenery and historic associations of ‘the still vexed Bermoothes’.”⁵ This writer’s use of Shakespeare’s phrase in *The Tempest* (I.2.230) to name the Bermudas suggests that Larcom is as inspired by a work of literature as she was by the scenery and associations of the Bermuda islands—and that other nineteenth-century readers understood this.

Larcom invites such a reading with her title and when she devotes much of her second stanza and some of her language (corals, pearls, Nereids) to *The Tempest*. When we compare Larcom’s poem to Shakespeare’s play, a helpful contrast emerges for distinguishing vividness. In *The Tempest*, the island is a place of wonder and a place of labor, ambiguously located in either the Mediterranean or the New World. Prospero claims to “discover” the island, enslaving both Ariel and Caliban. Throughout the play he shifts characters’ perceptions of the world around them, using acts of magic frequently described as temporary misperceptions rather than as lingering mergers between the “real” and the “imagined.” While the opening dramatizes a shipwreck as real before having Prospero demystify the scene, subsequent scenes include the audience in Prospero’s machinations. Thus, at play’s end Gonzalo’s “senses” can “chase the ignorant fumes that mantle / Their clearer reason” and “[b]elieve things certain” again (V.1.66-68; 125). Even factoring in performance and the ways in which “*The Tempest* refuses to make clear whether an event has Prospero’s art behind it,” there is little in the play that suggests

⁵ “World Biographies,” *The Literary World; a Monthly Review of Current Literature* 11.9 (Apr 24, 1880): 140.

dwelling on these confusions in the way that Larcom does.⁶ European characters may come to the island, but there is little traffic represented between the two places. In order to return to Milan and re-assume state power, Prospero must relinquish his magical powers. As Sebastian acknowledges regarding Tunis and Naples: “twixt which regions / There is some space” (II.1.255-56). For characters in *The Tempest*, such spaces or distances can be exploited, endured, or maintained, but they are rarely treated as invitations to intimacy.

Larcom’s poem raises similar problematics using a different set of aesthetic strategies. In hearing “an unchronicled sorrow,” Larcom seems to step inside *The Tempest*, hearing Ariel, as much as she gestures towards Bermuda’s colonial history. The confusion in the second stanza between the dreaming “I,” the island, and Ariel’s song—and with which entity is “[f]lushing [in] response” to whom or what—bespeaks an intimate connection between the “I,” the place, and the play. Larcom neither entirely ignores nor seriously investigates the “unchronicled sorrow” she senses, but dwells on its aesthetic effects: “A musical mystery, filling the air / With its endless pathos of vague despair” (ll. 95-96). The endlessness of the pathos is facilitated by its mixture of vagueness—here an aesthetic virtue—and intensity. She does not, in other words, step into the masterful role of Prospero but rather like Miranda or even Gonzalo seems affected by the wonders of the island. Larcom finds heightened aesthetic experiences through the place even as the place allows her to describe having sensory perceptions of a literary text. Hovering between memory and fantasy allows her to elaborate on fantastic effects, not debunk them. As readers we are invited to register aesthetically consistent effects emanating from the flora and fauna: the redness of the cardinal, the pomegranates burning, coral, pearls planted by Nereids who exist in the same world as cardinals and pomegranates. Drowning one’s book wouldn’t do much good

⁶ Peter Holland, “Introduction,” xxxiv. William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed. Holland, The Pelican Shakespeare (Penguin Putnam Inc., 1999).

here because the physical world and the aesthetic keep “[d]reamily lapsing” into each other. The Bermudas in “Bermoothes” are a place recognizably part of the world and yet also part of a literary text that reflects on its literariness.

In this dissertation, we will encounter multiple geographies that appear in some way fantastic. Like “Bermoothes” they will present real places as if they were phantasmagorical. We will also find throughout this study that the historical category of vividness and various histories of imperial power cross paths. Like *The Tempest*, the poems under investigation here display or critically reflect upon imperialist and colonialist desires. Further, their representational strategies have been powerfully read as obfuscating, exoticizing, and as a means of bringing distant, different, or othered places and people under cognitive, textual, and disciplinary control.⁷ For example, Saree Makdisi’s *Romantic Imperialism: Universal Empire and the Culture of Modernity* offers a nuanced study of how romanticism imagines alternatives to the modernity it helps to create. Makdisi reads the bowers and “spots of time” that abound in romantic poetry as offering an optic onto possible sites of anti-modernity, typically in exoticized locations such as the East or the Scottish Highlands.⁸ Focusing on the co-constituting developments of romanticism, on the one hand, and British imperialism and global capitalism, on the other, Makdisi attends to poetic representations of “discovery” in sites of cultural alterity and to how

⁷For additional, select scholarship on how representations of distant places contribute to British imperial and colonial projects, see Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Vintage Books, 1979); Saree Makdisi, *Making England Western: Occidentalism, Race, and Imperial Culture* (U. of Chicago Press, 2014); Tim Fulford and Peter J. Kitson, eds., *Romanticism and Colonialism: Writing and Empire, 1780-1830* (Cambridge UP, 2005); and Elaine Freedgood, “Fictional Settlements: Footnotes, Metalepsis, the Colonial Effect,” *New Literary History* 41 (2010): 393-411, and “Hetero-Ontologicality, or Against Realism,” *English Studies in Africa* 57:1 (2014): 92-100. For studies of the nineteenth-century U.S. and empire, see Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Harvard UP, 2002), and Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease, eds., *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Duke UP, 1993). For a longer historical arc, see Anna Brickhouse, *The Unsettling of America: Translation, Interpretation, and the Story of Don Luis de Velasco, 1560-1945* (Oxford UP, 2015). Scholarship relevant to individual places appears within each chapter as well.

⁸“The romantic discovery of such spots of time must be understood dialectically, not as a reaction but rather as a mutual process of constitution through which both the inside and the outside of the spot of time emerge in relationship to each other, neither privileged with ontological priority” (Makdisi 16).

many of these discoveries “violently ... ignore what was once there” (22). In “Transatlantic Vividness,” I attend on a chapter by chapter basis to the geopolitical power dynamics within and surrounding the poems under consideration. For the purposes of historicizing vividness, however, I focus less on acts of discovering or violently ignoring real places, and more on descriptions of the romantic bowers and idealized geographies themselves. I treat the fact that the poems are “not even trying to be accurate” in their descriptions of places and their local, indigenous, enslaved, or exiled inhabitants as an intellectual-historical problem, investigating all that such a lack of investment in accuracy made available for nineteenth-century readers and writers.⁹ In order to understand the full range of aesthetic and extra-aesthetic stakes for such poems and their reception, we must grapple with the weirdness of their descriptions of real places.

In excavating and analyzing this literary historical problem, my project contributes primarily to recent discussions about the return to aesthetics in literary studies. While for some this return amounts to a defense of aesthetics, for others it involves using critical methodologies to elucidate “uncritical” modes of reading, such as enchantment—a mode of reading with obvious relevance to “Bermoothes.”¹⁰ The pressure such studies wrestle with, implicitly or explicitly, is how to “return” to aesthetics without abandoning politics.¹¹ Dorri Beam models one

⁹ Said, *Orientalism*, 71.

¹⁰ Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just*; Felski, *Uses of Literature* (Blackwell Publishing, 2008); Sarah Kareem, *Eighteenth-Century Fiction and the Reinvention of Wonder* (2014); Colin Jager, *Unquiet Things: Secularism in the Romantic Age* (Harvard UP, 2015). Both Kareem and Jager engage Charles Taylor’s notion of enchantment and disenchantment, or the related notions of porous and buffered selves in *A Secular Age* (Harvard UP, 2007). My use of “uncritical” refers to Michael Warner’s “Uncritical Reading,” 13-38, in *Polemic Critical or Uncritical*, ed. Jane Gallop, Essays from the English Institute (Routledge, 2004). See also Marjorie Levinson, “What Is New Formalism?” *PMLA* Vol. 122, No. 2 (Mar. 2007): 558-569.

¹¹ This is the problem at which Cindy Weinstein and Christopher Looby ultimately arrive in their introduction to *American Literature’s Aesthetic Dimensions*: how to attend to literature’s “aesthetic dimensions” without abandoning political critique and/or subordinating aesthetics to politics. They arrive at this articulation by a different route than Felski: by accounting first for how ideology critique energized Americanists scholarship and recovering ways in which ideology critique never truly abandoned the aesthetic. See Weinstein and Looby, “Introduction,” 1-30, in *American Literature’s Aesthetic Dimensions*, eds. Weinstein and Looby (Columbia University Press, 2012).

approach to this problem in *Style, Gender, and Fantasy in Nineteenth-Century American Women's Writing*, a book that has significantly nourished my project. In Beam's account, American women writers cultivated a "highly wrought" style of excess, ornament, and extravagance as an "aesthetico-political code" to reflect critically on the gendered discourse of romanticism, and to make present to readers "a mode of pleasure as a way of being that is not rooted in gendered anatomy" (1; 15; 6). This "highly wrought" style offers readers "a new world in language with the political urge to provoke social change outside of the text as well" (29). Beam's work opens up new ways of reading and thinking about women's ornamental writing. It does so, however, by valuing the aesthetic insofar as the aesthetic seeks to effect political and social change. I depart from this approach, focusing instead on how the vivid mediates between imaginative and socio-political realms. I understand vividness both as an aesthetic style that enables thinking of the overtly imagined as real and as an aesthetic style that enables thinking of real places as sources of aesthetic effects. I draw here on Rei Terada's and Theo Davis's recent work, which reappraises the discourse of "mere" appearance. Whether looking, as Terada does, at anti-social investments in fleeting visual phenomena, or, as Davis does, at individual, highly contingent acts of noticing, both studies see in the glittery, beautiful, and fleeting neither an escapist nor a meaning-making impulse, but an invitation to "noncoercive relation" between the individual critical mind and the world.¹² They unflinchingly remind us that aesthetics need not be

¹² Terada, *Looking Away: Phenomenality and Dissatisfaction, Kant to Adorno* (Harvard UP, 2009); Davis, *Ornamental Aesthetics: The Poetry of Attending in Thoreau, Dickinson, & Whitman* (Oxford UP, 2016). In Terada's account of phenomenophilia, "the most transient perceptual objects come to be loved because only they seem capable of noncoercive relation" (4). While "noncoercive" fairly applies to the relationships between humans and objects in Davis as well, (a) Terada's phenomenophiles delay entering into relation with the given world while Davis's authors come into relation with the world through their contingent acts of noticing, and (b) Davis would emphasize that "noncoercive" does not mean ornamentation is a gentle or unaffecting relationship. As her closing sentence states: "Ornamentation is both an irritant and a tonic to a mind that wants the world to follow its own logic, or to fit in some final way, and it thus invites us to a freedom that doesn't begin by negating what is present" (193).

instrumentalized, referential, or even representational in order to illuminate historically-specific problems of feeling, thinking, and being in the world.

Critical work invoking a “return” to enchantment typically claims that literary studies is returning from the disenchantment of ideology critique, including new historicism. Indeed, my positioning in relation to Makdisi might seem to uphold this pattern.¹³ Yet Stephen Greenblatt’s “The Touch of the Real” also frames new historicism as a means of re-enchantment: reading this way we can encounter intellectually and affectively electrifying traces of everyday life within literary and non-literary representations. He explains the stakes of his method as follows: “If it is only a matter of rhetoric—the effect of what the ancient rhetoricians called *enargeia*, or vividness—then only a reality-effect is conjured and nothing more” (20).¹⁴ As I argue, however, vividness is not “only a matter of rhetoric.” It has a history, like Greenblatt’s wonderful attention to anecdotes of ghost sightings—or his attention to Caliban’s language in relation to colonialist tropes.¹⁵ What’s more, vividness also concerns a relationship between the literary and everyday life. But where Greenblatt establishes a dialectic between the real and the imaginative so that we as historically distant readers might feel affected both by history and by Shakespeare, nineteenth-century readers had their own, historically-specific way of working through a related desire. They turn to vividness, a particular aesthetic, to mediate between aesthetics and reference to the

¹³ Looby and Weinstein also model resisting the stark binary through their attention to evidence of the aesthetic in Sacvan Bercovitch’s and Jane Tompkins’s scholarship, for example. However, in their introduction they ultimately reinforce the idea that aesthetics and the socio-political exist in a dialectical relationship (9-10; 29-30) rather than modeling other ways in which aesthetics might relate to the social, historical, political, or ideological. The introduction is useful both for the disciplinary history it impressively assembles and for the ways in which its aspirations are in tension with the editors’ modes of discussing the aesthetic. Again, see Levinson, “What is New Formalism?” (2007), who confirms, “normative new formalism’s claim that contextual reading sets its face against the pleasures of the text falls flat when tested against the likes of Stephen Greenblatt and Jerome McGann” (561).

¹⁴ Greenblatt, “The Touch of the Real,” *Representations*, No. 59, Special Issue: The Fate of “Culture”: Geertz and Beyond (Summer 1997): 14-29.

¹⁵ *Learning to Curse: Essays in Modern English Culture* (Routledge, 1990).

world. As we saw with “Bermoothes,” readers of these long poems set in geographically distant places are eager not for the touch of the real but for the touch of the vivid.

My title, “Transatlantic Vividness,” underscores this connection between geographical distance and aesthetic immediacy. We shall see that vividness itself relies on distance in order to produce or suggest an experience of contact or closeness. My title indicates a particular, historically-specific relationship between distance (the transatlantic) and closeness or intimacy (vividness). It also pairs two different kinds of distance (material and conceptual), doubling down on distance as the writers and readers of this study will. The poems and reading practices under consideration here meanwhile participate in a specifically “transatlantic vividness” in three ways. They use geographical distance to stand in for aesthetic distance. They rely on transatlantic readerships and publishing markets as well as on aesthetic theories and discourse that circulated transatlantically. And they favor geographic elsewheres, relative to England and the United States, as grounds on which to represent intimacy between lavish, lustrous descriptions and the real. My chapters center on poems by Thomas Campbell, Maria Gowen Brooks, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. These poems are set in colonial North America, Caribbean islands, “the East,” and the U.S. South. While many of the texts I read, such as Campbell’s “Gertrude of Wyoming” (1809) or Elinor Wylie’s *The Orphan Angel* (1926), incorporate the Atlantic world into their narratives, the phrase can also apply to poems such as Shelley’s *Alastor* (1815) due to the ways in which geographical distance and description stands in for how the aesthetic might be part of, in touch with, or actually touching readers’ lives. Deirdre Lynch has argued that as literature became an abstraction understood as distinct from other kinds of writing, this separation produced not just a professionalization but a personalization of reading literature (12). In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries

this created conditions in which readers had to negotiate new “intimacy expectations” from their reading.¹⁶ The concept of vividness sheds light on one such way in which readers and writers tried to make sense of their evolving intimacy expectations with print.

Vividness and Vivacity in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

We tend to use the word vivid as if its meaning is self-evident, but the concept of vividness also has a history. Elaine Scarry’s theory of perceptual mimesis offers a radiant vision of how literature infuses its characters, events, objects, and locales with similar degrees of vivacity to perceptual objects. As Scarry and the many citations to her work reveal, there is a recognized value in expanding our understanding of how literature comes alive, making us feel as if we are not reading but perceiving. Scarry’s examples, however, rely on realistic images many readers would have little difficulty “picturing”: skating, spinning on a heel, walking outside, the bend of a candle flame, drinking from a glass, waving a scarf. Drawn from canonical works of literature, they associate perceptual mimesis with a particular taste. This in turn ends up suggesting that any “good” work of literature will fit Scarry’s theory. As someone working to read long nineteenth-century poems that refer to real places yet participate in conventions more readily aligned with the landscapes of romance and fantasy, I want to know what vivified these once-popular poems for readers. How, for example, might a nineteenth-century reader have explained the effects of a description of jewel-encrusted dolphins, autumn air filled with a “purple mist / Like a vaporous amethyst,” and a cluster of Louisiana trees resembling a ship that could sail away?¹⁷ Even the “vividness of the palm [tree],” one of Scarry’s key examples, has a

¹⁶ Lynch, *Loving Literature: A Cultural History* (U. of Chicago Press, 2015).

¹⁷ These examples are drawn from Brooks’s *Zophiël*, Percy Shelley’s “Lines Written among the Euganean Hills” (ll.287-88), and Longfellow’s *Evangeline*, poems taken up in chapters two, three, and four, respectively.

history, as we have glimpsed in Larcom's poem and as we will see in chapter one.¹⁸ Scarry's reading methods and terms point to a gap in our understanding of how to read popular nineteenth-century poems that were once described as "vivid."¹⁹

In order to understand how such patently unrealistic descriptions, such as the Nereids unfurling purple fans and building coral reefs in "Bermoothes," could generate a strong enough aesthetic force to feel real, we must turn to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century uses of vivacity and vividness.²⁰ Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* and *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* introduce vivacity as a quality that can be used to distinguish between ideas and sensory impressions.²¹ Initially, vivacity seems to mark the primacy empiricists awarded to sensory impressions, for Hume states that impressions will always be more vivid than mental images:

These faculties [memory and imagination] may mimic or copy the perceptions of the senses; but they never can entirely reach the force and vivacity of the original sentiment. The utmost we say of them, even when they operate with greatest vigour, is, that they represent their object in so lively a manner, that we could *almost* say we feel or see it: But, except the mind be disordered by disease or madness, they never can arrive at such a pitch of vivacity, as to render these perceptions altogether undistinguishable. All the colours of poetry, however splendid, can never paint natural objects in such a manner as to make the description be taken for a real landscape. The most lively thought is still inferior to the dullest sensation. (*Enquiry*, 2:1)²²

¹⁸ See Richard Ligon's enraptured and gendered description of the Royal Palm in *A true & exact history of the island of Barbadoes...* (1673; 1970): "...for I believe there is not a more Royal or Magnificent tree growing on the earth, for beauty and largeness not to be parallell'd; and excells [sic.], so abundantly in those two properties and perfections, all the rest, as if you had ever seen her, you could not but have fallen in love with her; I'm sure I was extreamly [sic.] much, and upon good and antique Authority: For if Xerxes strange Lydian love the Plantane tree, was lov'd for her age, why may not I love this for her largeness? I believe here are more women lov'd for their largeness than their age, if they have beauty for an addition, as this hath; ... I will deliver her dimensions as near truth as I can, and for her beauty much will arise out of that" (75).

¹⁹ Scarry, *Dreaming by the Book* (FSG, 1999); *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton UP, 1999), 17.

²⁰ Hume and the eighteenth century do not invent vividness. These terms draw on the classical rhetorical trope *enargeia*, a "detailed verbal description that is intended to create a picture of a place, person or action in the mind of the listener" (Walser 325). See Walzer; Webb and Weller; Marshall 41; and Jajdelska, et al., 435.

²¹ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, vol. 1, eds. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007). Hereafter abbreviated "T" and cited parenthetically by section and paragraph numbers.

²² Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter Millican (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 12 (E 2.1). Hereafter abbreviated "E" and cited parenthetically by section and paragraph numbers.

Hume, however, goes on to establish not only a law but also a loophole for vivacity. Even as he claims that ideas will always be “less forcible and lively” than impressions, he also indicates that this distinction might be undone.²³ The loophole appears when Hume discusses how we are able to believe in objects not immediately near us. Belief, defined as a manner of conception discerned through feeling, as an “act of the mind, which renders realities, *or what is taken for such*, more present to us than fictions” (*E* 5.12, emphasis mine), undoes the fundamental intensity-difference between impressions and ideas. It converts or “raise[s] up a simple idea to an equality with our impressions, and bestow[s] on it a like influence on the passions . . . making an idea approach an impression in force and vivacity” (*T* 10.3).²⁴ We are left with an understanding of belief as an especially vivid feeling within the mind that accompanies whatever is real and true. Hume’s “or what is taken for such” most immediately registers an idealism resulting from skepticism about knowing reality beyond our perceptions. However, his qualification allows for ideas that produce the same force as impressions, and acknowledges our placing belief in fictions as much as in realities.

Crucially, vivacity marks not just the difference but the *distance* between ideas and sensory impressions, for Hume relies on a spatial conception of the mind. Distance is both the problem his philosophy must address and his means of conceptualizing the problem. Hume states his desire to create a “mental geography” (*E* 1.13), relying on the figure of geography to think through the relationships and scopes of different mental faculties. More significantly, he

²³ See Marshall, *Frame of Art*, 47-8; Marina Frasca-Spada, “Quixotic Confusions and Hume’s Imagination,” 161-186, in *Impressions of Hume*, eds. Frasca-Spada and P. J. E. Kail (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); and Katherine Ding, “‘Searching after the Splendid Nothing’: Gothic Epistemology and the Rise of Fictionality,” *ELH* 80.2 (Summer 2013), 551-52, for other acknowledgements of how Hume works against his own separation between impressions and ideas.

²⁴ For an argument that our interpretations of Hume’s force and vivacity must keep them consciously available and must “allow impressions and ideas to be distinguished” by seeing that force and vivacity produce “a sense of presentedness” (86), not representations, see Francis W. Dauer, “Force and Vivacity in the Treatise and the Enquiry,” *Hume Studies* Vol. 25 Nos. 1-2 (April/Nov. 1999): 83-99. Web.

describes the force of an idea as directly proportional to its proximity to a sensory impressions, explaining that “‘tis evident this vivacity must gradually decay in proportion to the distance” from the original sensory impression (*T* 13.3). Hume conceptualizes the train of associations in the mind by focusing on how belief results from overcoming distance. Hume’s examples frequently revolve around how we can believe in a friend who has traveled away from us, or how we can believe in and recognize a voice we hear in another room. Hume’s theory of imagination “reproduces impressions so that we can think about things in their absence,” or, as I will be emphasizing, so that we can think about things at a distance and different from ourselves.²⁵

Thinking spatially about the possibility of belief-at-a-distance also matters in terms of reading. Hume insists that epic poems ought to cover less time so as to keep the connections between their described events close in space as well as causality. “[A]n epic poet,” writes Hume, “must not trace the causes to any great distance” in order to “preserve[] the affections still in the same channel and direction” (*E* 3.12). If the writer does not lessen the distance between events, s/he risks losing the reader’s absorption, that “transfusion of the passions” they should be facilitating (*E* 3.12). Hume also allows that reading about distant places might enable us to create vivid ideas of those distant places even without visiting them. Hume acknowledges his own “idea of *Rome*” as being more vivid than an idea of the imagination alone, despite being based only on “the conversation and books of travellers and historians” (*T* 9.4).²⁶ And he also grants imaginary or “feign’d” places a certain amount of vividness through relations: Hume allows that poets who wish to describe the Elysian fields can do so, vividly, by attending to “a beautiful meadow or garden” (*T*9.5). Even though we can never know how the Elysian fields do or do not resemble this meadow, and even though we know that the Elysian fields are not contiguous to

²⁵ Mary Warnock, *Imagination*, 15.

²⁶ See Frasca-Spada, 171-75, for a reading of the different vivacities of a remembered Paris and an imagined New Jerusalem in Hume’s *Treatise*.

this meadow, our idea of them may be enlivened through a relation of cause and effect enhanced by one of the other main relations. On the vivacity spectrum, despite the fact that distance poses problems to absorptive reading experiences, one's ideas of distant places can acquire enough vividness—through reading—to enable belief.

Hume's terms were part of a broader eighteenth-century discourse regarding the vivacity of mental images, and this discourse circulated transatlantically into the nineteenth-century. It circulated in particular through Scottish common sense philosophy, rhetoric, oratory, and belles-lettres textbooks, such as Lord Kames's *Elements of Criticism* (1762), Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783), and George Campbell's *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776). Edward Cahill names "college curricula, imported and reprinted books, and domestic periodical criticism" as the three major vehicles through which aesthetic theory circulated (25).²⁷ Still, it is important to note that it was not just theories of the beautiful or recognizable keywords such as "taste," but the conceptual language of vividness itself that moved through this transatlantic print culture. Different writers found vivacity useful for different ends. Whereas Hume had been primarily interested in vivacity as a way to distinguish between first ideas and impressions, then belief and nonbelief, associationist theorists such as Kames and Archibald Alison dwelt more fully in the possibilities of Hume's "loophole of vivacity" than even Hume himself, abandoning any interest in the difference between "realities, or what is taken for such" and encouraging

²⁷ William Charvat, *The Origins of American Critical Thought, 1810-1835* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1936); Terence Martin, *The Instructed Vision: Scottish Common Sense Philosophy and the Origins of American Fiction* (New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1969). Charvat reports that there were at least 31 American editions of Kames and 56 of Blair, including abridged editions adapted for local schools (30-31). More recently, in *Liberty of the Imagination: Aesthetic Theory, Literary Form, and Politics in the Early United States* (U. Penn Press, 2012), Edward Cahill suggestively points out that the more general "transatlantic discourse of aesthetic theory ... gain[ed] in significance and complexity around the same time as the American colonial crisis in the 1760s" (12). See especially "Aesthetic Theory in Early National Print Culture," 21-34, in *Liberty*. For a meticulous, quantitative study of nineteenth-century college students' backgrounds, beliefs, and professions, a study which suggests how much local variation there might be to curriculum, see Colin B. Burke, *American Collegiate Populations: A Test of the Traditional View* (NYU Press, 1982).

readers to give themselves over entirely to the train of associations prompted by description.²⁸ For rhetoricians, vivid description enabled a speaker or writer to impress his audience in more ways than one, for “the more an idea resembled an impression in intensity or energy, the more believable and affecting it became.”²⁹ For example, book III of Campbell’s *Philosophy* focuses on “vivacity” as a quality of style “adapted to please the imagination, and consequently to awake and fix the attention.”³⁰

Even in textbooks and lectures that do not explicitly define or use the terms “vivacity” or “vividness,” the language of vivacity suffuses the work. Some authors such as Campbell take up vivacity explicitly while other authors describe comparable aesthetic states such as Kames’s “ideal presence.” Terms like “lively” and “liveliness” are most clearly serving synonymous roles to vividness and vivacity, but terms such as bold, striking, steady, and forceful also relate to the sense of converting language and its distant, unsteady ideas into near-sense impressions. These terms pervade these texts. Regardless of whether nineteenth-century readers and writers thought of Hume when they used the language of impressions or terms associated with vividness, and regardless of *what* they thought of Hume, the ways in which words such as “force,” “steadiness,” “vivacity,” “vividness,” “striking,” “glittering,” “bright,” and “dazzling” are used to describe aesthetic styles and aesthetic responses draw on this longer intellectual and aesthetic legacy. It is thus the very diffuseness of this discourse that makes it difficult to notice and worthy of our attention.³¹

²⁸ See Theo Davis, *Formalism, Experience, and the Making of American Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge UP, 2007) and Kerry Larson, *Imagining Equality in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Cambridge UP, 2008), regarding Kames, Alison, and the tendency of associations to move away from both subject and object.

²⁹ Gerald A. Hauser, “Empiricism, Description, and the New Rhetoric.” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* Vol. 5, No. 1 (Winter, 1972): 24-44; 28.

³⁰ George Campbell, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, ed. Lloyd Bitzer. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1988: 285.

³¹ In *Miles of Stare: Transcendentalism and the Problem of Literary Vision* (2014), Michelle Kohler makes a similar case for the discourse of literary vision, though her emphasis is on heterogeneity, contentiousness, and Foucauldian

In part because of this diffuseness, the vivid is both separable from and intertwined with more recognizable aesthetic categories and mental faculties, such as the sublime, the beautiful, the picturesque, wonder, fancy, and the exotic. The sublime in particular also relies on distance to produce its characteristic effects of awe and vastness, and its theorists frequently rely on descriptions of the natural world—such as The Alps or Niagara Falls—to articulate its effects on a spectator or reader. Fancy, the beautiful, and the picturesque also all have their own relationships to distance, and aspects of all the poems under consideration here might be fairly described as beautiful or fanciful. In *Zophiël*, for example, even as I read the poem in terms of vividness, descriptions of angels flying through a storm clearly evoke the sublime, just as Ione’s descriptions in *Prometheus Unbound* of seeing Power through her wings can be described as participating in not only the sublime but the vivid. At times I place special emphasis on vividness as a distinctive category. My aim in doing so is not to suggest that the vivid is categorically cordoned off from other well known aesthetics, but to insist on activating patterns in the poems and their reception that we might miss otherwise. The poems in this study all feature vast geographical and historical distances. They are written and read by people with little to no first-hand knowledge of the places being described. They are claimed to affect readers forcefully, as if impressing readers at the level of the senses. They exaggerate the overtly aesthetic qualities of their geographical descriptions. And, with the possible exception of Shelley’s poems, they have resisted being incorporated into dominant critical reading paradigms. In order to make sense of these recurrent aesthetic features, we need a sharply delineated concept of the vivid.³²

discourse formations so as to keep her project’s interest in literary vision distinct from arguments concerning unified countertraditions (7-11).

³² Vividness can be productively compared to the category of “wonder” and/or enchantment as well. See for example Mary Baine Campbell, *Wonder & Science: Imagining Worlds in Early Modern Europe* (Cornell University Press, 1999); Rita Felski, *Uses of Literature* (Blackwell Publishing, 2008); and Kareem, *Eighteenth-Century Fiction and the Reinvention of Wonder* (Oxford UP, 2014). Kareem’s account of wonder is most relevant to my own investigation of vividness since we both seek to get outside the binary of romance vs. realism. Kareem’s study,

To meet this challenge I draw on Sianne Ngai's argument about "vernacular aesthetic categories" and the insights they might provide to ongoing problems in aesthetic theory.³³ While Ngai's argument centers on our aesthetic categories—postmodern Western categories that reflect on late capitalism—her attention to a more variegated range of aesthetic styles and judgments can be productively adapted to our investigation of nineteenth-century readers' and writers' care for this distinct group of poems, for *their* aesthetic categories. Approaching vividness historically helps us not only to recognize the relationship between vividness and distance, but also to understand the extra-aesthetic stakes that Ngai insists are always bound up in aesthetic judgments.³⁴ "It is impossible," writes Ngai, "to grasp the full cultural significance of any aesthetic category" without linking assessments of style and assessments of value so that the critic can see how it is that texts "mak[e] it *seem as if* value judgments follow from factual ones."³⁵ Ngai makes this move to assert the usefulness of approaching minor aesthetic categories not only as styles but also as judgments.³⁶ In the chapters that follow, I focus on the way in which vividness as style tends to be associated by writers and readers with value-saturated descriptions of tropical, exotic, and/or distant geographies. Describing a poem as vivid reveals a desire to have the aesthetic exist and glimmer as a distanced and different part of the world, but as part of the world nonetheless, with all of the ideological embarrassments that this effect produces. Describing a poem as vivid also smuggles in the possibility of treating real places and

however, centers on understanding how wonder itself need not be opposed to disinterestedness or the real world, whereas I am more interested in why writers and readers *claim* that they have had a highly passionate and real encounter with their reading.

³³ See Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 2, and the section "Triviality," *ibid.*, 18-28.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 48-52.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 29; 41.

³⁶ For example "cute" may describe "a sensuous quality or appearance of objects," but it is also a judgment: "'cute' as a feeling-based evaluation or speech act, a particular way of communicating a complex mixture of feelings about an object to others and demanding that they feel the same" (Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 2).

persons *as if* they were imaginary.³⁷ This desire to have intense aesthetic experience belong to the world and the risk of treating real places as solely imagined are two examples of the vivid's extra-aesthetic stakes.

Transatlantic Poetics

Scholars of American literature have tended to approach geographical description or representations first and foremost as an index to national and geopolitical narratives. Paul Giles identifies as an enduring “conceptual problem[]” for the field the “self-perpetuating loop through which American writers were critically validated for being identifiably American” (22). This is certainly true when it comes to geographical and landscape descriptions. There is a persistent tendency among critics to seek poems that describe distinctly North American landscapes, or poets who clearly adapt British aesthetic traditions to produce categories such as the “American sublime.” This tendency persists in more subtle ways in recent work valuing aesthetic theories insofar as they are “homologous” with national political values and structures.³⁸ Here, aesthetic theory is not only “recovered” but is in a sense rescued by being shown to tell us something about the nation. This is not a problem per se, but it indicates a dominant and in many cases default framework. Scholarship such as Davis's or Meredith L. McGill's shows just how rich new accounts of literary nationalism can be when that nationalism is understood to be advanced through unexpected channels, such as notions of abstract experience, or through a transnational

³⁷ The term “smuggling” comes from Ngai, who takes it from Gérard Genette. See Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 40, and 258n149.

³⁸ Cahill, *Liberty of the Imagination*, 14.

literary marketplace. Nonetheless, Americanist scholarship still tends to value attention to aesthetics only insofar as those aesthetics ultimately reflect upon the nation.³⁹

I adopt instead a transatlantic framework and enter the vibrant field of nineteenth-century transatlantic poetry and poetics. I explore primarily a British-American transatlantic, though at times I work in an American-Caribbean-British nexus. I enter this field in order to expand our understanding of what geography figures in addition to physical places, nations, and geopolitics in nineteenth-century poems. Colleen Glenney Boggs interprets Noah Webster's 1828 Dictionary definition of "transatlantic" as follows:

The 'transatlantic' envisions a relationship to an always distant yet ever proximate other. 'Transatlantic' defines a location that is always elsewhere: it means 'being in America' only when one is not in America; when one is in America, it means being in Europe or Africa. . . . Only secondarily a geographical marker, it is therefore first and foremost a term that defines relationship. (222)⁴⁰

In "Transatlantic Vividness," I expand on this insight, asking: *how can that which is distant also be proximate?* I take up this question in terms of geography, aesthetics, and print culture.

The Atlantic as a space, place, and conceptual framework has been used to initiate and energize a wide variety of projects with varying methodologies and scales of analysis. Paul Gilroy argues for the centrality of racial slavery and diaspora in the creation of modernity, rethinking modernity within a circum-Atlantic context and theorizing black Atlantic culture as hybrid. Elisa Tamarkin, working within a more contained time period and national culture, reconsiders U.S. nationalism through Americans' affective investments in British culture in the aftermath of the American Revolution.⁴¹ More recently, Joseph Rezek relies on the space of the

³⁹ Giles, *The Global Remapping of American Literature* (Oxford UP: 2011), 22; Davis, *Formalism* (2007); McGill, *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834-1853* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

⁴⁰ Colleen Glenney Boggs, "Transatlantic Romanticism," 219-237, in *Transatlantic Literary Studies, 1660-1830*, eds. Eve Tavor Bennett and Susan Manning (Cambridge UP, 2012).

⁴¹ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Harvard UP, 1993); Elisa Tamarkin, *Anglophilia: Deference, Devotion, and Antebellum America* (U. of Chicago Press, 2008). For an influential method

Atlantic to argue for the centrality of metropolitan London in the transatlantic literary marketplace of the early nineteenth century. In Rezek's account, provincial writers' geographical distance from London manifests as an "aesthetic distance" as well—in other words, their shared set of aesthetic practices differ from the aesthetic practices of metropolitan writers and thus reveal their provincial status.⁴² Despite the obvious differences in these scholars' archives, periodizations, and constructions of the Atlantic, all three turn to an Atlantic world framework to reconceptualize forms of relation. Like these scholars, I adopt a transatlantic framework to unsettle assumed relationships between nation and culture. Unlike these scholars, I focus on making visible a set of nuanced relationships between readers and poems in particular.

That there is a field of nineteenth-century transatlantic poetics to join is thanks to the critical conversation initiated by *The Traffic in Poems: Nineteenth-Century Poetry and Transatlantic Exchange*, and especially to McGill's lucid introduction.⁴³ The essays in this volume cluster around three key findings: "the centrality of women poets ... and figures of women to transatlantic literary culture," structural asymmetries between British and American verse cultures, and the unusual temporalities introduced into literary histories traditionally conceived of as a "succession of styles" (3-5). My project builds on all three of these findings. I offer new understandings of individual poems, as well as of national and transnational traditions,

of classifying Atlantic studies projects according to geographical relationships (circum-, trans-, and cis-Atlantic), see David Armitage, "The Concepts of Atlantic History," *The British Atlantic World: 1500-1800*, eds. Armitage and Michael J. Braddick (Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 11-27. For an argument for a new set of classifications based on critical investments rather than geography (Atlantic Modernity, Literature in English, Atlantic as Conduit and Context), see Joseph Rezek, "What We Need From Transatlantic Studies," *American Literary History* 26.4 (Winter 2014): 791-803.

⁴² Rezek, *London and the Making of Provincial Literature* (U. of Pennsylvania Press, 2016). See especially "The Aesthetics of Provinciality," 14-20, regarding how provincial writers' investments in representing cross-cultural communion as uncontaminated by national and imperial politics contributes to the development of a notion of the aesthetic as separable from material realities. Rezek draws on Pascale Casanova's *The World Republic of Letters* for this understanding of provincial authors being not only at a geographical distance but an "aesthetic distance." I explore a related if inverted connection between geographical and aesthetic distance, but I treat geography as a multivalent figure that can stand in for aesthetics as well as reference geopolitics.

⁴³ McGill, ed., *The Traffic in Poems: Nineteenth-Century Poetry and Transatlantic Exchange* (Rutgers UP, 2008). McGill, "Introduction," 1-10, *The Traffic in Poems*.

and I do so by staying rooted in nineteenth-century readers' intense attachments to particular poems and poets.⁴⁴ *The Traffic in Poems* also announces its ties to distinctly feminist scholarship, and furthers a longer feminist tradition of recovering the value of literary texts, writers, thinkers, and aesthetic traditions that had long been dismissed as unserious, unoriginal, inauthentic, or sentimental. McGill highlights this connection between the traffic in women and the traffic in poems as follows: "Like [Gayle] Rubin we are interested in social and cultural systems that operate beneath and beyond the nation-state," and the volume hopes to show "how something that is ordinarily thought to lie outside of—or to rise above—systems of exchange is thoroughly and consequentially embedded within them" (3).⁴⁵ McGill further notes that, when it comes to poetry, nineteenth-century Americanists find themselves in the odd situation of having "a canon that need[s] to be opened to not only culturally marginal but also culturally dominant poets and poetic forms" (4). "Transatlantic Vividness" participates in this tradition of making available the ways in which historically distant literary texts and traditions had and have value. While my focus is on popular poems, rather than women's poetry per se, my attention to these popular poems, my focus on female figures in aestheticized landscapes, and my work to open up our understandings of both culturally marginal and once culturally dominant poets, poems, and poetics proceeds from values shared with the important work already done and being done on

⁴⁴ Michael Moon's "'No Coward Souls': Poetic Engagements Between Emily Bronte and Emily Dickinson," 231-249, serves as a particular inspiration. Moon recovers a transnational tradition of women poets' engagements with stoic discourse, offers new readings of poems, and speculates on how to understand the relationship between two writers who never met in person yet whose relationship seems far more mutual than simply one of influence.

⁴⁵ This formulation calls back to Virginia Jackson's and Yopie Prins's argument that the figure of the poetess ought to be understood not as "a lyric subject to be reclaimed as an identity but a medium for cultural exchange" (523). See "Lyrical Studies," *Victorian Literature and Culture* (1999): 521-530. Scholarship such as Eliza Richards's *Gender and the Poetics of Reception in Poe's Circle* (Cambridge UP, 2004), while not transatlantic in its focus, shows how thoroughly women poets understood and responded differently to the gendered terms of the literary marketplace.

women writers, African American writers, Native American writers, and other historically underrepresented writing and reading communities.⁴⁶

Each of my chapters investigates a distinctive form of vividness: inaccuracy, amplified temporality, luminosity, and reference. These forms produce verisimilar effects without a concomitant commitment to realistic description. In my first chapter, “Viewless Scenes: Nineteenth-Century Ideals of Reading In and Through ‘Gertrude of Wyoming,’” I analyze Thomas Campbell’s “Gertrude of Wyoming” (1809), its geographical inaccuracies, and its nineteenth-century transatlantic afterlives in poetry and visual culture. Written by a Scottish poet about a battle in Wyoming, Pennsylvania, “Gertrude” famously describes Wyoming as inhabited by tropical flamingos and palm trees. Scholars have tended to group the poem’s geographical errors with its representational errors of living and historical persons, specifically its inaccurate representation of Joseph Brant (Thayendaneagea). While both kinds of errors traffic in New World exoticism, recognizing the differences between such errors allows us to analyze nineteenth-century reading practices and so understand the cultural logic of the poem’s popularity. Campbell figures Gertrude as a reader and frames Wyoming as a locus for

⁴⁶ In addition to Beam, McGill, McGill (ed.), Richards, and Jackson and Prins, see Margaret Homans, *Women Writers and Poetic Identity: Dorothy Wordsworth, Emily Bronte, and Emily Dickinson* (Princeton UP, 1980); Mary Kelley, *Private Woman, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford UP, 1984; 2002); Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction* (1985); Adela Pinch, *Strange Fits of Passion: Epistemologies of Emotion, Hume to Austen* (Stanford UP, 1996); Yopie Prins, *Victorian Sappho* (Princeton UP, 1999); June Howard, “What Is Sentimentality?” *American Literary History* Vol. 11, No. 1 (Spring 1999); Julie Ellison, *Cato’s Tears and the Making of Anglo-American Emotion* (U. of Chicago Press, 1999); Kirsten Silva Gruesz, *Ambassadors of Culture: The Transamerican Origins of Latino Writing* (Princeton UP, 2002); Paula Bernat Bennett, *Poets in the Public Sphere: The Emancipatory Project of American Women’s Poetry, 1800-1900* (Princeton UP, 2003); Mary Loeffelholz, *From School to Salon: Reading Nineteenth-Century American Women’s Poetry* (Princeton UP, 2004); Angela Sorby, *Schoolroom Poets: Childhood, Performance, and the Place of American Poetry, 1865-1917* (U. of New Hampshire Press, 2005); Virginia Jackson, *Dickinson’s Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading* (Princeton UP, 2005); Virginia Jackson and Eliza Richards, “‘The Poetess’ and Nineteenth-Century American Women Poets,” *The Poetess Archive*. 1.1 (Web, 12 April 2007); Max Cavitch, *American Elegy: The Poetry of Mourning from the Puritans to Whitman* (U. of Minnesota Press, 2007); Robert Dale Parker, “Introduction: The World and Writings of Jane Johnston Schoolcraft,” in *The Sound the Stars Make Rushing Through the Sky*, ed. Robert Dale Parker (U. of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); Jennifer Putzi, “‘Some Queer Freak of Taste’: Gender, Authorship, and the ‘Rock Me to Sleep’ Controversy,” *American Literature* 84,4 (Dec. 2012): 769-795; and Daniel Hack, *Reaping Something New: African American Transformations of Victorian Literature* (Princeton UP, 2016).

contemplating the desire for readerly belief. Early national and antebellum poets did not correct Campbell but rather used his inaccurate, exotic geography to ground their own poems. Being in Wyoming comes to mean encountering the force of Campbell's poem as part of, not apart from, the place. This chapter establishes that inaccurate geographical description does not inhibit vividness. On the contrary, vividness motivates readers' investments in made-up geographies.

Maria Gowen Brooks offers an inverse scenario to the one raised by Campbell. While nineteenth-century reviewers and readers willingly read past Campbell's location in England to enjoy his inaccurate North American topos, reviewers and readers could not stop reading Brooks's imagined geographies for evidence of Brooks's personal location in Cuba. Chapter two, "Amplifying *Zophiël*: Maria Gowen Brooks and the Space and Time of Reading," centers on vividness as a mark of two temporal ideals in Brooks's six-canto epic, *Zophiël; or, The Bride of Seven* (1833). In order to assess the nineteenth-century critical tendency to mine *Zophiël* for references to Cuba, I situate Brooks's aesthetic in relation to Robert Southey's romances set in an exoticized Middle East and an equally exoticized pre-Columbian America. This enables me to show how Brooks locates her work in the "territory of genre," as much as in the country of Cuba. I then argue that Brooks experiments with a temporally amplified reading experience. She bombards her readers with marks of intensity to see how long she might hold their attention. Long-poems such as *Zophiël* dramatize the problem of how to extend intense feelings over time and space, including the time and space of reading. The complex temporalities of vividness, which can signify both the brightly fleeting and the sustained, help us to understand this historic reading ideal.

In chapter three, "Luminous Distance: Shelley in the Nineteenth-Century United States," I press on dissatisfaction in the US reception of Shelley's poetry, a dissatisfaction rooted in a

perceived ontological distance between the US and Shelley himself. By “ontological distance,” I mean here a difference between kinds of being: to most nineteenth-century American readers, Shelley and his poems appeared to be so ethereal as to be almost alien. Specifically, I chart US readers’ complaints that Shelley, like his sky-lark, seemed too distant from their material, real world. It took a twentieth-century American poet, Elinor Wylie, to imagine Shelley as belonging in the nineteenth-century US. Wylie effects this belonging through a counterfactual history in which Shelley does not drown but instead sails to the geographically-distant States. Once there, he lives out a simultaneously luminous and embodied existence, walking to California to locate an ideal woman, Silver Cross. Renaming Shelley “Shiloh,” Wylie turns the ethereal Shelley into a geographical place even as the geography he traverses glitters with Shelleyan style. I use Wylie’s novel to reread Shelley’s own exotic landscape descriptions in *Alastor* and *Prometheus Unbound*, among others, investigating how he presents the aesthetic as involved in — not removed from — the world. I argue that both Shelley and Wylie use figures of silver and materialized luminosity, a luminosity you could touch and by which you could be touched, to conceptualize an intimate relationship between being in the world and on the page.

My final chapter, “Between Two Skies: Vividness, Reference, and Reading Through Place in Longfellow’s *Poems of Places*” considers the vividness of reference itself. This chapter shifts our focus from poetic description to reference, topos to toponym, through a reading of Longfellow’s 31 volume anthology *Poems of Places* (1876-79). Built upon the trope of reading as travel, this massive anthology relies on dual systems of reference—geography and the alphabet—to select, title, and organize poems. This use of reference promises that the reader’s experience will emerge from or move towards contact with the real. I argue that this dual-strategy reveals an insistence that poems and places refer to one another according to a logic of

mutual mediation. I test this idea by reading Longfellow's extracts from his own *Evangeline* (1847). *Evangeline's* erotic dissolution into the Louisiana atmosphere, as framed within *Poems of Places*, represents the effects of this mutual mediation that Longfellow imagines might exist between the pages we read and the places in which we read. Finally, a brief coda to the dissertation reflects on a set of practices I call "reading backwards": a way of thinking about the limitations of reading at a historical distance, and the challenges of reading poems that judge real places as "backwards" while themselves seeming "backwards" to many twenty-first century readers.

"Transatlantic Vividness" draws on a range of methods—primarily historical poetics, aesthetics, and transatlantic studies, but also reception studies, book history, affect theory, and phenomenology—in order to discover a complex range of extra-aesthetic stakes made available to us through careful study of poems typically read for the national, imperial, and geopolitical narratives with which they are entangled. The poems under consideration here engage a range of poetic genres and modes, from pastoral, epic, and Spenserian allegory, to loco-descriptive, ode, and excerpt. However, as described in the previous section, they all share certain stylistic features that justify treating them as a historically specific group. In conceptualizing vividness, then I rely not only on historical theories of reading but on the poems themselves. This enables me to attend to a range of ways that historical readers understood their relationships to, through, and with printed pages. It also allows me to move back and forth from poem to context and new context to poem, a method Yopie Prins describes as "a historical poetics that works recursively as a loop, reading simultaneously from inside out and from outside in" (14).⁴⁷ In moving

⁴⁷ Yopie Prins, "'What Is Historical Poetics?'" *Modern Language Quarterly* 77:1 (March 2016): 13-40. For a selection of recent Americanist work drawing on related understandings of historical poetics, see Michael C. Cohen, *The Social Lives of Poems in Nineteenth-Century America* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015); Jackson, *Dickinson's Misery* (2005) and "Thinking Dickinson Thinking Poetry," 205-221, in *A Companion to Emily*

methodologically “from inside out and from outside in,” I call back to these poems’ own interests in entangling the poems’ aesthetic features with their daily lives.

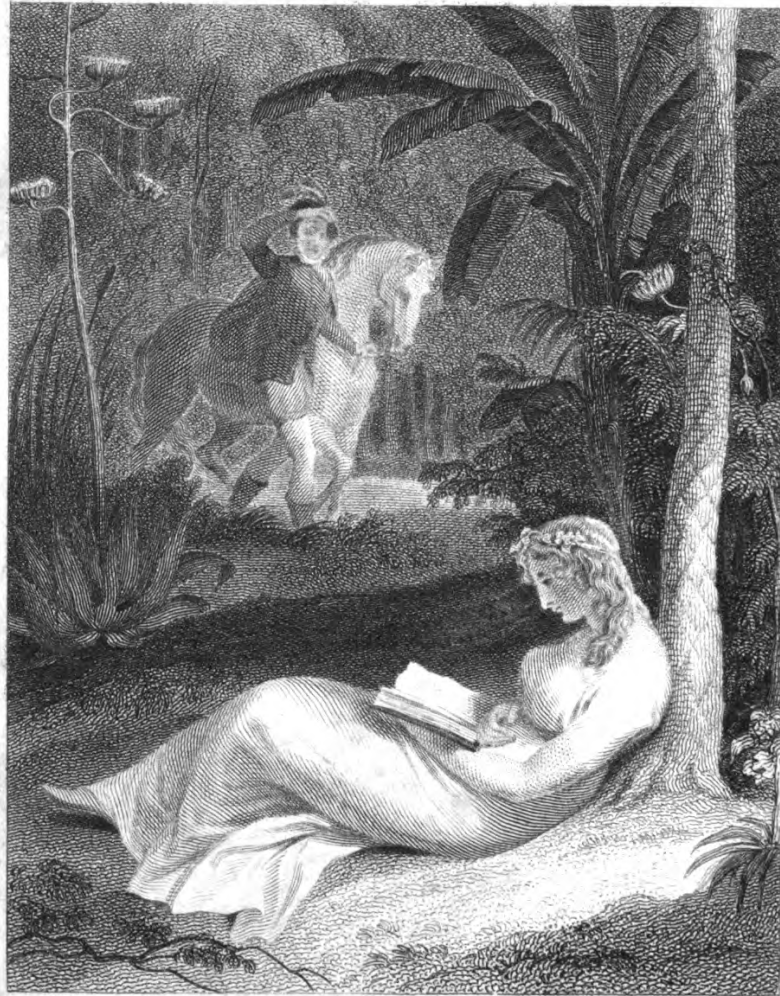
Dickinson, eds. Martha Nell Smith and Mary Loeffelholz (Blackwell Publishing, 2008); McGill, “Frances Ellen Watkins Harper and the Circuits of Abolitionist Poetry,” 53-74, in *Early African American Print Culture*, eds. Lara Langer Cohen and Jordan Alexander Stein (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012) and “What is a Ballad?” (*Nineteenth-Century Literature*, forthcoming); and Richards, *Gender and the Poetics of Reception in Poe’s Circle* (2004) and “Menken and Whitman, Loosing and Losing Tongues,” 192-212, in *Whitman Among the Bohemians*, eds. Joanna Levin and Edward Whitley (U. of Iowa Press, 2014).

Chapter 1

Viewless Scenes: Nineteenth-Century Ideals of Reading in and Through Campbell's "Gertrude of Wyoming"

In 1814, a frontispiece was added to the fifth edition of Thomas Campbell's "Gertrude of Wyoming" (fig. 1).¹ Framing the poem with a single scene, the frontispiece features the heroine reading in Wyoming, Pennsylvania. Gertrude reclines in the foreground, her back against a palm tree, book in lap. Light streams down on her even as it also seems to emanate from the blank pages before her. Thick vegetation fills the vertical space: tropical fronds and cattails are just visible in the midground, and flowers circle Gertrude's hair as well as the palm tree's trunk. Meanwhile, in the background a dimly lit man and his white horse peer hazily in Gertrude's direction, the man's hand raised to peer at something in the distance. In the poem, this scene appears in the middle section and features Gertrude reading Shakespeare in a private grotto. This might seem a surprising choice, both in terms of the poem's narrative and in terms of the poem's marketing: for a poem structured around the dramatic and politically charged Battle of Wyoming (1778), why have the front matter feature a scene of a reader wholly absorbed in her book? Further, for a poem whose descriptions were known to be inaccurate, why might the illustrator, engraver, and publisher shine a spotlight not just on the figure of Gertrude but on the scene's scenery? Though the reading scene garnered only passing attention in the poem's nineteenth-

¹ Thomas Campbell, *Gertrude of Wyoming: and Other Poems* (1814).



Drawn by R. Cook

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Engraved by E. Engleheart

GERTRUDE OF WYOMING.

IT WAS IN THIS LONE VALLEY SHE WOULD CHARM
THE LING'RING NOON, WHERE FLOW'RS A COUCH HAD STREWN;
Part II. Stan. XI.

PUBLISHED BY LONGMAN & CO. JANY 1. 1812.

Figure 1. R. Cook, "It was in this lone valley she would charm / The ling'ring noon, where flow'rs a couch had strewn," in *Gertrude of Wyoming*, 5th ed. (Longman, 1814). Web. *HathiTrust*. April 2013.

century critical reception, it played a significant role in the poem's visual and verbal afterlives as readers, illustrators, and engravers elaborated upon Campbell's unrealistic Wyoming.

Campbell, a Scottish poet, wrote "Gertrude of Wyoming" (1809) without ever having traveled to North America, let alone to the banks of the Susquehanna River.² Therefore, we should not be surprised that his descriptions, which feature palm trees and flamingos, fail according to a rubric of accurate representation. Yet, when critics dismiss the poem's landscape descriptions as "faulty naturalism" or as evidence of "displaced English pastoral idealism," they assume that these inaccuracies range from mistaken to harmful without acknowledging their aesthetic potentials as well.³ This assumption differs strongly from many nineteenth-century readers' aesthetic values: Campbell's descriptive inaccuracies and his lack of firsthand experience of Wyoming were well known and oft-noted in the poem's nineteenth-century reception, perhaps nearly as well known as the poem itself, which was a transatlantic success. Inaccuracy did not stand in the way of popularity.

Campbell's poem influenced numerous works of antebellum American literature. For example, Nathaniel Parker Willis opens *A l'abri; or The Tent Pitched* (1839) not just in the Wyoming Valley but with reference to Campbell, figuratively "pitch[ing] his tent" in relation to Campbell's poem.⁴ Willis describes a hypothetical scenario in which he and Campbell together float down the Susquehanna, a scenario that testifies to the relationship between descriptive errors and aesthetic force in Campbell's poem:

What would I not give to get upon a raft with him, and float down the Susquehanna a

² Campbell, *Gertrude of Wyoming* (1809; facsimile of the first edition, in *Revolution and Romanticism, 1789-1834*, Oxford: Woodstock Books, 1991). Hereafter cited parenthetically by line number and abbreviated "G."

³ Kevin Hutchings, *Romantic Ecologies and Colonial Cultures in the British Atlantic World, 1770-1850* (Montreal & Kingston, London, Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), 144; Kate Flint, *The Transatlantic Indian, 1776-1930* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 50.

⁴ Nathaniel Parker Willis, *Al 'Abri; or, the Tent Pitch'd* (1839): 7.

hundred miles to the scene of his Gertrude, watching his fine face while the *real* displaced the *ideal* valley of his imagination. I think it would trouble him. Probably in the warmth of composition and the familiarity of years, the imaginary scene has become enameled and sunk into his mind, and it would remain the home of his poem after Wyoming itself had made a distinct impression on his memory. They would be two places—not one.⁵

In this passage, Willis's imagined displacement of Campbell's ideal softens into a decentering, for Willis allows that the sensory impressions of the real Wyoming would not dislodge the mental impressions made by Campbell's imagined Wyoming: "They would be two places—not one." The imagined place, Willis acknowledges, with all its inaccuracies, would continue to feel real—as if it existed (however improbably) in the world.

Twentieth- and twenty-first century critics have also pointed out Campbell's inaccuracies, focusing occasionally on the poem's use of tropes for Edenic places but mostly on its reliance on typic persons. Critical of Campbell's stereotyped descriptions of Native Americans, these critics have recovered the writings and actions of historical Native Americans in order to complicate and counter nineteenth-century Anglo-Americans' writings about Native Americans. Specifically, Tim Fulford, Kate Flint, and Kevin Hutchings recount the powerful story of how John Brant (Ahyonwaeghs), the son of the actual Joseph Brant (Thayendaneagea, who appears as the villain in Campbell's poem), crossed the Atlantic in 1822 to prove to Campbell that Brant's father was not in Wyoming in 1778, and so could not have attacked the historical settlement. Brant requested that Campbell change the poem, but Campbell did not honor this request. Instead, Campbell added an endnote acknowledging that the Wyoming massacre was caused by "Britons and Anglo-Americans," and in which he declared, "[t]he name of Brandt [sic] . . . remains in my poem a pure and declared character of fiction."⁶ Not identical

⁵ Ibid., 117.

⁶ Thomas Campbell, *Gertrude of Wyoming: or, The Pennsylvanian Cottage* (1857): 94. For the letter Campbell references in this endnote, see Thomas Campbell, "Letter to the Mohawk Chief Ahyonwaeghs, commonly called

but uncomfortably similar to Willis's "two places—not one," Campbell suggests there can be not just one Brant but two.

Campbell's response is ethically indefensible. By asserting this distinction between the historical and the fictional Joseph Brant, Campbell fails to acknowledge how egregiously his poem has wronged Brant, and continues to harm Brant's family, by falsely blaming him for the attack and describing him as a "Monster" ("G" III.xvi.4). Understandably, both Flint and Hutchings use this story of John Brant's transatlantic request to critique Campbell's failure to recognize real Native Americans apart from the figure of the Indian he helped write and circulate. Hutchings further notes: "Perhaps Campbell considered his erroneous representation of Brant to be of the same order as one of his poem's naturalistic errors."⁷ The force of this remark is rhetorical: as a joke, it works to underscore the ethical absurdity resulting from Campbell's blindness to Brant's request and his inability to distinguish between differing stakes for ethical and naturalistic errors.⁸ But Hutchings's joke also draws our attention to the fact that there may be different ethical stakes for different kinds of errors. Campbell's "naturalistic errors" are not "of the same order" as his errors of reference to living or historical persons, but it is precisely this difference between these orders that I hope to draw out and examine here. Attending to Campbell's geographical inaccuracies, to his poem's reception, and to readers' represented and recorded responses to the topos of Wyoming reveals a more complicated story about the cultural work of this poem's landscape and geographical descriptions than we currently possess. This

John Brant, esq. of the Grand River, Upper Canada. From Thomas Campbell," *New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*, n.s. vol. 4 (London: Henry Colburn & Co., 1822): 97-101. For accounts of John Brant's trip and request, see Tim Fulford, *Romantic Indians: Native Americans, British Literature, and Transatlantic Culture 1756—1830* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006), 192; Flint, *Transatlantic Indian*, 51; and Hutchings, *Romantic Ecologies*, 150-52.

⁷ Hutchings, *Romantic Ecologies*, 152.

⁸ In "Fictional Settlements: Footnotes, Metalepsis, the Colonial Effect," *New Literary History* 41 (2010): 393-411, Elaine Freedgood explores ethical errors on the order of Campbell's privileging the fictional Brant over John Brant's requests. Freedgood argues that nineteenth-century novels about distant places creates an "open circuit of referentiality" between fictionality and factuality, producing a "colonial effect" in which readers get to decide what is true and what is fictional about distant places on a case by case basis.

chapter looks closely at confusions between real and imaginary places as prompted by the poem. It does so not to counter ideological critiques of the poem, but to reconstruct the wide spectrum of ideals and ideologies disseminated through the poem. As we will see the poem's geographic inaccuracies not only did not detract from the poem's popularity: they helped to produce it.

Recent scholarship has re-examined the role of place—the function of landscape description and of particular locales—in early national and antebellum literature, critiquing the idea that descriptions of particular North American places (Niagara Falls, e.g.) are the only way nineteenth-century writers sought to advance a national literature. Meredith L. McGill attends to poetic excerpts' ability to dislocate readers from a work as seemingly located as Thoreau's *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, arguing that a focus on the “common places” of poetic fragments reveals an important privileging of illocality and placelessness over any sense of being located in time and space.⁹ Drawing attention to another kind of placelessness at the heart of literary nationalist projects, Theo Davis highlights an antebellum preference for typical and generic descriptions, characters, and scenarios, arguing that writers understood experience to be abstract, neither the property of a subject nor fused with the work of art but projected out of the text.¹⁰ While McGill and Davis de-localize and de-particularize literature in importantly different ways, their critical interventions both locate the work of literature somewhere other than in geographical place. Without returning to a less capacious understanding of the relationship between American landscape descriptions and American literature, we might learn more about how and why accuracy could simultaneously matter and not matter in the

⁹ Meredith L. McGill, “Common Places: Poetry, Illocality, and Temporal Dislocation in Thoreau's *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*,” *American Literary History* (Spring 2007): 357-374.

¹⁰ Theo Davis, *Formalism, Experience, and the Making of American Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007). Davis begins her investigation with the eloquent, provocative question: “What would you have to believe about both literature and experience to think it would be so hard to write about upstate New York, Boston, or Virginia?” (1)

transatlantic reception of poems linked with places, such as “Gertrude of Wyoming.” Critics from Washington Irving to Robert Crawford to Flint have claimed that Campbell showed Americans that they could write about their own nation and landscape, what Crawford aptly names the “Campbellscape.”¹¹ But why should this have been the case? It is worth looking closely at how and why a poem that describes Pennsylvania in terms of Virginia, India, and Scotland contributed not only to nineteenth-century American literary nationalist projects but also to nineteenth-century ideals of reading.

Campbell’s poem is, importantly, about Wyoming, not because it is realistic, ethnographic, or accurate, but because it prompts readers to make belief-claims about the place. Campbell’s choice to figure Gertrude as a reader, and nineteenth-century readers’ preoccupation with this figure, frames Wyoming as both a place to imagine and a place in which to imagine, turning Wyoming into a locus for contemplating the conditions and desires for readerly belief in the early nineteenth century. Further, Campbell’s inaccurate and idealized descriptions prompted American poets to idealize Wyoming on their own terms, creating a new topos grounded in the effects of reading Campbell as much as in a place. Like Willis many nineteenth-century readers and writers describe Campbell’s Wyoming as feeling real and being wrong, and this acknowledged difference between feeling and being made “Gertrude of Wyoming” a useful vehicle for exploring the desire for literature to overcome the distance between the reader and the page. Understanding these readers’ imaginative investments in Wyoming requires us to move beyond traditional aesthetic categories, such as the sublime and the picturesque, and to rely instead on a historical “vernacular aesthetic category,” the vivid, a category describing works of literature to which readers ascribe the same force and reality as they do to objects in the

¹¹ Robert Crawford, *Devolving English Literature*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2000), 180.

phenomenal world.¹² Taking seriously the Campbellscape and the place of its geographical inaccuracies in nineteenth-century readers' imaginations not only helps us better understand this poem's popularity and historical aesthetic, but also contributes to current discussions about historical reading practices and professional practices of reading historically.

“‘Tis Distance lends enchantment to the view”: Vividness and Campbell’s Geographical and Aesthetic Distance

In order to think about the function of geographical inaccuracies in “Gertrude of Wyoming,” we must move beyond emphasizing only Campbell’s geographical distance from the United States and consider how distance as a concept was thought to relate to aesthetic experience at the turn of the nineteenth-century.¹³ While distance can be characterized as an aesthetic ideal or as a general aesthetic problem, I focus here on one particular aspect of distance in relation to aesthetics: the problem of describing and reading about places you have never seen or been. In Anglo-American poems I will gather under the aesthetic heading “vivid,” I ask how and why such poems, set in places far away from their authors or audiences, are claimed to affect readers forcefully, as if impressing readers at the level of the senses. How does foregrounding geographical distance contribute to readers’ desires to overcome the distance between themselves and the page? By approaching Campbell’s poems through the aesthetic category of “vividness,” I resist slotting the poems into more critically established eighteenth-century aesthetic categories—such as the sublime, the beautiful, and the picturesque, which have their

¹² I borrow the phrase “vernacular aesthetic categor[y]” from Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 16.

¹³ For distance as a general problem of philosophical aesthetics, see David Marshall, *The Frame of Art: Fictions of Aesthetic Experience, 1750-1815* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2005) and Jonathan Kramnick, “An Aesthetics and Ecology of Presence,” *European Romantic Review* Vol. 26, No. 3 (2015), 315-327. For the interplay between geographical distance (within transatlantic publishing) and early nineteenth-century aesthetics in Irish, Scottish, and U.S. writing, see Joseph Rezek, *London and the Making of Provincial Literature* (Philadelphia: U. of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

own relationships to distance. Instead, I draw on Sianne Ngai's argument about "vernacular aesthetic categories" and the insights they might provide to ongoing problems in aesthetic theory.¹⁴ As we saw in the introduction, vividness as an aesthetic category retains the Humean notion of impressions and vivacity that informed aesthetic discourse in the early nineteenth century. Campbell, as one of many nineteenth-century poets for whom vivacity was particularly salient, participates in theorizing the vividness of mental images through his reliance on scenarios of spatiotemporal distance. This lineage helps us understand poems such as "Gertrude" that were claimed to affect readers as strongly as places in the world. As opposed to connoting the calming delicacy produced by the beautiful, or the sense of vastness and awe associated with the sublime, the vivid and its related terms (radiant, striking, forceful, e.g.) enables us to understand an aesthetic located dazzlingly and uncomfortably between the real and the imaginary. Poems such as "Gertrude" in turn offer new insights into the stakes of certain ideals of reading.

With "The Pleasures of Hope" (1799), Campbell's first major poem, we can already see Campbell thinking through the aesthetic effects of being at a distance from particular places.¹⁵ "Hope," published ten years prior to "Gertrude" and immensely popular, opens with a condensed best practices for looking: "'Tis Distance lends enchantment to the view," the poem famously proclaims ("P," l.7). While such a line might seem to exemplify neoclassical aesthetics, in which a disinterested spectator enjoys a picturesque landscape from the safety of the prospect, or the sentimental potential of geopolitical events, the framework of vividness as an aesthetic category allows us to complicate such assessments of the function of distance in Campbell's poem. "The Pleasures of Hope" celebrates a particular mental faculty, Hope, which facilitates pleasurable

¹⁴ See Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 2, and the section "Triviality," *ibid.*, 18-28.

¹⁵ Campbell, *The Pleasures of Hope; with Other Poems*, 4th ed, corrected and enlarged (1800). Hereafter cited parenthetically by line numbers and abbreviated "P."

mental experiences. Campbell describes the poem as “open[ing] with a comparison between the beauty of remote objects in a landscape, and those ideal scenes of felicity which imagination delights to contemplate.”¹⁶

At summer eve, when Heav'n's aerial bow
Spans with bright arch the glittering hills below,
Why to yon mountain turns the musing eye,
Whose sun bright summit mingles with the sky?
Why do those cliffs of shadowy tint appear
More sweet than all the landscape smiling near?
'Tis Distance lends enchantment to the view,
And robes the mountain in its azure hue.
Thus, with delight, we linger to survey
The promised joys of life's unmeasured way;
Thus, from afar, each dim-discover'd scene
More pleasing seems than all the past hath been;
And every form that fancy can repair
From dark, oblivion, glows divinely there. (“P,” 1-14)

Using the language of the prospect (“to survey”) and spatial distance (“unmeasured,” “afar”) to describe mentally anticipating “promised joy,” the poem does more than compare geographical and spatial distance to temporal and mental distance: it begins to conflate them, using the language of the former to describe what can be projected into or imagined for the latter. By having fancy “repair” distant forms from dark oblivion into a glowing state, Campbell grants Hope immense creative power while at the same time cloaking this power by suggesting that these glowing forms already exist and are just waiting to be restored. The glowing prospects created from the prospect thus appear substantive. Seeing that which, due to its distance in time and space, cannot be seen is what the poem proclaims Hope offers. “Hope” goes on to offer its readers a bird’s-eye view of cosmopolitan scope, leaping from one vignette and geographical location to another (Libya, England, India, America, the Caribbean, Siberia, and Poland all

¹⁶ Campbell, *Pleasures of Hope*, viii. This “Analysis of Part I” did not appear in the first edition.

appear), and using distance as a means to levy social critique.¹⁷ Even as aesthetics are used to advance a geopolitical position, however, personal and geopolitical events also open onto aesthetic problems. As Campbell notes, thinking about how and why we approach gazing on a distant landscape or geographically distant events might offer insight into how and why we seek and find not only pleasure but belief in gazing on mental objects.

Through its emphasis on distance, “The Pleasures of Hope” concerns itself with producing an aesthetic state of vividness: not through a detailed description of particular places, but through its emphasis on Hope’s ability to persuade one out of the present, in particular present suffering. Hope is most frequently described within the poem as a “charmer” due to its ability to transport you somewhere else: where what has been lost can be found, but also where what is imagined can be realized despite spatiotemporal constraints or material realities. “Why does the brother of my childhood seem / Restored awhile in every pleasing dream?” writes Campbell of Hope’s ability to make his deceased brother seem alive (“P,” ll. 463-464). Speaking of another mental restoration—when an incarcerated man seems to see “A long-lost friend, or hapless child restor’d”—Campbell asks Reason not to “destroy / The shadowy forms of uncreated joy” (“P,” ll. 269; 273-274) The imagined forms are both believed to be fully present and known to be “uncreated” since they exist only in the mind. *The British Critic*’s review of the poem linked the production of such belief to “the very essence of genius ... [the ability] to form ideal scenes of future gratification; which, if not at all destined to be realized, confer, for the time, an actual happiness by anticipation.”¹⁸ The poem describes what it feels like to believe in a purely mental image. As the *British Critic*’s critic notes, even if we recognize an ontological

¹⁷ For more on the vertical energies and cosmopolitan vision of fancy, see Julie Ellison, “The Politics of Fancy in the Age of Sensibility,” in *Re-Visioning Romanticism: British Women Writers, 1776-1837*, eds. Carol Shiner Wilson and Joel Haefner (Philadelphia: U. of Penn. Press, 1994), 228-255.

¹⁸ “The Pleasures of Hope, with other Poems,” *The British Critic*, vol. 14 (July 1799), 21-26; 21.

difference between current realities and ideal scenes, this ideality needn't undo the "actual happiness" produced by and experienced while reading and imagining. Distance here may lend enchantment to the view, but it does so less by idealizing an actual view than by enchanting the spectator into a new belief. It serves as a necessary precondition to activate imagination and aesthetic pleasure. Like the loophole within Hume's law of vivacity, Campbell uses the figure of Hope to explore how a mental action or unrealistic representation might overcome the distance between "realities, or what is taken for such" (*E* 5.12), producing ideas that feel as forcefully present as objects in the world.

Campbell's poem was part of the broader eighteenth-century discourse regarding the vivacity of mental images, a discourse that continued to circulate in the nineteenth-century. In the United States, it circulated in particular through Scottish common sense philosophy.¹⁹ Associationists such as Lord Kames and Archibald Alison were especially popular. Rather than worry about the difference between "realities, or what is taken for such," writers such as Kames and Alison encouraged readers to give themselves over to the train of associations prompted by description. In associationist artworks, writes William Charvat, "description is a means, not an end."²⁰ In other words, description serves to take the reader somewhere else, making descriptive accuracy a secondary concern. It is, writes Kerry Larson, the "suggestiveness [of emblems, types, and particular places] that is most coveted," which means, writes Davis, that if the reader

¹⁹ See Gerard A. Hauser, "Empiricism, Description, and the New Rhetoric." *Philosophy and Rhetoric* Vol. 5, No. 1 (Winter, 1972): 24-44. For the influence of empiricism and associationism in the early nineteenth-century U.S., see William Charvat, *The Origins of American Critical Thought, 1810-1835* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1936). For an example of how the discourse and aesthetic ideal of vivacity were deployed by the American Anti-Slavery Society through its "ocularcentric ethos," see Radiclan Clytus, "'Keep It Before the People': The Pictorialization of American Abolitionism," 290-317, in *Early African American Print Culture*, eds. Lara Langer Cohen and Jordan Alexander Stein (Philadelphia: U. of Penn Press, 2012).

²⁰ Charvat, 26.

dwells on description itself, something must be wrong.²¹ Because Common Sense philosophy offers an “analytic account of the mind, but not an argument for the accuracy and validity of the mind’s impressions,” writes Davis, “experience [in Kames and Alison] is strikingly separated from phenomena” (30; 35). Campbell, a friend of Alison and Dugald Stewart, orbited the Common Sense philosophy scene, and Francis Jeffrey’s praise for “Gertrude” arrived in clear associationist terms.²² Given the prevalence of associationist aesthetics in the early national and antebellum U.S., attending to Campbell’s descriptive inaccuracies might seem beside the point.

As glimpsed in the Willis example, however, the attention nineteenth-century readers gave to “Gertrude of Wyoming” for being both inaccurate *and* aesthetically vivid suggests a variation on this approach to description, an approach that includes Hume’s appeal to “what is taken for” real. “Gertrude”’s reception produces a poem in which inaccurate descriptions of actual places are claimed to provoke powerful associations — but without readers’ forgetting either the initial inaccuracy or the object described. Description holds a different place in such nineteenth-century poems of distant places, for imagining distant places approaches a philosophical aesthetic question in geographical, imperial, and empirical terms. How is it possible to think that an idea of a place could impress you as strongly as the place itself? To answer this question, we need to recognize a language of force and impressions as a sign that not

²¹ Kerry Larson, *Imagining Equality in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 82; Davis, *Formalism*, 40; 42; 48; 50-51. Davis advances our understanding of how and why description might seem of secondary importance within an associationist framework. Poetic effects, and an account of one’s response to those effects, matters more than the details of the text. For Davis, this explains nationalist praise for Brockden Brown, for example, for he “makes only minimal use of the phenomenal world as a reference-point, and allows the imagination to run its course, without being forced to come back to the phenomenal world *and* without being forced to pay undue attention to the phenomena of the text” (53).

²² “The object [of poetry] is,” writes Jeffrey, “to awaken in our minds a train of kindred emotions, and to excite our imaginations to work out for themselves a tissue of pleasing or impressive conceptions.” Jeffrey goes on to say that “Gertrude” has achieved this object. See [Francis Jeffrey], “Gertrude of Wyoming, a Pennsylvanian Tale; and other Poems,” *The Edinburgh Review*, vol. 14 (April 1809-July 1809), 1-19; 2.

all readers desired ideal presence “at a cool distance.”²³ The aesthetic category of vividness thus offers a heuristic to thinking about the problem of inaccurate, exoticized, and stereotypical descriptions in nineteenth-century poems of real and distant places. The acts of reading I will be analyzing make it seem as if Campbell’s poem is vivid because he describes North America in overtly aesthetic terms, yet we must also notice that these same acts smuggle in the possibility of treating real places and persons as if they were imaginary.²⁴

Vividness in and of “Gertrude of Wyoming”

“Gertrude of Wyoming” recounts a battle during the American Revolution in which approximately 300 Americans died. Initially the attackers were reported to be Indians of the Six Nations allied with the British; later, however, it was reported that white British soldiers as well as loyalists participated in the attack while dressed as Indians, increasing the battle’s political and transatlantic notoriety.²⁵ Writing thirty years after the battle, Campbell represents pre-1778 Wyoming as an idyllic colony, a place inhabited by “happy shepherd swain[s]” and composed of stunning landscapes. Such descriptions contribute to naturalizing the colony and to framing the stakes of the battle, including the misrepresentation of Joseph Brant and Campbell’s re-use of the noble savage trope. These descriptions are thus entangled with colonialist and ethnocentric ideologies.²⁶ Knowing this, it remains a productive risk to explore the space opened by

²³ Davis, *Formalism*, 37: “Kames is looking at his own experience as something alien to himself, looking at his observations from a cool distance.”

²⁴ The term “smuggling” comes from Ngai, who takes it from Gérard Genette. See Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 40, and 258n149.

²⁵ Fulford, *Romantic Indians*, 184-85. See also *ibid.*, 183-87, for an excellent account of the political significance and legacy of the Battle of Wyoming in Great Britain, as well as an account of the inter-colonial land conflicts between Pennsylvania and Connecticut that contributed to the 1778 battle. For the long history of white Americans dressing up as Native Americans as a way to perform and define national identity, see Philip Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1998).

²⁶ See Hutchings, *Romantic Ecologies*, chapter 6, for a reading of the colonial ideology in and behind Campbell’s landscape descriptions, especially 137-145.

acknowledging the different orders of ethical stakes concerning errors of persons and errors of place, for “Gertrude” also foregrounds and thematizes geographical distance in order to experiment with overcoming aesthetic distance for the reader.

Campbell’s geographical inaccuracies did not prevent his poem from signaling, at the level of style, his desire to produce vivid effects. Campbell’s Wyoming appears as a New World bower of bliss infused with Old World and classical associations as well as motifs of eastern luxury. The poet introduces “Gertrude in her bowers of yore” (“G,” I.i.8); his Wyoming has palm trees and enough aloes to form a Cathedral-like grove (“G,” II.x-xi); Gertrude’s love is compared to incense wafted “When Coromandels’ ships return from Indian seas” (“G,” II.xxiv.9). Further expanding the poem’s range of geographical and tropological affiliations, Irving praises the poem’s ability to make the reader feel as if they are in Wyoming while at the same time making the reader feel *almost* as if they have been transported to a “classic stream,” Italy, and the poetry of James Thomson. For Irving the poem’s ability to place the reader in Wyoming while at the same time suggesting other recognizably-literary topoi testifies not to a descriptive failure but to the very vividness of Campbell’s poem.²⁷ Campbell’s own descriptive mash-ups contribute to this sense of Wyoming as a vividly described place, as this representative early stanza will show:

Then, where of Indian hills the daylight takes
His leave, how might you the flamingo see
Disporting like a meteor on the lakes—
And playful squirrel on his nut-grown tree:
And ev’ry sound of life was full of glee,
From merry mock-bird’s song, or hum of men, ... (“G” I.iii.1-6)

The passage combines the generic (“playful squirrel”) with the awkward (“nut-grown tree”) with the real yet fantastically inaccurate (a flamingo in Pennsylvania). Like the meteor to which Campbell compares it, the flamingo flashes brightly in and through the stanza, suggesting a

²⁷ [Washington Irving], “A Biographical Sketch of Thomas Campbell,” *Analectic Magazine* V (March 1815), 247.

splash of exotic color and light in an otherwise calmly pastoral scene. In Campbell's description, Wyoming brims within multiple sensory registers: in addition to the bright flash of the flamingo against the fading light of day, the scene fills with described sound (the mocking bird's song and the georgic hum of bee-like men).²⁸ As if the adjectives describing the flamingo and squirrel were converted into a general energy, ambient glee fills not just sounds but the scene itself. Through its focus on actions, color, light, and sound, the stanza offers not a faithful representation of Wyoming (its actual birds, its specific trees, its topography) but a strong impression of aesthetic harmony surging towards extravagance. The stanza creates this strong impression, even as there is no denying the wrongness of Campbell's candescent flamingo.

Nineteenth-century British and American reviews likewise acknowledge this mixture of the poem's inaccurate and obscure descriptions alongside its vivid effects. While Walter Scott admired the "splendid luxuriance of transatlantic vegetation" on display in the poem, others noted its geographical errors.²⁹ The imagery is "often fantastical," noted the *Universal Magazine*, while the *Eclectic Review* honed in on figurative language it found wrong yet striking: "Is there no impropriety in comparing the 'winglet' of the humming bird to what can neither exist in nature nor in imagination—the fragments of a broken rainbow? Yet the simile is sparkling, and will *inevitably* be admired."³⁰ "Splendid luxuriance" highlights the vivid's tendency to shade into the exotic, but "splendid" alongside "sparkling" and "fantastical" shows that vividness and exoticism are not coterminous. Describing the simile as "sparkling" draws attention to the vivid impressions this critic attributes (reluctantly) to the poem. Such reluctance did not appear on the

²⁸ See Hutchings, *Romantic Ecologies*, 139-140, for an interpretation of this stanza's representation of harmony as evidence of Campbell's "environmental-determinist poetics" (140).

²⁹ [Walter Scott], "Gertrude of Wyoming," *Quarterly Review* 1.2 (May 1809), 241-258; 248.

³⁰ "Gertrude of Wyoming, a Pennsylvanian Tale; and other Poems," *Universal Magazine*, n.s. Vol. 12 (1809), 391-398; 392; "Gertrude of Wyoming, a Pennsylvanian Tale; and other Poems," *The Eclectic Review*, vol. 5, part I (1809), 519-528; 528.

other side of the Atlantic, where many US readers emphasized that the poem, while inaccurate, had made plenty of vivid impressions. For example, when the *Port Folio* reprinted Francis Jeffrey's positive review of the poem, it framed Jeffrey's review with a note: "It was a somewhat perilous undertaking to lay the scene in a country to which the writer was a stranger, and of which he was indebted for all his information to hasty and inaccurate travelers. This disadvantage, indeed, exists only to a Pennsylvanian or American reader," who presumably has some knowledge of the real place (154).³¹ Yet the *Port Folio* then reprinted Jeffrey's review all the same. The poem's descriptive inaccuracies did not prevent readers from praising the poem for prompting pleasurable and powerful associations.

The problem of describing or imagining a place "to which the writer was a stranger" is not only a problem of the poem's execution or reception: it is a problem Campbell explores within the poem as well. While being a stranger in or "discovering" a geographically distant and culturally different place is a common pose within Romantic Orientalism, and thus signals the poem's participation in imperial attitudes and projections,³² Campbell's choice to adopt this pose in relation to the (lost) North American colonies, rather than "the East," is significant, for it jumbles the direction, political stakes, and affective charge of Campbell's use of these tropes.³³ For example, within the poem, England is the place "to which [the heroine] was a stranger." The poem's second part commences with Gertrude addressing England from her geographically distant location and colonial position: "Land of my father's love, my mother's birth! / The home of kindred I have never seen! / We know not other—oceans are between;..." ("G" II.vi.3-5). The

³¹ "Review of *Gertrude of Wyoming*," *Port Folio*, n.s., vol. 2 (July-Dec. 1809), 153-169; 154.

³² Saree Makdisi, *Romantic Imperialism: Universal Empire and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). See especially chapters 5 and 6, which chart a shift in British constructions of the Orient within the romantic period, and which compare the implications of Byron's and Shelley's different approaches to "encountering" the geographically distant "East."

³³ Flint, *Transatlantic Indian*, 9; Hutchings, *Romantic Ecologies*, 142.

scene of reading with which we began this chapter follows this apostrophe to England's "viewless scenes," drawing attention to the poem's fascination with depicting desire for the state of transport it was attempting to produce for readers. In the poem, Campbell strikingly relies not on the figure of the poet but on the figure of the reader when grappling with this simultaneously geographical and aesthetic problem of distance. Campbell's Hope had made "viewless forms" seem present and produced an "actual happiness," but apostrophe in "Gertrude" cannot fill in the "viewless scenes" between Gertrude and England; they remain viewless, faint ideas on the other side of the ocean. This failure of the figure of voice matters because in it we see Campbell testing Gertrude as a metapoetic figure. Unlike Wordsworth's Ruth, who first as a child and then as a mad woman mimics the sounds of nature with oaten pipe and hemlock flute, Campbell's Gertrude does not mimic sounds but speaks in formal, rhetorical patterns labeled within the poem as "apostrophe." And yet Gertrude as poet cannot produce Humean vividness or Kamesian ideal presence, in the sense of collapsing distance, for herself. She remains a spectator to the distance she cannot overcome when relying on the figure of address. Having tried to produce a sense of vividness by "trac[ing]" the sun's path visually all the way to England, Gertrude experiences more success when she "trace[s]" England's name with her eye and finger "[i]n many a pilgrim's tale and poet's song"—in other words, when she reads ("G" II.v.7; vii.6; vii.7). Turning from apostrophe to silent reading, from facing the Atlantic to facing the printed page, Campbell's Gertrude seeks an imaginative and aesthetic solution to a geographical problem even as Campbell uses Gertrude and Wyoming to think through an aesthetic problem in geographical terms.

Campbell's attention to Gertrude's reading grotto testifies to his concern with his own readers' sense of vividness. When Gertrude reads "where flow'rs a couch had strewn," this

flower-couch or flower-filled grotto is less for the fictional Gertrude's physical comfort and far more for Campbell's real readers' imaginative pleasure. This becomes obvious when Campbell comments, "For, save her presence, scarce an ear had heard / The stock-dove plaining through its gloom profound, / Or winglet of the fairy humming-bird, / Like atoms of the rainbow fluttering round..." (II.xii.1-4). That "save her presence," while ostensibly describing Gertrude as the listener, more importantly describes Gertrude as a vehicle. Her presence invites readers to imagine the romantic sounds of a North American scene. With Gertrude entirely absorbed in her reading, the reader can imagine hearing and seeing through her as well as like her. Like the ambient glee we saw on display in Campbell's description of the flamingo, these lines describe Wyoming as vibrating with sound, texture, and energy. Gertrude's desire may be completely wrapped up in Shakespeare, but the Pennsylvania scene around her is alive with desire, and it is for Campbell's readers to get wrapped up in and to be impressed by.

Visual representations of Gertrude's scene of reading—of which there were many, including the 1814 frontispiece—participate most immediately in the vogue for illustrated books that Andrew Piper calls "this increasingly visual bibliographic experience," but they also participate in a longer painterly tradition of scenes of absorption, as well as in the genre of the painted scene of reading, as theorized by Michael Fried and Garrett Stewart.³⁴ These engravings are especially amenable to Stewart's argument that the genre of the painted reading scene "tends to textualize its scenic space," displacing the implied energy of narrative time throughout the canvas.³⁵ However, the nineteenth-century popularity of illustrating this particular scene from

³⁴ Andrew Piper, *Dreaming in Books: The Making of the Bibliographic Imagination in the Romantic Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 187; Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: Univ. of California Press, 1980); and Garrett Stewart, *The Look of Reading: Book, Painting, Text* (Chicago & London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2006).

³⁵ Stewart, *Look of Reading*, 33. Stewart further explains: "the seen reader operates to focus the look itself as the vector of a textual desire. This is a desire conferred in turn on the painting for its own insinuated promotional

this poem also offers insight into nineteenth-century ideals of reading. The fact that so many engravers chose to put on view not just one of the poem's "viewless" scenes but a scene in which a human figure reads and so seems to "view" somewhere else, suggests that nineteenth-century readers were attuned to the poem's own meditations on the conditions and desires for readerly belief.³⁶

Specifically, the engravings highlight Campbell's and his readers' desires to undo the ontological distinctions between place and page. In the three engravings shown here (figs. 2, 3, and 4), we can see that the North American scenery takes on an increasingly prominent role in Gertrude's reading scene. Figures 2 and 4 even introduce waterfalls, the kind of North American iconography readers might wish to imagine whether or not it is accurate to either the poem or the place. Even as geography seems to provide a "real world" context in which Gertrude imagines somewhere else, visually representing North American geography to geographically and historically distant readers seems to treat as real what Campbell's readers have been imagining. While figures 2 and 3, like figure 1, include Henry Waldegrave approaching Gertrude as she reads, figure 4 presents Gertrude as the only human figure in the landscape. If Waldegrave gazing on Gertrude serves as a kind of proxy for the reader, removing Waldegrave makes clear that the geographical scene has been suffused with desire all along. Stewart terms this desire "reading out" where the vector of desire from the look of reading fills the canvas: "The painted text that is not ours to see, or at least not ours to read," writes Stewart, "must be extrapolated across the landscape or architecture of the rendered world."³⁷ As Stewart shows, this effectively troubles attempts to distinguish between "inside" and "outside," as the scenery of the scene of

rhetoric" (15) and "[f]rom the look of reading, so certain paintings would imply, we derive the concentrated essence, and the essential concentration, of aesthetic response" (15).

³⁶ For an analysis of two nineteenth-century visual depictions of Outalissi, the Oneidan Indian chief in Campbell's poem, see Stephanie Pratt, *American Indians in British Art, 1700-1840* (U. of Oklahoma Press, 2005).

³⁷ Stewart, *Look of Reading*, 151.

reading seems to stand in for the experience of readerly absorption to which we as viewers and/or readers both do and do not have access. We may know that Gertrude is reading and weeping with Shakespeare, but the engravings equally suggest that she is reading about the scene at which we are looking. Put another way, we seem to see her mental images externalized. For example, she sits in the landscape's frame, not the landscape itself, in figure 2, as if gazing onto an alternate reality; in figure 3 she lowers her eyes as if dreaming, and the voluptuous scene, including Waldegrave, seems to exist in a gauzy thought bubble even as its birds and vegetation reach outside these boundaries. As a result of such blurring between page and place, the North American scene appears not only as the scene in which Gertrude reads but also the scene of which she reads.



IX.

Apart there was a deep untrodden grot,
Where oft the reading hours sweet Gertrude wore ;
Tradition had not named its lonely spot ;
But here (methinks) might India's sons explore
Their fathers' dust, or lift, perchance of yore,
Their voice to the great Spirit :—rocks sublime
To human art a sportive semblance bore,
And yellow lichens coloured all the clime,
Like moonlight battlements, and towers decayed by time.

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Figure 2. J. M. W. Turner, "Apart there was a deep untrodden grot," in *The Poetical Works of Thomas Campbell* (Moxon, 1837), 129. Web. *HathiTrust*. 22 Nov. 2013.



It was in this lone valley she would charm
The ling'ring noon, where flow'rs a couch had strown ;
Her cheek reclining, and her snowy arm
On hillock by the palm-tree half o'ergrown :
And aye that volume on her lap is thrown

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Figure 3. William Harvey, "Gertrude of Wyoming," in *The home affections portrayed by the poets*, ed. Charles Mackay (Routledge, 1866), 123. Web. *HathiTrust*. 24 Feb. 2014.



Which every heart of human mould endears ;
With Shakspeare's self she speaks and smiles alone,
And no intruding visitation fears,
To shame th' unconscious laugh, or stop her sweetest tears.—

Figure 4. Miles Birket Foster, illustration for Thomas Campbell, "It was in this lone valley," in *Gertrude of Wyoming* (Routledge, 1857), 35. Web. *HathiTrust*. 18 April 2013.

When we look at the figure of Gertrude in these luxurious settings, we see less Gertrude's scene of reading than a scene of reading "Gertrude of Wyoming." Recognizing the quotation marks implicit in this scene of double reading, we can understand how visual representations of Gertrude's textual reading scene make visible a desire for readerly belief through the ontological confusion of what one reads with where one reads, the page and the place. Visual representations of Gertrude's reading scene do textualize space, but they do so not only because of their participation in the genre of the painted scene of reading but also because of how Campbell's poem uses the figure of the reader in Wyoming's distant yet vivid geography to invite his readers to place belief in his poem.³⁸ Faced with the obvious removes between "here" (Great Britain and/or early nineteenth-century America) and "there" (the imagined place as well as the page), Campbell and his readers used "Gertrude" to represent their desire to merge the two.

Vividness and Campbell's Nonfictional Endnotes

While there is nothing new about noticing descriptive inaccuracies in Campbell's poem, we can see that these inaccuracies matter as more than jokes at Campbell's expense. Campbell, it is true, did not know enough to faithfully represent Wyoming, and yet this does not mean that Campbell's descriptions would have differed significantly nor that his reception would have been more positive had he known more. Like those waterfalls that appear in the engravings,

³⁸ Unlike the history Stewart traces, however, this visual scene of reading *does* depict an actual textual scene of reading, a fact which lessens the inter-medial tensions between plastic arts and verbal arts.

It is possible Campbell may have written this scene with visual representations of reading in mind. Thanks to William Beattie, ed., *Life and Letters of Thomas Campbell*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1855), we know that Campbell planned for engravings to accompany *The Pleasures of Hope* (204; 333n; 352), engaged "Mr. Williams, the eminent landscape painter" to illustrate his second major poem before the poem was complete (227), and took an active interest in his frontispieces: "I have got another picture for Lochiel. Besides my Beechen-tree vignette, and this large frontispiece, representing the 'weird' man addressing Lochiel, I have a design rather pretty, emblematic of the 'Pleasures of Hope,' as a *second* frontispiece to the title page. Thus equipt, I shall come out like the sweeps in May-morning, decked in all my finery; and, like them, I shall hope for a few pence to be tossed at me" (348-49). These details all suggest a more than passing familiarity with the illustrated book.

geographical features often appear in the poem for reasons other than accuracy. We can see the limits of reading the poem for accuracy alone when we consider the function of Campbell's nonfictional endnotes.

In the 1809 edition of "Gertrude," Campbell included about 20 pages of endnotes and thirteen footnotes. The endnotes in particular excerpt descriptions from nonfictional accounts of North American geography and of Native American cultures, such as Isaac Weld's *Travels through the States of North America* (1799) and Cadwallader Colden's *The History of the Five Indian Nations* (1727; 1747). Attention to Campbell's endnotes and footnotes typically understands these notes to function as textual sources from which Campbell must have worked. Like the *Port Folio*'s nod to "hasty and inaccurate travelers," we read more recently that "Campbell worked eclectically from travellers' tales and printed sources, and went to considerable lengths to furnish his poem with explanatory notes on American phenomena." A more charged version of this approach to understanding the endnotes claims, "Campbell was forced to experience America ... vicariously through the works of travelers" whose aestheticized descriptions he then mistook "as 'authentic' representations of Wyoming."³⁹ The verb "to furnish" in the former is illuminating, however, for Campbell seems as interested in the notes as ornaments as he does in the notes as factual sources. Natural history notes, as recent scholarship has shown, were a generic convention of eighteenth and nineteenth-century poems.⁴⁰ That the poem would have notes was, in other words, an expectation framing the poem's composition, not

³⁹ Crawford, *Devolving English*, 178; Hutchings, *Romantic Ecologies*, 138; 139.

⁴⁰ For an account of the debates in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain about the relationship between poetry and scientific discourse, particularly natural history, see Emily Howard's chapter "Charlotte Smith, John Clare, and the World as If They Had Witnessed It," in "Grounds of Knowledge: Unofficial Epistemologies of British Environmental Writing, 1745-1835" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2015), 61-97. Howard identifies and situates a number of British poets who produced theories and praxes about whether and how poetry with notes might contribute to scientific knowledge, both public and private. Howard's account helps establish how widespread the practice of attaching notes to poetry was during this period. See also Rezek, 1-3; 67, concerning provincial authors' use of paratexts, including footnotes, to authenticate their fiction and to make local knowledge available to non-local audiences.

an anomaly, nor a product solely of Campbell's geographical distance from North America. Although Campbell claims to have relied on, sought out, and struggled to find "references and authorities" for his poem, this does not mean that he always worked from nonfictional texts, nor that his interest in these texts was primarily a fact-finding interest. For example, while in the process of writing "Gertrude," Campbell complained about the difficulty of finding Jefferson's *Notes on the States of Virginia*, not because he had already read it but because he had learned of it and thought he might use it for his poem.⁴¹ This matters as we tend to assume that Campbell conducted research in order to generate or substantiate his poem, an assumption that treats nonfictional texts as sources and that enables dismissals of Campbell's inaccurate geographical descriptions. And yet, as Crawford observes, Campbell continued to add Notes to later editions of the poems without changing any of his descriptions within the poem (178). This observation suggests not that Campbell simply needed more time or materials for research, but that much of Campbell's "research" came after the poem existed and was tangential to the descriptions within the poem. Such compositional practices undermine assertions and assumptions that Campbell's Notes function only as sources for "Gertrude."

Rather than serve only as sources, the endnotes also function as invitations to readers to further imagine North America, if not the precise scene of the poem.⁴² They serve, in other words, as supplemental invitations to heightened aesthetic responses as much as they serve as empirical evidence for Campbell's descriptions.⁴³ To take just one example, the very first note to

⁴¹ Letter to Miss Mayow (16 June 1807), in Beattie, *Life and Letters*, 462. Beattie dates the beginning of Campbell's work on "Gertrude" to 5-6 months earlier, at the end of 1806.

⁴² See Rezek, 122-3, for a related argument concerning early nineteenth-century readers' preference for novels written by authors living in distant places. While some of Campbell's representational strategies participate in the representational modes Rezek associates with the "aesthetics of provinciality," "Gertrude" does not neatly fit this model since Campbell is not writing about Scotland but about a continent of which he has no personal experience.

⁴³ Howard confirms that it is a historical mistake to read the footnotes in poems according to a realist rubric: "notes [to poems] do not contribute to greater knowledge, technical expertise, or realism. They are the place where, instead, problems of knowledge, personal messiness, and irrational attitudes toward the text and its knowledge begin to leak

“Gertrude of Wyoming” glosses the mocking-bird’s song (a note on notes, if you will). Excerpted from Thomas Ashe’s *Travels in America* (1808), specifically from a letter describing Virginia’s geography and history, the note makes no effort to connect mockingbirds to Pennsylvania. Instead, it offers a more elaborate description of what a mockingbird sounds like when singing. Emphasizing the bird’s “superior taste,” its gifts at imitation, and its ability to “swell certain notes” for a “most astonishing effect,” Campbell’s selection underscores the aesthetic potential of the markedly North American bird’s song so that readers may, if they wish, imagine this bird and its song themselves (77). In addition to notes such as this describing North American fauna and flora, Campbell also included many notes describing Native American cultures and recirculating tropes (such as the trope of Native American eloquence). These notes invite Anglo-American readers to imagine the aesthetic properties of, for example, wampum (79). Like that uncomfortable slide from “two places—not one” to Campbell’s refusal to change his poem’s libelous depiction of Brant, these examples highlight how Campbell offers both natural history and native peoples’ cultures as portals to aesthetic experience. Though the one does not necessarily lead to the other, they are frequently contiguous in Campbell’s notes and poem.

While one or two notes describe “authoris[ing]” details within Campbell’s poem, the majority of the notes function less to “authorize” corresponding poetic descriptions of real people, places, and objects than to use descriptions of people, places, and objects to prompt

out” (Howard, “Grounds of Knowledge,” 94). See also Julie Ellison, “From Z to Z: Character and Color in *Zeluco*, *Zamoni*, and *The Zoyara*” (unpublished manuscript, August 2010), Microsoft Word file, which identifies a long, transgeneric history of Orientalized characters with Z-names, and argues that even as Z culture novels rely on stereotyped characters and descriptions to offer readers various kinds of “color” (costume, exotic locations, ethnicity, race), the nonfiction episodes within these novels explored important ideas that paradoxically became associated with the rise of the novel.

heightened feelings of interest among readers.⁴⁴ Campbell indicates respect for the authorities he consults (even if, when criticized, he blames his poems' inaccuracies on their accounts). In other words, he would not have understood his use of these texts as sources of aesthetic effect as much as of information to be disrespectful. Nonetheless, his selection of notes troubles the assumption that he grants these nonfictional accounts ontological priority.⁴⁵ Even a note such as the one he added declaring Brant an utter character of fiction, while it introduces a distinction between the world of his poem and the world in which his readers live, grants just that: an ontological distinction (two Brants exist, one in the poem and one outside the poem), not the ontological priority the Brant family requested and that we as twenty-first century readers expect. Campbell's notes are less about proving descriptive accuracy and more about the elaboration of an effect.

"Gertrude of Wyoming" thus suggests that readers read and imagined not only through the front matter but also through the accumulation of end matter. While engravings of the reading grotto illustrate a particular scene within the poem, these nonfictional endnotes illustrate the general aesthetic appeal (for nineteenth-century readers) of geographical and cultural difference that could be imagined vividly *because* at a distance. Similar to the ways in which Gertrude's reading scene undoes the boundaries between the scene of reading and the scene read,

⁴⁴ Mary Baine Campbell, *Wonder & Science: Imagining Worlds in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), explores the entanglement of proto-ethnological writing with romance and the novel prior to the creation of disciplinary boundaries. In *Playing Indian*, Deloria identifies a "modern" shift away from literary figures of the Indian in favor of ethnographic description in the mid-nineteenth century (73). The notes to "Gertrude" are closer to Baine Campbell's model, despite Baine Campbell working in an earlier period, in that they blur a boundary that has become naturalized between the literary and the anthropological. Davis makes a related claim regarding antebellum prose: "the fundamental distinction between subjective imagination (producing the romance) and grounded observations of objects (producing factual writing) is a mistaken paradigm for American literature as it developed under the rubric of nationalism" (*Formalism*, 31).

⁴⁵ Davis, *Formalism*, 143-147, charts a generally similar belief operating in the work of Harriet Beecher Stowe. Describing the relationship between fictional characters and incidents in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and "real life" people and incidents in *The Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Davis claims that "Stowe does not make a claim that the material or historical real is in some sense *more* real, or that it is ontologically in addition to temporally prior to the fictional" (143). As Davis shows, the novel's desire to advance abolitionism forced the political stakes of this lack of ontological priority to a head (138-9).

the notes to “Gertrude” unsettle the boundaries between imaginative and nonfictional texts. Even more than confusing inside/outside, the poem and its reception display a fascination with “reading backwards,” a term that helpfully accounts for these varied ways of engaging with the poem. The phrase accounts for imagining back into existence a lost and idealized colony; images of Gertrude’s back to the viewer as she pores over her book so that we might peek into North America (figs. 2 and 4); a movement like Stewart’s “reading out,” where the background of Gertrude’s reading scene seems to emerge from her book (fig. 3); and the function of the endnotes in the back of the book as one inviting entryway among many to imagining a place.

Vividness and the Topos of Wyoming

In the poem’s nineteenth-century reception, one final form of “reading backwards” is the act of attributing a poem’s vividness to its imagined place of origin in the perceivable world. This form can accommodate a number of different approaches. For instance, we might note that Coleridge’s famous formulation concerning “that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith” emerges from a description of landscape. Coleridge claims that “[t]he sudden charm, which accidents of light and shade, which moon-light or sun-set diffused over a known and familiar landscape” reveals that the two aims of poetry (truth of nature and novelty) might be combined.⁴⁶ Given that he composes poems with supernatural elements to demonstrate this insight, we can see that when Coleridge values “a faithful adherence to the truth of nature” in poetry, he does not mean realistic representation. Indeed, Catherine Gallagher charts a steady distancing between prose fiction and reality, emphasizing the role of will in Coleridge’s account of the suspension of disbelief: “[k]nowingly reading a novel . . . conducts the

⁴⁶ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, in *Coleridge’s Poetry and Prose*, A Norton Critical Edition, eds. Nicholas Halmi, Paul Magnuson, and Raimonda Modiano (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004), 487-88.

reader to a great responsiveness and more vivid perception” because readers trust that the “psychological state of ontological indifference” will be “temporary.”⁴⁷ As we have seen with the engravings and notes and shall see with two American poets, however, what appealed to some readers was the way that knowingly reading striking yet inaccurate descriptions enabled them to dwell in that ontological indifference.

In 1821, just four years after Coleridge’s remarks, Byron recorded a note in his journal concerning the descriptions of actual places that are simultaneously literary topoi, and this note explicitly names “Gertrude” as an example of inaccuracy and inauthenticity. “In reading,” writes Byron, “I have chanced upon an expression of Tom Campbell’s;—speaking of Collins, he says that ‘no reader cares any more about the *characteristic manners* of his Eclogues than about the authenticity of the tale of Troy.’ ‘Tis false—we *do* care about ‘the authenticity of the tale of Troy’”.⁴⁸ Byron introduces a counterintuitive understanding of authenticity in which his belief in Troy trumps historians’ doubts as to its location. His belief, in other words, produces evidence of authenticity, not the other way around:

...I still venerated the grand original as the truth of *history* (in the material *facts*) and of *place*. Otherwise, it would have given me no delight. Who will persuade me, when I reclined upon a mighty tomb, that it did not contain a hero?—its very magnitude proved this. Men do not labour over the ignoble and petty dead—and why should not the *dead* be *Homer’s* dead? The secret of Tom Campbell’s defense of *inaccuracy* in costume and description is, that his Gertrude, &c. has not more locality in common with Pennsylvania than with Penmanmaur. It is notoriously full of grossly false scenery, as all Americans declare, though they praise parts of the Poem.⁴⁹

Byron treats “authenticity” as synonymous with “characteristic manners,” and as the opposite of “inaccuracy.” Doing so, he comes closest to a nineteenth-century version of Hutchings’s ethico-

⁴⁷ Catherine Gallagher, “The Rise of Fictionality,” in *The Novel*, Vol. 1, ed. Franco Moretti (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2006), 348-9.

⁴⁸ George Gordon Byron, Lord Byron, *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron: with notices of his life*, vol. 2, ed. Thomas Moore (London: John Murray, 1830), 405-6.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 406.

political critique of the poem's inaccuracies. However, his example fails to align neatly with these terms. Even as Byron's critique centers on inaccuracy, it still suggests that inaccuracy might not foreclose the feeling of authenticity. In fact, his anecdote of seeing Troy speaks more to Troy's authenticity effects—Byron's sense that the topos of Troy feels and looks real—than to Homer's Troy's geographical and historical accuracy. Much like confusions between vividness as an immersive reading experience and vividness as an object's style, authenticity here emerges as an affect that can be confused with or subsequently treated as fact. Having already been impressed with the poem, the reader can retroactively point to a real place as the possible origin of their mental imagining.⁵⁰ Crucially, what is at stake here is not a belief that literature must proceed from the real but a desire for reading that feels real to belong to the world. Though Byron wants to draw a sharp distinction between the authenticity of the tale of Troy and Campbell's inaccurate Pennsylvania, his definition of authenticity leaves a space in which inaccurate descriptions and authenticity effects need not be opposed when it comes to believing in places on the page.

Byron's comment that Americans declare "Gertrude of Wyoming" "grossly false" in its "scenery" while "prais[ing] parts of the Poem" points towards the strange investments Americans made in a poem they understood to be wrong.⁵¹ For writers in the early national and antebellum United States, the imagined Wyoming became as important a reference point as the real Wyoming Valley—not despite but because of Campbell's inaccuracies.⁵² Poet Joseph

⁵⁰ For a similar process in which the imagined seems to produce the real, and the likely serves as evidence of the actual, see Davis, *Formalism*, 144, on Harriet Beecher Stowe's approach to creating fictional characters and scenarios.

⁵¹ See Rezek, 151-161, regarding readers' responses in the provinces to metropolitan travel writing, including some of Campbell's sources such as Isaac Weld. These responses not only differ in terms of tone and genre ("The author is a liar," e.g., qtd. on 157), but also underscore that American readers did *not* judge Campbell's poem according to accuracy.

⁵² Campbell's poem also famously influenced Irving and James Fenimore Cooper. Irving's "Traits of Indian Character" and "Philip of Pokanoket," for example, appeared in the *Analectic* in 1814, just a few years after Irving's

Rodman Drake presents Campbell as having described “Romantic Wyoming” well enough, but not as well as someone on the scene ideally could. Strangely, Drake suggests that we will know the “real” Wyoming only when someone who has seen it can more fully romanticize it. The poet proves his patriotism not through greater accuracy but through greater intensity:

Romantic Wyoming! could none be found
Of all that rove thy Eden-bowers among,
To wake a native harp’s untutored sound,
And give thy tale of woe the voice of song?
Oh! if description’s cold and nerveless tongue
From stranger harps such hallowed strains could call,
How doubly sweet the descant wild had rung,
From one who lingering over “thy ruined wall,”
Had plucked thy mourning flowers and wept thy timeless fall!⁵³

Adopting Campbell’s Spenserian stanzas, Drake distinguishes between the aims and effects of different kinds of writing. While “description’s cold and nerveless tongue” can be read as describing Campbell’s descriptions (his descriptions are cold and nerveless yet still manage to produce hallowed strains), a stronger reading understands the line as describing nonfictional travel accounts such as those displayed in Campbell’s endnotes. This second possibility acknowledges differences between cold description (nonfiction prose) and poetry (“descant wild”), yet ultimately ranks them according to a single measure: intensity. Valuing intensity over “cold” accuracy, Drake further suggests the impossibility of replacing Campbell’s Wyoming with the real. This is both because the longed-for “native harp” would intensify (make “doubly sweet”) rather than fact-check Campbell’s descriptions, but also and most importantly because

“Biographical Sketch” of Campbell (1810). “Philip” quotes from “Gertrude” in its epigraph, while “Traits” quotes Logan’s oft-quoted speech, a speech included as an endnote to “Gertrude.” A full study of the nineteenth-century U.S. reception of “Gertrude of Wyoming” would include these sketches, in particular Irving’s concerns regarding the historical distance between King Philip’s War and the present in “Philip.” This focus on distance, however, most immediately concerns the genre of history in relation to fiction and the truth value of colonial chronicles, placing it more readily in conversation with work such as Roger Maioli’s “David Hume, Literary Cognitivism, and the Truth of the Novel,” *SEL* 54.3 (Summer 2014): 624-648, ISSN 0039-3657, which elegantly analyzes tensions between eighteenth-century literary cognitivism and the British empiricism on which such cognitivism was based.

⁵³ Joseph Rodman Drake, “To a Friend,” *American Poetry: The Nineteenth Century*, vol. 1, ed. John Hollander (New York: The Library of the Americas, 1993).

Drake cannot seem to escape Campbell's poem. In the stanza above he quotes it twice, referencing both the poem's close (Oulalissi's "descant wild") and the poem's opening ("Although the wild flower on thy ruin'd wall..."). Thus, when Drake imagines an American poet "lingering over 'thy ruined wall,'" he conflates that which is gained by being in the place with that which is gained by reading the text.

In a similar vein, Fitz-Greene Halleck begins his poem "Wyoming" with a reference both to Wyoming, Pennsylvania and to "Gertrude of Wyoming": "Thou com'st in beauty on my gaze at last, / 'On Susquehannah's side, fair Wyoming, '...'"⁵⁴ As in the case of Drake, Halleck appears to begin by gazing on Campbell's poem even as he proclaims that Wyoming is "a vision of [his] brain no more." Drake and Halleck, along with Lydia Sigourney, point to the inaccuracy of Campbell's Wyoming and gesture towards replacing it with their own poetic descriptions, yet ultimately none of these poets disentangle their descriptions from Campbell's.⁵⁵ Recognizing how affected readers were by the poem, these writers sought to build on the poem's striking effects, noting Campbell's inaccuracies yet building on the aesthetic vividness he had generated. The imagined Wyoming persists in their poems as more than an allusion: it is a recognizable place in which the poets locate themselves, through which they authorize further imaginative descriptions, and with which they raise questions about how reading comes to feel real.

Halleck offers the most sustained meditation on the topos of Wyoming and its mixture of inaccuracy with vividness. Though his title and endnote immediately associate themselves with Campbell's poem, Halleck's chosen epigraph comes from Rousseau's *Julie*—"Dites si la Nature n'a fait pas ce beau pays pour une Julie, pour une Claire, et pour un St. Preux, mais ne les y

⁵⁴ Fitz-Greene Halleck, "Wyoming," *Alnwick Castle, and other poems* (1827): 24-28.

⁵⁵ For example, in "Vale of Wyoming," Sigourney remarks: "Often was some melodious passage from the Gertrude of Campbell brought to the memory or the lips, by scenery, which had he ever beheld, he might doubtless more accurately have portrayed" (*Scenes in My Native Land* (1845): 221). She immediately follows this with a descriptive stanza from Campbell's poem, which seems to offer evidence of both inaccuracy and vividness.

cherchez pas” [“Say if Nature has not made this beautiful place for a Julie, a Claire, and a St. Preux, but do not seek them there.”]. Framing his “Wyoming” with a text fixated on and by representations replacing or superseding realities (what Marshall calls *Julie’s* “representation compulsion”), Halleck signals that he will also address the relationship between reality and representation.⁵⁶ The epigraph’s closing clause combined with Halleck’s jokes about the gap between Campbell’s idealized characters and Wyoming’s actual inhabitants might make it seem as if Halleck will succeed in disentangling real from ideal. Yet even as Halleck uses Campbell’s poem to authorize his own Wyoming, his place reinforces belief in Campbell’s. Taught to admire the place by reading Campbell, the poem’s final stanza shows how deeply Campbell’s Wyoming has been impressed into the place:

And on the margin of yon orchard hill
Are marks where time-worn battlements have been,
And in the tall grass traces linger still
Of “arrowy frieze and wedged ravelin.” (ll.73-76)

Wyoming here becomes a page with a margin, marks, traces, and a quote from Campbell’s poem that seems to be physically present in the tall grasses. This conflates not only looking and reading, but being and reading, as Campbell’s description and Halleck’s quotation marks *exist* in the landscape, challenging the distance between the page and the place. Though Halleck’s concluding lines try to account for some of what has been left out of Campbell’s poem—the quotidian deaths, from old age, of the massacre’s survivors—his inclusion of them in the same stanza seems to write their numbers into the Campbellscape as well. The vividness of the topos of Wyoming emerges through readers’ elaborations on the aesthetic force of a simultaneously real and imagined place.

⁵⁶ Marshall, *Frame of Art*, 113.

The Campbellscape came to be not because Campbell described Wyoming realistically or well, and not only because he wrote about a historical event that happened in the US, but because his figure of the reader in an inaccurately described North American scene suggested that the US had a place other people were imagining and from which US writers could launch their own imaginative productions. The simultaneously placed and unplaceable reader in the simultaneously real and imaginary place made Wyoming a perfect locus for meditating on readers' and writers' desires to overcome the distance between themselves and the page. Put another way, the fact that Wyoming did exist in the world, felt like it could exist through the page, and couldn't exist as described made it not only a useful literary topos, but a place that brought to the surface the desire for readerly belief. The spatiotemporal and geographical distance between Campbell and Wyoming, combined with Campbell's descriptive inaccuracies, provided conditions for readers to entertain their desire to believe that where they go when they read could be a place in the world.

As an aesthetic category, vividness names this desire; it also, however, describes a set of relationships rooted in ontological confusions that can be, depending on the reader, pleasurable, enabling, offensive, or harmful. Scholarship on "Gertrude of Wyoming" has tended to read such desires and confusions dismissively or as ideologically suspect. In this chapter, I have sought to complicate and expand these readings by emphasizing how taking seriously Campbell's scene of reading and attending to a spectrum of nineteenth-century readers' poetic and visual responses to it sheds light on additional facets of the poem, its reception, and its contributions to literary nationalism in relation to philosophical aesthetic questions. As New Yorkers and New Englanders worked to cultivate a national literature, the inaccuracies of Campbell's geographical descriptions combined with the figure of the reader longing for aesthetic transport invited them

to use and reuse, and in the process firmly establish the topos of Wyoming. A poem frequently understood today as nostalgic for North American British colonialism was used by nineteenth-century Americans in the service of imagining a nation. Assuming that the reading scene or that the poem's aesthetic features are ideologically rigid hampers our ability to understand all that is at stake in that topos.⁵⁷ Bringing historical reading practices to the fore enables us to better grasp the cultural logic of the poem's popularity.

When we read a poem like "Gertrude" now, at a historical distance and with our own philosophical and political commitments, we recognize the racist, imperialist, and colonialist perspectives channeled through the poem's descriptions of persons and places. It is important for us to use that distance to name the ethical stakes of those descriptive errors, both for historical and current readers. However, our historical distance can have its own obfuscating effects, for example when we assume that there is only one way to read a misplaced palm tree, that the palm's lack of faithful mimesis concerning place only confirms the poem's and poet's ethical failure regarding Brant. Judging the geographical descriptions in "Gertrude" as unethical because inaccurate risks assuming that nineteenth-century readers held poetic descriptions of distant places to a standard of accuracy, and that they assigned an ethics to this standard. But as we saw in Byron's response, even when accuracy was invoked as a value for poetry, that accuracy did not neatly align with realistic description. Or, as in Drake's Wyoming stanza, a travel account ("description's cold and nerveless tongue"), Campbell's poem, and a longed-for American Wyoming poem can be ranked based on intensities not accuracies. Vividness always beats nervelessness. This spectrum of readers' responses, then, ranges from John Brant's appeal to

⁵⁷ See Flint, 12 and 50, regarding the malleability of the figure of the Indian in nineteenth-century Great Britain and in "Gertrude of Wyoming," respectively. My thinking about how the same text can enable and prevent both "cultural mobility" and "ideological malleability" has been influenced by Daniel Hack's "Close Reading At A Distance: The African-Americanization of *Bleak House*," *Critical Inquiry* vol. 34, no. 4 (Summer 2006), 729-753; 731.

correct the misrepresentation of his father to the extravagance of the illustrations' thorough confusion of real and ideal settings, with everyone else falling somewhere in between: Byron's critique of inaccuracy that nonetheless acknowledges authenticity as an affect; Campbell's treatment of nonfictional notes as portals to aesthetic experience; Drake's hierarchy of genre description based on descriptive intensity, not objectivity; Willis's facetious creation of two coexistent Wyomings; and Halleck's sustained meditation on the entanglement of the topos and the page with the place. Assembling this range of desires, moods, and values circulating through the poem enriches our understanding of why some readers wished to dissolve the distance between themselves and the page, and why other readers wished for a firmer divide between the two. Acknowledging the different ethical stakes along this spectrum opens the possibility of seeing Campbell's geographical errors two ways instead of one. Seeing that these different ethical orders exist on a spectrum, however, keeps us always grappling with when geographical errors merge into one kind not two.

Chapter 2

Amplifying *Zóphiël*:

Maria Gowen Brooks and the Space and Time of Reading

Around the time that Drake was putting Campbell's topos to work on behalf of his desire for a national literature, another American poet cited the figure of Gertrude to initiate her own literary career. The anonymously published volume *Judith, Esther, and Other Poems* (1820), written "[b]y a lover of the fine arts," opens with a brief catalogue of books. The introductory poem presents itself as trying to match the reader's mood and taste to particular poems ranging from Classical epic to Oriental verse narratives. Within this scenario, the poem also establishes the writer's credentials, for this lover of the fine arts is familiar with Homer, Scott, Byron, Campbell, and Pope.

Ye who admire the lofty-moving strain,
See fierce Achilles tread the corse-strown plain,
Behold proud Troy in flames, or turn your eyes
Where, pale and gasping, noble Hector lies.
Or, do you love when darkly looms the night
To hear of wizard grim and goblin sprite,
Go see the moon illumine with storied pane
And seek the *book* with shuddering Deloraine.
Delight your hearts in tumult, what a grace
In young Zuleika's *music* breathing face!
Love you mild beauty, on the forehead fair,
Of guileless Gertrude see her *parted hair*,
Or, pleases most, the sad, impassioned tale,
With Eloisa's sighs resound the cloisters pale. ("Introduction," ll. 1-14)

As these author names indicate, the catalogue only includes male poets, though the characters singled out shift from heroes (Achilles and Deloraine) to heroines (Zuleika, Gertrude, and

Eloise). The poetess suggests that her own poems simply assuage loneliness “[w]hen no congenial, kindly heart is nigh / And your lone bosoms heave th’ unbidden sigh” (ll.21-22). Yet this conventional pose of humility belies the ambition driving the writer’s extended narrative poems celebrating Biblical heroines. The Preface also makes a curious distinction between “fugitive pieces . . . written under the influence of vivid impressions” and longer narrative poems, which were “suggested by circumstances, which occurred in reality” (iv). While the distinction between vivid impressions and occurrences in reality seems to indicate primarily a distinction of genre, it also suggests that vivid impressions and reality might not be identical, and that vivid impressions might have a distinct temporality. By way of conventional and unconventional gender roles, her reading of male poets, and her appeal to both vivid impressions and reality as sources for her poetry, this lover of the fine arts — Maria Gowen Brooks — introduced her poems in hopes of finding readers.

Brooks and her six-canto poem *Zóphiël; or, The Bride of Seven* (1833) offer an inverse scenario to the one raised by Campbell and “Gertrude of Wyoming.” Although *Zóphiël* is set in the ancient Near East and relies on Orientalist tropes, it comes to be associated with Cuba, the island to which the Massachusetts-born Brooks moved in 1823 and where she lived on and owned a coffee plantation that depended on slave labor. Like “Gertrude,” *Zóphiël* is a long poem that becomes associated with a particular place through its reliance on an assortment of tropes. In this way, both the previous chapter and this chapter probe the relationship between places in the world and places described on the page. Unlike “Gertrude,” however, no one in the nineteenth century accused Brooks of inaccuracy, either about the Near East or about Cuba. Where reviewers pointed out Campbell’s inaccuracies, they praised Brooks’s varied knowledge, both

esoteric and experiential, and the sensual force of her poem.¹ Most strikingly, while nineteenth-century reviewers and readers willingly read past Campbell's location in England to enjoy his inaccurate North American topos, reviewers and readers could not stop reading Brooks's imagined geographies for evidence of Brooks's personal location in Cuba.

The reception of *Zóphiël* in particular and of Brooks in general has been remarkably consistent in emphasizing (1) Brooks's passion and imagination, and (2) her residence in Cuba. Robert Southey confided to Caroline Bowles that the poem was so steamy, it would "require cooling." Hartley Coleridge went a step further, declaring the poem to be "the temperature of... the island of Cuba, where it was written." And, in 1879, Zadel Barnes Gustafson wrote admiringly of the combination of virtue and passion, restraint and richness that she found in Brooks's life and work: "Her short life of only fifty years was one of comparatively little outward incident [...] But her poems, especially her great work 'Zóphiël,' show that her mental and spiritual life was a passionately vivid aeon of intense experiences...."² Despite the frequency with which "passion," "impassioned," and "intense" have been used to describe both poem and poet, little attention has been paid to tracking the processes through which nineteenth-century readers came to understand the poem's aesthetics as related to its place of writing. While Coleridge's comment suggests that the poem's intensities can be attributed to geography and climate, Gustafson suggests that the poem communicates a personal and temporal intensity: of a woman whose mental and spiritual life amplified her seemingly scarce experiences. Readers continued to equate *Zóphiël* with intensity well into the twentieth century. In 1926, Thomas

¹ Reviewers described her notes as "interesting" and indicative of "consummate judgment and vast reading," but they rarely called the descriptions "true," never "realistic." See Ingraham, "Biographical Sketch, No. IV: Maria del Occidente," *Southern Literary Messenger*, 544; "The Poet's of the Day," *Fraser's Magazine*, 368; *Monthly Review*, 577; and, for "realistic," *Ambassadors of Culture*, 32. Most reviewers noted the notes briefly; the *Monthly Review's* focus on the notes is an anomaly.

² Southey to Bowles (c1831), qtd. in Low, 98; Coleridge, "Modern English Poetesses" (1840), 393; Gustafson, Preface, v.

Ollive Mabbott praised “Song,” an excerpt from *Zóphiël*, as “the finest thing in the poem. He further attributed its intensities to Cuba, the reader, and a particular temporal experience:

Written in Cuba, it seems to hold in it the fire of the blazing stars of that tropic sky—to feel the full effect, one must imagine an evening balmy as a few nights are with us in June. Then, it seems the perfect expression of a lonely heart—unquestioning in its passionate devotion; the words of the singer gradually increasing in vigor from the merely rich description of the first lines, to the utter abandonment at the end, of everything else in a consuming flame of unselfish love. (“María del Occidente,” 419)

Like Coleridge, Mabbott claims that the poem seems to communicate something of the Cuban climate. However, he also indicates that although these effects are held within the poem, they might only be activated fully by imagining or remembering balmy nights shared by “us in June” in Massachusetts. If one participates in imaginatively sensing a distant place by way of more locally extreme effects, *then* it seems to set off an aesthetic reaction so that the poem “increas[es] in vigor” from “merely rich description” to “utter abandonment” as one reads. Mabbott does not hesitate to attribute the poem’s blaze and balm and vigor to three different sources—to a distant geographical place, to Northern readers’ memories of embodied experiences at home, and to a gradual escalation of affect over time. It is the very casualness of his linking all three to the poem’s effects that invites our further consideration.

Taking up the question *Where does the poem come from?* in relation to *Zóphiël* might seem foolish since the obvious answer is Cuba. Almost all nineteenth-century reviews of the poem mention that the poem was written in Cuba, and the best scholarship on Brooks to date has focused on resituating her and her poems in relation to Cuba, both the tropical island and its sugar, coffee, and slave labor economies, and to a lesser extent the trope of the tropics.³ An unintended consequence of this important work, however, is that we miss the aesthetic discourse of this poem. And this omission causes us to misread the processes by which Brooks’s

³ See Gruesz, both “The cafétal of María del Occidente and the Anglo-American Race for Cuba” (2008), and *Ambassadors of Culture* (2002), especially 32-35; 37-39; and 62-70.

association with Cuba, her ambiguous national identity, and her self-presentation as exotic were established.⁴ *Zóphiël* refers to real geographical places, including Cuba, but it emerges from and contributes to a tradition of unfaithful mimesis—a tradition of descriptive strategies that do represent real places, but that make little to no attempt to represent them in a realistic way. In other words, Brooks scholars may have been too quick to locate a particular place within or behind *Zóphiël*.⁵ Kirsten Silva Gruesz has carefully recovered the process by which Rufus Griswold’s reading of Brooks’s novel as autobiography, has shaped all subsequent Brooks scholarship. Through this tremendous work, Gruesz troubles the idea that we should read Brooks’s characters, even poetess characters, as mirror-reflections of their author.⁶ I propose a similar intervention when it comes to *Zóphiël* and its relationship to Cuba. We need to stop reading the poem only as a way to access Brooks’s Cuba and to take seriously as well the Orientalist, allegorical, fantastic, and frankly aesthetic elements of *Zóphiël*. In focusing on a single place, we’ve overlooked how vividness in *Zóphiël* relates to the formal and relational problem of extending intense feelings over time and space, including the time and space of reading. Recovering the “imaginariness” of Brooks’s imaginary geographies, as opposed to attempting to realize them, it becomes possible to chart the multiple conventions of intensity Brooks employs in order to amplify the scope and the effects of her poem. *Zóphiël* thus offers a reading experience that is both intense and sustained as a means to establish Brooks in the literary marketplace.

As Brook’s earlier pairing of “fugitive pieces” with “vivid impressions” begins to suggest, there are distinctive temporalities associated with vividness. On the one hand, vividness

⁴ For Brooks’s ambiguous nationality and self-exoticization, see especially Gruesz, “The café-tal,” 38-39; 44; 49; 52.

⁵ Mary Loeffelholz similarly points out that nineteenth-century Americanists have too often “looked for poems of spontaneous domestic realism, poems that immediately and accurately reflect the privatized domestic realm of emotion” (*From School to Salon*, 17).

⁶ Gruesz, “Maria Gowen Brooks, In and Out of the Poe Circle,” especially 80-83.

seems rare, fleeting, a flicker on its way to fading, something that can surge into existence or a perceiver's awareness at peak intensity only to fade away. On the other hand, a vivid dream or memory often makes the dream or memory seem substantial, as if the mental scene were so stable it could be inhabited. Elaine Scarry theorizes that writers both exploit and deny a related difference between perceptions and mental images. They "enlist" flimsy, gauzy, nearly immaterial objects that mimic the imagination's own lack of solidity, Scarry argues, in order to "turn our minds into the floor" on which imagined images move and imagined scenes are vivified.⁷ Much of Scarry's theory is dedicated to understanding how mental images acquire "solidity," where "solidity" involves world- or object-making. Eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century discourse, however, uses "steadiness" as much as "solidness," "firmness" in terms of fixity rather than necessarily in terms of dimensionality, indicating duration rather than only representational objecthood.⁸ We might turn to *The Fall of Hyperion — A Dream*, when Moneta tells Keats's poet-figure:

My power, which to me is still a curse,
Shall be to thee a wonder, for the scenes
Still swooning vivid through my globed brain
With an electral changing misery
Thou shalt with those dull mortal eyes behold,
Free from pain, if wonder pain thee not. (ll.243-248)

In this passage, Moneta suggests that only the elect (a goddess, or perhaps a chosen poet) are possessed with the power to keep such distant scenes "still swooning vivid." The wonder, then, is an effect of the goddess's power to hold the scenes steady—and for the mortal spectator to be able to view them in all their intensity without pain—rather than an attribute of the scenes themselves. The *Southern Literary Messenger* describes Brooks performing a similar role to Moneta: "She transmits freshly to her readers the impressions glowing, as she receives them, and

⁷ Scarry, *Dreaming By the Book*, especially 14; 170-176.

⁸ I am grateful to Julie Ellison for an October 2014 conversation about Scarry's object-oriented notion of vivacity.

imbues their minds with the idea and feelings which fill her own soul.”⁹ This chapter investigates Maria Gowen Brooks's nineteenth-century election to the superlative status of “most impassioned and most imaginative of poetesses” through her experiments in *Zóphiël* with the doubled temporalities of vividness and with varied conventions of intensity to amplify her poem.

Amplification

Zóphiël was published in London in 1833. It is set in the ancient Near East with brief visits to Sicily, Libya, Egypt, and an unnamed location near the center of the earth. Formally, much of the poem is composed in the stanza of Gray’s elegy, and the poem’s extensive endnotes and footnotes draw heavily on the history of world religions and on the natural history of Cuba. Its plot springs from the apocryphal Book of Tobit. Zóphiël, an Apollo figure, is one of the angels who rebelled with Lucifer. Having fallen out of heaven but not quite into hell, he wanders the earth, attempting to block his memories of a paradise lost. In the process, he falls in love with a Jewish woman, Eglá, during the Babylonian Captivity. This same Eglá wishes to marry Helon, a man she has never met but of whom she had a vision; however, neither Eglá’s mother nor Zóphiël nor the many men in Ecbatana support Eglá’s desire to wait for Helon. Six times Eglá is pressured into marriage, and six times Zóphiël kills her bridegroom, resulting in Eglá’s temporary banishment to a grove outside the city.¹⁰ Zóphiël then travels to the center of the earth for an elixir to make Eglá immortal, giving Helon time to find and marry Eglá, making official the poem’s title, “The Bride of Seven.”

As this brief plot summary shows, Cuba is only one of many “exotic” locales described or named in Brooks's poem. The *North American Review* praises Brooks's “description of

⁹ *Southern Literary Messenger* (1839): 547.

¹⁰ Technically he only kills 5. Altheëtor, the sixth husband, dies from too much pleasure when Eglá, trying to protect him from Zóphiël, wraps her hair around him. Eglá, however, believes Zóphiël to be the killer.

tropical scenery” in general for its “delicious richness, a dreamy beauty, and a ‘mazy-running soul of harmony,’ ... which not only bring the scene vividly to the eye, but render it perceptible to the other senses.” When it comes to *Zóphiël*, the “tropical scenery” could just as easily be Ecbatanian as Cuban.¹¹ This vividness, in other words, may be due as much to *Zóphiël*’s exoticism as to its descriptions of Cuba. Clearly part of what Julie Ellison has identified as “Z-culture,” *Zóphiël* foregrounds and trades on cultural otherness from the very first letter of its title.¹² It accumulates not only material items and tropical scenes but, like Milton’s lists in *Paradise Lost*, the proper names of distant locations as well.¹³ And still the poem’s reliance on multiple exotic locales was only one gesture towards the conventionally vivid. *Zóphiël* relies on and offers a panoply of conventions nineteenth-century readers associated with intensity: invocations, apostrophes, extravagant descriptions, enclosed spaces, exotic places, songs, objets d’art, metamorphoses. In the way that there is not just one exotic location but six, there is not just one way to signal the intensity of a particular scene or mood but many.

We can best understand this amassing of bejeweled objects, tropical settings, and fervent addresses if we approach Brooks’s poem as an experiment in “amplification.” Amplification is a rhetorical figure and concept circulating in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as seen especially in Joseph Priestley’s *A Course of Lectures on Oratory and Criticism* (1777) and in Hugh Blair’s *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783). It refers both to expanding upon a point through accumulation (showing numerous examples) and to enlarging a point through magnification (using tropes to heighten or exaggerate an effect). The *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric*

¹¹ *North American Review*, 33.

¹² “From Z to Z: Character and Color in *Zeluco*, *Zanoni*, and *The Zoyara*,” (unpublished manuscript, August 2010), Microsoft Word file. See chapter one, n43.

¹³ William B. Hunter, Jr., “Milton’s Laundry Lists,” *Milton Quarterly* 18, 2 (May 1984): 58-61. Hunter considers the lists in *Paradise Lost* to be an “important [aesthetic] embellishment[.]” that relies on readers being “able to identify [the listed names] at once and through the names associate with them everything that they evoke” (59). The longest list (Book XI, 388-411) includes reference to “where / The Persian in Ecbatan sat” (392-93). See Packer for more on Brooks’s engagement with Milton.

captures this double tendency through a Cartesian figure: “Amplification has a qualitative and a quantitative variant”: vertical amplification, which “elevat[es] or magnif[ies] the subject,” and horizontal amplification, which “enlarge[s] a proposition or...exten[ds] a text by...multipl[ying] and var[ying] its constituents...” (Plett 25). As if graphing the figure’s force and function, this definition describes amplification as both a spike in and an unspooling of attention. When Brooks adds yet another brief description of something fiercely bright or overtly exotic, she invites both a concentrated and an extended focus from her reader.

Recent scholarship on nineteenth-century American aesthetics has drawn attention to the effects of accrual and elaboration, both thematic and stylistic, within texts. These kinds of accrual and elaboration—particular forms of amplification—range from emblems and reveries to “highly wrought” and eclectic styles.¹⁴ Taken together, these studies demonstrate a widespread interest in understanding the politics, aesthetics, and philosophical underpinnings of descriptive or imaginative excess in nineteenth-century texts, in particular in prose. While studies featuring emblems and reveries are underwritten by a similar intellectual legacy as Priestley and Blair, it is the work on “highly wrought” style that most immediately relates to the figure and history I track in this chapter.¹⁵ As discussed in the introduction, Dorri Beam argues that women prose writers’ developed a “highly wrought” style as an “aesthetico-political code” that allowed them to shape

¹⁴ See Theo Davis, *Formalism, Experience, and the Making of American Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (2007) and *Ornamental Aesthetics: The Poetry of Attending in Thoreau, Dickinson, Whitman* (2016); Kerry Larson, *Imagining Equality in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (2008); Dorri Beam, *Style, Gender, and Fantasy in Nineteenth-Century American Women’s Writing* (2010); and Meredith L. McGill, *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834-1853* (2003).

¹⁵ Beam, *Style, Gender, and Fantasy*. My overall argument is also indebted to Davis’s articulation of how affect in Hawthorne’s prose is the product of spatialized figures for reading. In “Sensing Hawthorne: The Figure of Hawthorne’s Affect,” 74-108, Davis describes two different directions of movement in Hawthorne’s prose, movement along with Hawthorne’s narrator and narrative, and movement away from the text, arguing, “Experience is ... proposed out of the text’s offer of conflicting vectors ... That figurative idea of a difference between moving along with and moving out and away from the text is the abstract, rather than personal, affect of Hawthorne” (74). My chapter uses “amplification” to conceptualize another spatialized figure for reading: the idea of a poem that could be both long and consistently intense.

and signify alternative conceptions of gender. Beam identifies the language of flowers, including its Orientalist motifs, as one cultural discourse that influenced this style. Women prose writers, Beam suggests, draw on these motifs and “adopt styles of indulgence, material accrual, and ornament [...] to confront Western constructions of femininity” (74). Here, the accrual of luxury items within the prose leads to an accrual of luxurious language on the page, the whole highly-wrought piece of writing striving to produce “a new version of the feminine” through the creation of “a feminine voice palpable, sensuous, and intricate” that is not tied to a gendered body (79).¹⁶ I take a different approach to amplification. As a constitutive device of the long poem, amplification helps us understand how long poems became long, such that “Cuba” functions as just one signpost of intensity among many. I do not see Brooks’s style as materializing an alternative feminine voice, but like Beam I do see Brooks using amplification as a means to reflect on desire, particularly the desire for a readership. Given that *Egla* spends most of her time with aestheticized natural scenes or with *Zóphiël*, an angel associated with the arts, we can see that Brooks reroutes desire between a female spectator and a figure for the aesthetic. In Brooks’s professional life, that figure for the aesthetic was Robert Southey, and Brooks’s use of amplification testified that Brooks had read Southey with care.

Southey, Brooks, and Orientalism: The Long Poem’s Amplifications

We know *Zóphiël* was written by “Mary of the West” but its storyline unfolds in a stereotypically lush East. Bowers, lotus blossoms, spices, dates, and gemstones fill the poem’s cantos. In revising the first Canto from its 1825 publication for the 1833 publication of the whole

¹⁶ See also McGill, *American Literature & the Culture of Reprinting*, 164-68. McGill demonstrates that Poe cultivated an eclectic aesthetic within and across his tales in order to leverage the haphazard juxtaposition of genres and aesthetics within the miscellanies and periodicals of antebellum print culture. This eclecticism serves as “a shorthand for heightened aesthetic effect” (167). It also involves elaboration and exaggeration, both potential synonyms for amplification.

poem, Brooks added not one but three invocations: to Columbus, to Madoc, and to the spirits of the Euphrates. By invoking Madoc especially—a figure as literary as historical in the early nineteenth century, and a metonym for Southey—Brooks scrambles any single location for her text. While Brooks clearly foregrounds Cuba and the West, she also foregrounds “the East,” Southey, and her reading of Southey.¹⁷

In *Zóphiël*, Brooks relies on the aesthetic conventions of the Oriental verse narrative, conventions she learned from Southey. Barbara Packer astutely describes *Zóphiël* as “a mythological epic in the style of Robert Southey’s *Curse of Kehama* or *Thalaba the Destroyer*,” incorporating “the learned footnote” as part of its genre (66; 67). But if Brooks’s participation in these conventions is not surprising, the framing of Brooks’s participation is. When scholars have noted the mixture of Near East settings and Caribbean description within the poem, the syntax of this notice has tended to privilege Cuba, presenting the Near East as a generic scrim against which to view Brooks’s originality in adapting such conventions to Cuba. Gruesz, for instance, writes: “But for all its cosmopolitan and biblical gleanings, *Zóphiël* presents itself as a work grounded in the Americas, recasting Orientalist conventions within a particularly Caribbean light and locating them within a New World geography and history” (*Ambassadors* 64). Here, we are asked to view the poem as “grounded” and “locat[ed]” in Cuba, the Orientalist conventions made less conventional through their “recasting” or repurposing within a local, occidental context. Less overtly, Packer emphasizes that Brooks “often used [the Notes to *Zóphiël*] to point out the

¹⁷ Gruesz points out that the “Occidente” of Brooks’s pseudonym does two different kinds of work: the pseudonym “with its overtones of the westward course of empire, marks a kind of indeterminate transatlantic space between the United States and Britain, even as it gestures at her specific location in Cuba (Matanzas is in the ‘Occidente,’ or western half of the island)” (“The cafetal,” 43). See also Kerry Larson, “The Historical Epic, Women’s Poetry, and Early American Verse,” 32-46, in *The Cambridge Companion to American Poets*, ed. Mark Richardson (Cambridge UP, 2015). Larson investigates the ways in which Brooks and other US poets writing between 1815 and 1830 use the conventions of historical epic without believing in the philosophy of history that had underwritten the genre. He reads *Zóphiël* in this context, explaining Brooks’s multiple “geographical sites . . . and the literary traditions they suggest,” including Madoc, as a way of “pay[ing] respect to the epic convention while overloading its circuits” (43).

resemblance between Cuba and the ancient Near East, or else to comment upon the graciousness of Spanish culture when compared to the barbarous customs of New England” (68). While not untrue, this characterization suggests that the Notes are more focused on Cuba and New England culture than in fact they are. And while Packer acknowledges *Kehama* and *Thalaba* as intertexts for *Zóphiël*, she focuses on how Brooks “rewrit[es]” Milton, routing *Zóphiël* through and against a canonical text (66-7). Despite Southey’s texts being well known intertexts for *Zóphiël*, scholars have treated Brooks’s engagements with Southey’s poems as a historical if forgettable fact, privileging the parts of *Zóphiël* that can be read as referencing Cuba and Brooks’s life in Cuba.¹⁸

Meredith L. McGill provides an alternative model for how to think about overt gestures towards location and place in antebellum texts such as *Zóphiël*. Arguing that Edgar Allan Poe foregrounds spatio-temporal dislocation in his tales, and empty markers of address in his poems, in order to ground his writing in “the territory of genre,” McGill suggests that it is the overt presence of genre conventions that produce a sense of readerly belief.¹⁹ McGill shows that for Poe, working within the antebellum marketplace’s culture of reprinting, markers of genre become a significant way to signal literariness. McGill’s argument helps authorize a reconsideration of how the connection between *Zóphiël* and Cuba gets narrated over time, and how that connection gets made initially: through Brooks’s overt use of nineteenth-century aesthetic conventions. By understanding Cuba not as the “real” waiting to be plucked out of the

¹⁸ Byron’s *Heaven and Earth. A Mystery* (1821) and Thomas Moore’s *The Loves of the Angels* (1823) would also seem to be dominant intertexts for *Zóphiël*, not to mention Byron’s, Moore’s and others’ Oriental tales. Gustafson, Mabbott, and Van Wyck Brooks mention these two writers and/or texts when discussing *Zóphiël*. However, in the Preface to the second edition, Brooks explicitly states that *Zóphiël* is not indebted to Byron, Moore, Milton, or Chateaubriand (whose “Les Martyrs” also involved angels). While this can be seen as evidence for the very influence the statement denies, I find it helpful for highlighting how Brooks’s self-positioning on the literary marketplace differs in relation to Southey.

¹⁹ *American Literature & the Culture of Reprinting*, 155-163. McGill introduces the phrase “territory of genre” as follows: “... I want to suggest that what we have taken to be [Poe’s tales’] placelessness actually serves to locate them within a culture of literary dislocation. The double gesture by which Poe first invokes and then evacuates conventional grounds of narrative authority can be seen as a mechanism for the transfer of authority to the only thing that American readers of magazine fiction reliably hold in common--the territory of genre itself” (160).

ideal or fantastic, but as one sign of intensity among many on display within the poem, we make space for focusing on the work of the conventions themselves, as well as the ideas authorizing these conventions.

In the next section I return to Brooks's own use of Cuba as a mark of intensity. First, however, we must consider the reception of Southey's long poems, for they illuminate the aesthetic aims and some of the extra-aesthetic stakes of *Zophiel*, at least as understood by nineteenth-century critics and readers. Southey's long poems set in distant places prioritize impressing the reader with striking images and language. In *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801), *Madoc* (1805), and *The Curse of Kehama* (1810), Southey reveals his "strange delight in exotic and mythological subject matter," for what these poems have in common is their length, their extensive notes, and their settings in distant places (Madden 5). Set in the Near East, Wales and North America, and India, respectively, *Thalaba*, *Madoc*, and *Kehama* all attempt to offer readers the "wild and wondrous" in both form and content.²⁰ To this end, they rely on mythologies, histories, natural histories, and travel narratives, foregrounding the details of cultural difference as a means of novelty. "All the studies and researches of Mr. Southey are now turned towards novelties of the most flaring sort; and it is immaterial how incredible the thing may be, provided it be new," lamented the Philadelphia *Portfolio* in its 1811 review of *Kehama*.²¹ Sales of Southey's long poems in Britain appear to have been moderate to low for all three books, and especially low for *Madoc*, and yet the poems were consumed by readers: Percy Shelley admired *Kehama*, Dorothy and William Wordsworth expressed pleasure in the descriptions in *Madoc*, and Southey complained to Coleridge, "Thousands of people read my books ... but they do not buy them - they borrow them, even those persons who are what they

²⁰ The language "wild and wondrous" is from Southey's prefatory remarks to *Madoc*: "I am he who framed / Of Thalaba the wild and wondrous song."

²¹ *Portfolio* ser. 3, 6 (1811): 518.

call my friends.”²² William Charvat characterizes U.S. critics as strongly preferring Scott’s romances to Southey’s due to the former’s higher degree of “realistic” content, yet acknowledges that the *The Curse of Kehama* was generally admired.²³

Contemporary reviewers on both sides of the Atlantic focused on the effects of these poems’ exotic settings, metrical experiments, and lengths on readers. Although the poems were published over the course of nine years, and the last (*Kehama*) was published fifteen years before Brooks published the first canto of *Zóphiël*, we can still identify patterns that provide a useful sense of both how Southey’s mythological epics were regarded when they were published, and how these long poems’ receptions compare to the reception of *Zóphiël*. Most relevant to Brooks and her poem were reviewers’ mixture of admiration for and exhaustion by Southey’s “wondrous” images and descriptions; their concern about whether readers could be emotionally invested in supernatural and/or “improbable” plots; and their concern about the poems’ moral effects on readers. In Francis Jeffrey’s famous review of *Thalaba*, for example, Jeffrey complains about “the Lake School” poets’ “perpetual exaggeration of thought,” explaining:

it is needless to speak of the fatigue that is produced by this unceasing summons to admiration, or of the compassion which is excited by the spectacle of these eternal strainings and distortions. Those authors appear to forget, that a whole poem cannot be made up of striking passages; and that the sensations produced by sublimity, are never so powerful and entire, as when they are allowed to subside and revive, in a slow and spontaneous succession. (Madden 69-70)

Not every reader shared Jeffrey’s opinion of Southey’s tendencies. Dorothy Wordsworth, writing of *Madoc* in June 1805, claimed that while “the attention is always kept awake” by Southey’s narrative strategies, Southey’s descriptions are like “resting-places both for repose and delight”

²² Leask, *British Romantic Writers*, 96, mentions Shelley’s admiration for *Kehama*; Madden, 100-102, reprints both William Wordsworth’s and Dorothy Wordsworth’s letters about *Madoc*; Letter from Southey to Coleridge, qtd. in St. Clair, 654.

²³ *Origins of American Critical Thought*, 60. Charvat suggests this popularity may have been due to the poem’s loose resemblance to biblical scholarship.

(Madden 101). Both Jeffrey and Dorothy Wordsworth identify Southey's long, exotic poems as striking and engaging the attention, but Jeffrey faults what he sees as a lack of concomitant rest within poems such as *Thalaba*, while Wordsworth doesn't seem to mind having "the attention ... always kept awake" since she finds there are moments of relative repose within that awakened state. There may have been a near consensus on the consistently striking qualities of Southey's poems, but there was a noticeable lack of consensus over whether having "the attention ... always kept awake" could or should make positive, lasting impressions on the reader.

Nearly ten years after Jeffrey's review of *Thalaba*, John Foster's negative, partisan review of *The Curse of Kehama* picked up this thread of Jeffrey's critique. There are indeed too many "wonders" in *Kehama*, complains Foster. What's more, they risk not only exhausting the reader but also corrupting her.

What was the impression which the poet wished all these combined and co-operating representations to make on the reader's mind? He will not say, nor any one for him, that he was unaware that a certain moral effect necessarily accompanies all striking representations of moral agents, and that all he reckoned on, in a work of great and protracted effort, was to present simply a series of images, chasing one another away, like those in a magic lanthorn, or like the succession of clouds in the sky, making no impression on the mind but merely that of their splendour, beauty, or monstrosity.²⁴

For Foster, it is impossible to believe *Kehama* to be "a mere piece of scenery, displaying fine colours and strange shapes, without any moral tendency at all" (Madden 143), and yet without a clear moral Foster fears the poem succeeds only in making paganism attractive to Christian readers.²⁵ Since *Kehama* cannot help but make an impression on readers, Foster is worried about the moral valence and potential violence of that impression. The *Portfolio*, meanwhile, worried about the opposite: that the poem would fail to make a lasting impression due to its saturation in

²⁴ *Eclectic Review* (April 1811), qtd. in Madden, 143.

²⁵ *The Literary Panorama's* anonymous review (1811), to the contrary, felt the poem's content could be separated from the poem's effects: "They [the poem's incongruities] may be too shocking to our faith, or too abhorrent from our knowledge, to be tolerated, while *this* [the poem itself] may repay our rivetted attention with delight" (reprinted in Madden, 146).

novelties. The reviewer frames this less as a problem of quantity, however, and more as a problem of time: “Novelties of the other species [such as Southey’s *Kehama* abounds in] blaze and disappear. Astonishment is transitory, and when allied to nothing more permanent, expires in disgust: it must be consecrated by probability to be lasting” (518). There was a consistent concern on the part of reviewers and readers as to whether or not readers could and should care about such exotic and supernatural characters, and for how long they could care. Jeffrey, both Wordsworths, Foster, and other reviewers all posed versions of Dorothy Wordsworth’s reflection that she “did not care as much about *Madoc* as the Author wished [her] to do, and [that] the characters in general are not sufficiently distinct to make them have a separate after-existence in [her] affections” (Madden 101). These comments clearly help us to approach Brooks’s reception in new ways. When reviewers of *Zóphiël* note their hesitations about Brooks’s “Rosicrucian machinery” (the Gnomes), admiration for how Brooks manages to make us care for supernatural creatures (*Zóphiël*), and belief that the poem is *not* immoral, they reveal that though Brooks’s poem was not published until 1833, her poem was written and at least in part assessed according to aesthetic styles and values affiliated with Southey’s poems. Whether or not reviewers mention Southey and/or his poems by name when writing about *Zóphiël*, they are nonetheless noticing its affiliation with poems such as *Thalaba*, *Madoc*, and *The Curse of Kehama*.

It is not only the similarities between Southey’s poems and Brooks’s poem that matter, however, but also Brooks’s professional positioning in relation to Southey and her passionate engagement with Southey as a reader. She surprised Southey in Keswick in 1831, arriving unannounced and asking for his help with publishing her poem. She then turned Southey into another tool for orienting readers to her work: *Zóphiël* includes a dedication poem to Southey, an invocation to “*Madoc*,” notes referencing *Thalaba* and *Madoc*, and scenes echoing Southey’s

Orientalist romances. Years later, in an anticipatory elegy for Southey, Brooks describes rereading *Madoc* “amidst the woods and canes of that island where repose the bones of Columbus.” Even as she prepares to mourn the loss of her mentor, she not only reminds her reader that she is writing from Cuba: she reminds them of the opening invocation in *Zóphiël* as well. Involving the historic Southey in the making of *Zóphiël* while writing the cultural figure of Southey into the text of *Zóphiël* suggests how useful Brooks believed him to be for marketing her poem and the kind of reading experience she hoped it would foster.

It also suggests just how passionately involved Brooks felt with Southey’s poems. They appear truly to have enjoyed a “separate after-existence in [her] affections.” In Brooks’s telling, a powerful reading experience of *Madoc* at age nine or ten secured a spot for Southey and his poem in her heart. Writing to Southey in 1834, she defines her pleasure in *Zóphiël* in terms of her relationship with him: “for if I had never formed it [*Zóphiël*] I never should have known you—& yet at the age of nine years I read *Madoc*—have I not known you ever since!”²⁶ Even as her poem serves as a means to meet Southey, she describes *Madoc* as granting her unmediated access to Southey all along. Her attachment to this poem seems never to have waned: she kept her childhood copy of *Madoc* with her in Cuba.²⁷ Some have hypothesized that this attachment to *Madoc* may reveal her attachment to her Welsh ancestry, and it is not hard to see how Brooks’s attachment to this poem, and not just Brooks’s pseudonym, attests to her imaginative and economic investments in the westward expansion of empire.²⁸ At the same time, these accounts overlook an important point: the way in which *Madoc* seems to authorize Brooks to present her

²⁶ Letter from Boston to Robert Southey from Maria Gowen Brooks, February 12, 1834. Qtd. in Granniss, 29.

²⁷ See Granniss, 12, 29, 36; *The New World* 2 (1841); *Boston Saturday Evening Gazette*, 26 February 1842.

²⁸ “Mrs. Brooks’s visit to Keswick was the great event of her life. She had, because of her Welsh ancestry, a romantic admiration for Southey’s well nigh forgotten epic “*Madoc*,” and the meeting with her idol was, as I have told, a happy one” (Mabbott 420). Gruesz makes the connection between Brooks’s pseudonym and her investments in empire in “The cafétal,” 43. See also Larson, “The Historical Epic.”

life and her writing as already literary. As a woman of Welsh ancestry who had moved to the Caribbean, Brooks seemed to have stepped into—and then to have emerged from—the poem she claims always to have loved for the “beauty of its delineations.”²⁹ David Marshall has argued, in relation to eighteenth-century aesthetics and fiction, that, “[o]nce aesthetics is defined by a way of looking, the work of art becomes reinscribed in the world,” and this insight could be extended to Brooks as she presents herself as a reader so transported by *Madoc* as to have stumbled into the text—as if the text exists as a place in the world (8). In the way that Americans claimed Campbell’s *Gertrude* had shown them America could be literary, Brooks frequently frames Cuba through her powerful reading experiences of Southey’s romances.³⁰

Southey in turn became a passionate reader and promoter of Brooks’s work, cementing the terms according to which Brooks and her poem would be celebrated. Writing to Brooks in March 1834, Southey empathized with the lack of notice given *Zóphiël*:

Time was when England would have ‘rung from side to side’ if such a poem as *Zóphiël* had appeared. In these evil days [. . .] you must wait for your fame;—& this you may well do, in full assurance that it will come. I who am out of the way of what is called the world, & see no journals except a newspaper & the Quarterly Review, have seen no critical notice of your poem. But I was much pleased at meeting with a quotation from it in a strange nondescript sort of book called the Doctor, & with seeing María del Occidente spoken of there as the most imaginative & passionate of all poetesses. The author probably was not acquainted with you by any other name.³¹

“The author” was Southey, a fact that Brooks may or may not have known at the time of this letter. In his chapter “More Concerning Love and Marriage, and Marriage Without Love,” Southey excerpted four stanzas from the sixth canto of *Zóphiël*, followed by the caption: “So

²⁹ *Boston Saturday Evening Gazette*, 26 Feb. 1842.

³⁰ See Gruesz, “cafétal,” especially p. 48 and p. 51, regarding Brooks’s presentation of the cafétal according to the tradition of English pastoral.

³¹ Letter from Keswick to Maria Brooks written by Robert Southey. Rpt. in Albrecht, 195.

sings María del Occidente, the most impassioned and most imaginative of all poetesses.”³² This quote—either verbatim or through citations of “passionate” and “imaginative”—appears in most major critical works on Brooks from 1839 onward. It is important to note that although Southey uses Brooks's Hispanicized pseudonym, he makes no explicit reference to Cuba, either in his selection of a quote or in his commentary on the poem. “Passionate” and “Imaginative” emerge from a matrix of intensities—“María del Occidente,” Palmyra, Antioch, poetess, *Zóphiël*, and loveless marriage—rather than from a focus on a single geographical place.

Brooks and Cuba: Amplification through Place

Brooks signals her affiliation with Southey through two forms in *Zóphiël* that cultivate not a faithfully mimetic but a vivid aesthetic: the trope of the sensual, enclosed garden, and the device of learned footnotes and endnotes. Brooks's poet-narrator invites the reader early on to “Rest in [her] wild retreat,” presumably on Cuba, but the first retreat in which we spend time is Egla’s “grove of acacias,” a “calm retreat” and aesthetic space in which Brooks's heroine enjoys napping, dreaming, and playing the lute (I.xxiv.1-2). Though the poem is composed of various ringed and framed spaces (bowers, groves, framed works of art, bedrooms, tombs, pavilions) this grove plays a central role in the overall poem and so is an exemplary space on which to focus our attention.³³ Here is how Brooks describes the grove:

... Acacias here inclined
Their friendly heads, in thick profusion planted,
And with a thousand tendrils clasped and twined;
And when, at fervid noon, all nature panted,

Inwoven with their boughs, a fragrant bower,

³² *The Doctor, &c.*, 222. *The Doctor, &c.* was published in seven volumes between 1834 and 1847. I quote from an American 1836 reprint of the first three volumes.

³³ For an argument that the Acacia grove and enclosed garden serve as a figure for Egla, representing Egla’s virginity, genitalia, and female autoerotic desire more generally, see Bennett, 174-5.

Inviting rest, its mossy pillow flung;
And here the full cerulean passion-flower,
Climbing among the leaves, its mystic symbols hung.

And though the sun had gained his utmost height,
Just as he oped its vivid folds at dawn,
Looked still that tenderest, frailest child of light,
By shepherds named “the glory of the morn.”

Because the first canto is titled “Grove of Acacias,” this grove of acacias bears a strong synecdochic relationship to the overall canto. To pay attention to a grove of acacias within the “Grove of Acacias” canto is to become keenly aware that you are reading the scene—like the double scene of reading in the engravings of “Gertrude.” For many nineteenth-century readers, not only Spenser’s bower of bliss and Milton’s Edenic bower, but also Southey’s various sealed-off gardens in *Thalaba* and Amreta’s bower in Lucretia Davidson’s “Amir Khan” (1829) serve as critical intertexts for the poem, making the grove of acacias recognizable in its generic exoticism and sensuality. Brooks even underscores the generic, and so recognizable quality of her grove of acacias by referencing Southey’s *Thalaba* in the Notes to this section.

This kind of acacia, or mimosa, particularly belongs to Abyssinia: it is said to incline its branches, as if sensible, when any one seeks its shade. The Arabians love it as a friend. A low species of mimosa, which grows profusely in this island (Cuba), is extremely sensitive: it not only shuts its pretty leaves like a closed fan when touched, but the whole branch which supports them stoops, and clings closely to the main stalk.

The affection of “Aswad” for a mimosa that bent over him in the gardens of Shedad or Irem forms a particularly beautiful passage in “Thalaba.” (“Page 20, First Two Lines,” 208)

While Brooks mentions acacias on the island of Cuba within the same note, she frames the Cuban acacia as one of many wonders in both the literary and natural worlds that readers could imagine but would be unlikely to experience. Brooks is less concerned with whether or not the reader understands the difference between one species of acacia and another, than with whether or not the reader believes in the heightened effects of these conspicuously fragrant and

intensified scenes.³⁴ The pronouns in “This kind of acacia” and “this island” point not only to different species in different geographical places, but also treat Brooks's textual grove of acacias and Southey's imagined gardens of Shedad or Irem as equivalent to, as equally present and pointable at as the real acacias in Cuba. In fact it is only within the frame of two Eastern acacias that we are invited to imagine the Cuban acacia. Further, although the Cuban acacia is described through simile as “shut[ting] its pretty leaves like a closed fan when touched,” in Brooks's note it seems to remain available—visible in its hiddenness—to readers so that they might, as with Campbell's notes to “Gertrude,” imagine something wondrous. Like the flower in Egla's acacia grove whose “vivid folds” remain open long past the time they should, Brooks's Cuban acacia is imaginatively held open to view, almost to touch.

Even notes that seem to focus on Cuba or the Americas are just as focused on creating an aesthetic experience in and through the text. Concluding a footnote describing caves in Virginia and Cuba, for example, Brooks references “concretions” taken out of the earth that resemble Greek sculpture and are named “The Twins of Latona,” presenting nature in terms of art as well as myth.³⁵ Gruesz has rigorously examined how Brooks linked poetic production to her *café*'s production of coffee. In addition to this critical connection between poetic and economic production, I note an additional layer to coffee references by way of Southey's *Thalaba*: when *Thalaba* stumbles upon the enchanted garden of Laila, Southey describes the air as “mild and fragrant” like “the evening wind / Passing in summer o'er the coffee-groves / Of Yemen, and its blessed bowers of balm” (Book X, 223-4), and includes a detailed note describing coffee plants. Coffee, then, is simultaneously a crop particular to nineteenth-century Cuba, an aesthetic trope of

³⁴ For more on footnotes, endnotes, and/or paratexts, see Rezek, *London*, 1-3; 67; and Howard, “Grounds of Knowledge: Unofficial Epistemologies of British Environmental Writing, 1745-1835” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2015), 61-97. See also chapter one, n40 and n43.

³⁵ “Page 109, Last Verse; Page 110, Verse 1,” 240-241.

exotic places, and a crop that seems to confirm that Brooks lives within a recognizably literary place. Southey's imaginative descriptions of the East underwrite Brooks's descriptions of Cuba even as Brooks's descriptions of Cuba underwrite her descriptions of the East, especially early in her career. Readers find themselves in the "territory of genre" as much as in the Americas.

This is important to keep in mind when, in a Note for *Zóphiël*, Brooks claims that the vivid experience described within Egla's grove of acacias is particular to climates such as Ecbatana (where Egla is) and Cuba (where Brooks was). Rather than read such a claim as privileging the real, we need to notice how Brooks focuses on a desired effect for readers. "It is impossible," begins Brooks, "for those who never felt it to conceive the effect of such a situation in a warm climate" (206). And yet the Note goes on to describe in detail what it might be like to experience these impossible-to-conceive effects:

In this island, the woods, which are naturally so interwoven with vines as to be impervious to a human being, are in some places cleared and converted into nurseries for the young coffee-trees, which remain sheltered from the sun and wind till sufficiently grown to transplant. To enter one of these 'semilleros,' as they are here called, at noonday, produces an effect like that anciently ascribed to the waters of Lethe. After sitting down upon the trunk of a fallen cedar or palm-tree, and breathing for a moment the freshness of the air and the odor of the passion flower,—which is one of the most abundant and certainly the most beautiful of the climate,—the noise of the trees, which are continually kept in motion by the trade-winds; the fluttering and various notes (though not musical) of the birds; the loftiness of the green canopy (for the trunks of the trees are bare to a great height, and seem like pillars supporting a thick mass of leaves above); and the soft, peculiar light which the intense ray of the sun, thus impeded, produces,—have altogether such an effect, that one seems involuntarily to forget every thing but the present, and it requires a strong effort to rise and leave the place." ("Page 10, Verse 3, Last Line," 206-7).

This Note has been used as evidence of Brooks's interest in "realistic representation," and of Brooks's framing of the tropics as a land of "forgetting." When Gruesz describes the language as "rapturous" and "distracting," she suggests both that Brooks is more personally interested in describing Cuba than the poem's purely imagined episodes, *and* that Brooks's realism is distorted

by its refusal to acknowledge Cuba's slave labor economy.³⁶ Gruesz is right that Brooks avoids acknowledging slavery as part of Cuba's, and Brooks's own, daily landscape. This political critique can and should be raised, however, without assuming that Brooks is trying to faithfully represent Cuba. Brooks includes aspects of Cuba for the purpose of amplifying her poem's effects on her readers. Invoking Lethe and comparing the trees to pillars invests the semillero with Classical and mythological weight, signaling the kind of aesthetic intensity Brooks wishes to cultivate. To have "such an effect, that one seems involuntarily to forget every thing but the present" is as close to a statement of *Zóphiël*'s poetics as we find Brooks making. As scenes set apart spatially and often temporally, these bowers, groves, and semilleros illuminate the role of "the territory of genre" in *Zóphiël* while also functioning as allegories about the text's aesthetic aims and featuring aestheticized descriptions of Cuba.

To dwell on the aesthetic conventions at work in *Zóphiël* is neither to doubt nor to deny the relevance of Cuba to Maria Brooks's life and work. Brooks lived on and off of her coffee plantation at a time when Cuba, unlike Haiti and nearby British territories, *increased* its dependence on slavery. In the first half of the nineteenth century, approximately 547,000 slaves were brought to Cuba, "more than any other port, nation, or colony in the nineteenth-century Americas, save Brazil" (Finch 23). And by the 1840s Matanzas had some of the highest slave

³⁶For the tropics as a place of repression and forgetting, see Gruesz, *Ambassadors of Culture*, 39, 67-69; and "The cafétal," 44-48. The language "realistic representation," "rapturous," and "distracting" all come from *Ambassadors of Culture*, on p.32 and p.63, respectively. For more on Cuba's sugar, coffee, and slave labor economies, see: William Van Norman Jr., *Shade-Grown Slavery: The Lives of Slaves on Coffee Plantations in Cuba* (Vanderbilt UP, 2013), which mentions the Brooks family and *Zóphiël*; Ada Ferrer, *Freedom's Mirror: Cuba and Haiti in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge UP, 2014); and Aisha Finch, *Rethinking Slave Rebellion in Nineteenth-Century Cuba: La Escalera and the Insurgencies of 1841-1844* (UNC Press, 2015). Van Norman provides a history of enslaved women's, men's, and children's daily lives on nineteenth-century Cuban coffee plantations specifically. Ferrer and Finch both offer histories of slavery in Cuba in general (sugar as well as coffee plantations). Ferrer focuses on how Haiti's independence unfolded alongside and effected an increasingly pro-slavery Cuba, while Finch revisits the Escalera resistance and repression of 1844 to recover ways in which rural slaves (women as well as men) conceptualized and coordinated resistance in the early 1840s.

populations on the island (32).³⁷ Gruesz's scholarship on how Brooks presents the *café-tal* as a pastoral alternative to Cuban sugar mills is indispensable, and invites further work on the economic systems and race and gender hierarchies entangled with Brooks's poems. I focus here on the territory of genre to remind us that while *Zóphiël* was clearly written in Cuba, it has not always been understood as "representing" Cuba. Cuba has been associated with *María del Occidente* since the publication of *Zóphiël*, but the manner of this association has varied over time. In 1833, three different British journals reviewed *Zóphiël*, and all three handled Cuba in an entirely different way: *The Athenaeum* admired the poem's "power," but "wish[ed] that a theme of a domestic character, with the scene at our own door, had been selected;" *Fraser's Magazine* noted matter of factly that the poem had been written in Cuba, invoked Milton's *Paradise Lost* just as matter-of-factly, and praised the poem as a "masterly performance," in particular the fantastic Palace of Gnomes and the embedded narrative of Neantes, a slave from Ethiopia; finally, *The Monthly Review*, after confessing that "[t]he origin of the present poem, together with its authorship, appear to be buried in complete obscurity," focused on moments in the poem that were paired with Notes describing Cuba, as if to make the poem's "origin" less obscure. Though all responses touch on the poem's displays of difference, and link that difference to the poem's "power," there was not yet a shared understanding for how to relate the effects of the poem to the various kinds of exoticism, fantasy, and conventional intensities it displayed.

Over the course of the nineteenth-century, reviewers and editors settled into a pattern of attributing the poem's luxuriance and sensuousness to the Cuban landscape and climate. Brooks herself initiated this. Framing *Zóphiël* as "a narrative imagined under the influence of soft luxuriant tropical scenery; where the writer drew solely from nature, and had access to no books at all relative to the subject," Brooks attempts to focus the reader on a particular kind of reading

³⁷ Finch, "Africans in Colonial Matanzas," 21-50. See also Van Norman, *Shade-Grown Slavery*.

experience, something we shall explore more fully in the final section (Preface, vi). Nineteenth-century reviewers and editors began suggesting an implicit connection between the poem and its place of writing. Thus we find John Ingraham's 1839 biographical sketch of Brooks informing us that after Brooks moved to Cuba and wrote the first Canto of *Zóphiël*, "[t]he continual warmth, the eternal verdure, the fragrant air, and the leafy retreats of that delightful island, where, it seems, favorable to the continuance of a favorite pursuit, and five other Cantos of the same poem were *there* conceived and executed." The *Quarterly Review*'s comment in 1840 that the poem is "the temperature... of the island of Cuba, where it was written" similarly suggests that the environment has somehow affected the writing of the poem. The features of the island appear "favorable" to Brooks's writing in the way that the island might be favorable to an acacia. These connections between poem and place grew increasingly explicit. John G. Wurdemann amplifies the connection between Cuba and *Zóphiël* in his 1844 travel narrative when he describes visiting Brooks's cafétal and writing temple at night: "... the air was laden with the mingled perfumes of the coffee-wreaths and orange-flowers, the tuberose and night-blooming cereus; and [I] have thought no fitter birthplace could be found for the images she created" (qtd. in Gustafson, iv). Wurdemann's romanticized description of Brooks's estate suggests that he has discovered the sources for her descriptions. His description was incorporated as a kind of authority into Griswold's *The Female Poets of America* (1848) and into Gustafson's Preface. It was also echoed by Brooks's own son, who mused in 1872: "Whatever charm there may be in 'Zóphiël,' and whatever talent it may portray, much undoubtedly is due to the surroundings of the miniature temple where the poem was imagined, and its verse constructed, by a nature as passionate as the name of the flower would indicate which she always wore in her hair...." (qtd. xi). Horace Brooks begins by crediting "the surroundings" with the poem's power, yet drifts into crediting

his mother's own "passionate" "nature." It remains unclear in Horace Brooks's sentence whether "a nature as passionate" refers to Cuba or the poetess herself. It is not hard to see Mabbott's similar slippage between Cuba, readers' experiences, and a passionate individual as a repetition of this tendency.³⁸ Gruesz is right to draw our attention to "[t]he collapsing of poet and place" in the *Quarterly Review*'s review of *Zóphiël*, but it is also important to notice that this collapse happened neither overnight nor uniformly.³⁹

These connections between Brooks's surroundings in Matanzas and the effects of *Zóphiël* runs throughout not only the poem's nineteenth-century reception but also twentieth and twenty-first century scholarship on the poem as well. At the implicit end of the spectrum, we find casual causal claims such as this: "Like Wallace Stevens in Florida Brooks suddenly found herself in the sort of paradise New Englanders thought had been lost with Adam's banishment. There, in a vine-covered summer house on the coffee plantation, she completed the first canto of *Zóphiël*..."⁴⁰ This characterization suggests that once Brooks relocates to Cuba, she is shocked by the paradisiacal qualities of her surroundings, qualities that she's then able to draw on and describe to produce the poem. More explicitly and persuasively, Gruesz has drawn our attention to the ways in which Brooks leverages the cultural capital of ideas about Cuba to market her *café* as a locus of intellectual and artistic activity by women. Historicizing the "Cuba of the mind" as a cultural commodity eagerly consumed by Anglo-American audiences of the 1830s and 1840s, Gruesz provides an important corrective to and context for Wurdemann's purely suggestive perfumes. Locating us in the history of coffee production, sugar production, and

³⁸ As late as 1879, the same year as Gustafson's reprint of *Zóphiël*, competing associations still existed: Longfellow included "Farewell to Cuba" and "Ode on Revisiting Cuba" but not a single excerpt from *Zóphiël* in the "West Indies" section of his anthology, *Poems of Places* (1876-79). This suggests that Longfellow clearly thought of Maria del Occidente but not necessarily *Zóphiël* when referring to Cuba. Longfellow was familiar with *Zóphiël*: he included excerpts from the poem in both his novel, *Kavanagh* (1849), and an earlier anthology, *The Estray* (1847).

³⁹ "Café," 51.

⁴⁰ Packer, 66.

slavery in Cuba, Gruesz recovers the material conditions that enabled Brooks's literary career, arguing that Brooks's own writing reveals a growing discomfort with idealizations of Cuba. Investigating how Brooks's writing about Cuba compares to tourists' descriptions and consumption of Cuba, Gruesz ties Brooks more tightly to a historical and historicized place. This intervention is excellent and necessary. As we learn from it, however, we need to notice that it relies in part on an aesthetic value of realistic representation, presenting Brooks as increasingly sympathetic in proportion to her increasing dissatisfaction with idealized representations of Cuba. What I have tried to show is that we cannot assume *Zóphiël* seeks primarily to represent Cuba in a realistic way. In this long poem, Cuba is both the actual place in which Brooks lives and an exotic place leveraged for aesthetic effect on the page.

“Vivid Folds” of Time: Amplified Temporalities⁴¹

Having demonstrated that *Zóphiël* seeks to cultivate a non-realist aesthetic, I hope to expand how we think about this poem by focusing on its temporalities and its conception of distance. “Despite of all the improvements & discoveries in chemistry & mechanism, it is still very difficult to commune with those far from us,” Brooks wrote to the dying Southey in 1840. “[D]istance still is distance, & absence always will be absence.”⁴² It is an eloquent statement to a dying mentor on the limits of overcoming distance. Brooks went on to “translate” part of *Madoc* into a lyrical elegy for Southey, working through a geographical and metaphysical problem, distance, within aesthetic conventions. *Zóphiël* operates in reverse: it relies on thematic

⁴¹ I take the phrase “vivid folds” from *Zóphiël*. For a theory of matter as folded, and of the baroque as a function not an essence, see Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (1993). See also Beam’s chapter on Pauline Hopkins, which adapts Deleuze’s metaphor to consider how Hopkins enmeshes western and romance genre conventions with each other to “create a form that embodies black female desire in the design of her text rather than in her heroine” (35).

⁴² Qtd. in Granniss, 40.

conventions of geography and metaphysics in order to work through an aesthetic problem, distance. For *Zóphiël* is intensely interested in the problems of extending attachment and readerly interest over time and space. Specifically, *Zóphiël*'s form as well as its content test whether one can extend feelings and beliefs over time and space without changing the quality of the feelings and beliefs themselves. For example, when Eglá appears before Sardius's court (a Jewish captive in a Persian court), she is a moving, both mobile and affecting, aesthetic figure. Her otherness produces a novelty effect that causes the entire court to stare (II.xlv-xviii). Though Eglá has previously demonstrated devotion to her parents and to her vision of Helon, Brooks depicts Eglá as affected by others' enamoration with her, as forgetting for the moment her past commitments and cares. Brooks inserts two sections commenting on the scene:

LVI.

When light, love, music, beauty, all dispense
Their wild commingling charms, who shall control
The gushing torrent of attracted sense,
And keep the forms of memory and of soul?

LVII.

O theme of rapture, honored Constancy!
Invoked, hoped, sworn, but rare! have we perchance
To thank the generous breast that nurtures thee
For thy dear life, when saved? or fate or circumstance?

Uninterested in evaluating Eglá's mental constancy, these stanzas use Eglá's brief immersion in Sardius's immersive gaze to question whether constancy is a quality "nurture[d]" by an individual, or whether it is produced by utterly contingent circumstances. At a distance from Helon and having traveled outside the contained context of her acacia grove, Eglá struggles to locate Helon in her mind. As a "[form] of memory," he is less vivid than the present "gushing torrent of attracted sense," a difference Brooks acknowledges and allows for. In addressing Constancy as a potentially contingent quality, Brooks allows her heroine to wander mentally without impunity, but she also considers "who shall control" or at least manage a reader's

investment in her poem. Is the reader's "Constancy" to her long poem a matter of "nurture," "circumstance," or something else?

These questions allow us to revisit Egla's grove of acacias and to think about the grove not only as a spatial topos but also as a temporal structure. As we have seen, the grove is presented as a scene of visual intensification. Stepping into a grove of acacias, we encounter a morning glory in full bloom:

And though the sun had gained his utmost height,
Just as he oped its vivid folds at dawn,
Looked still that tenderest, frailest child of light,
By shepherds named "the glory of the morn."

The grove offers Egla and the reader an enclosed space with its own sensory intensities and its own order of time.⁴³ It is in this space that the morning glory blooms. Even more significantly, it is in this space that the morning glory persists. I say "even more significantly" because although it is noon in the world beyond the grove, the morning glory — whose name as well as blooming patterns suggest an alternate time of day — is described as remaining as open and "vivid" as it appeared when it first opened at dawn (I.xx.2). Brooks's narrator then shifts from describing the flower to addressing it:

Sweet flower! thou'rt lovelier even than the rose:
The rose is pleasure,—felt and known as such;
Soon past, but real; tasted while it glows:
But thou, too bright and pure for mortal touch,

Art like those brilliant things we never taste
Or see, unless with Fancy's lip and eye,
When, maddened by her mystic spells, we waste
Life on a thought, and rob reality.

Why does an apostrophe to the morning glory end with a judgment against "wast[ing] Life on a thought, and rob[bing] reality"?" Put simply, the apostrophe swerves: from the empirical to the

⁴³ See Stewart's chapter on "The Miniature" for a similar focus on how enclosed spaces both telescope and dilate time. Our work is most similar when Stewart considers how the miniature object serves as a metaphor for the book.

theoretical and finally to the aphoristic. The poem does not ask us to dwell on this swerve — the next stanza begins, “Here, too, the lily...,” relocating us in the grove — and yet attending to the shifts from “Sweet flower!” to the “real” rose to the risk of a wasted life will help us understand not only this section’s odd conclusion but also the kind of aesthetic problem Brooks tests repeatedly.

Though this passage foregrounds the dyadic language of real and ideal, we should notice that it actually anatomizes a triad: the real (the rose), the ideal (the mystic spells of Fancy), and the so “bright and pure” it is real but almost unbelievable (the morning glory). In keeping with Brooks’s description of the flower’s “vivid folds,” as well as this dissertation overall, I call it “the vivid.” As these lines show and confirm, the vivid hovers between the real and the fanciful, or even between the real and the delusional. While it may relate to color or delicate objects, like the beautiful, it connotes an intensity our morning glory displays as present, fleeting, and possibly excessive. Yet its intensity is not sublime: clear, brilliant, and bounded, it produces no feelings of terror nor of vastness, nor does the perceiving subject seem to expand or shrink in response. “Too bright and pure,” the vivid grounds this passage even as the passage struggles to keep the vivid morning glory in focus.

As we’ve seen, what is fascinating about Hume’s notion of “vivacity” is that it signifies two qualities that seem mutually-exclusive: first and foremost, vivacity names the quality that marks sensory impressions as stronger and more affecting than ideas. Seeing the sun set in the middle of the Atlantic will always be brighter and more striking than remembering or imagining seeing the sun set in the middle of the Atlantic. However, vivacity also names the quality that ideas might acquire, freeing us to think about things not immediately near us. It indicates both the demands of our immediate surroundings, and a manner of feeling that allows us to travel,

mentally, beyond the immediate. Thus, “vividness” serves as a kind of litmus test for both what is sensorially present (is it vivid enough to be real) *and* for what we can believe in whether or not it is present (is it vivid enough to feel real). Brooks is interested in both, but she more actively explores the latter.⁴⁴ Noticing and naming the vivid as such helps us approach Brooks's address to the morning glory in two ways: first, it gives us a term and concept outside the binary of real/ideal for considering Brooks's experiments with intensification; and second, as I'll show, it helps us notice that Brooks is actively exploring how to construct her poem so as to solicit and maintain her reader's attention.

Brooks explores and exploits this doubleness of “vividness” in a variety of ways. First, she explores how the real is also an idea. Although she employs the language of “real” and “ideal” in this address, her real rose only exists in the stanza as an idea of actual beauty against which other beauties might be measured. For there are no roses in this grove of acacias: there are acacias, passion flowers, morning glories, lilies, shrubs, mosses, and leaves, but no roses.⁴⁵ Invoked for its established reputation as the most lovely and pleasurable flower we know through our senses and minds, not only “felt and known as such” but even metaphorically “tasted,” the absent rose enters the discursive space only to be superseded by the “lovelier” morning glory. And yet our Sweet flower! is barely glimpsed in this address. Though the flower's existence in the grove's filtered temporality seems to prompt the address, the passage focuses primarily on the real rose (that is not really there) and on a simile for the typically quick-to-close morning glory (which should have closed earlier in the day, and so not been present). Like Hume's notion

⁴⁴ Brooks frames *Zóphiël* as an exercise in belief: “In finishing “Zóphiël,” the writers has endeavored to adhere entirely to that belief (once prevalent among the fathers of the Greek and Roman churches) which supposes that the oracles of antiquity were delivered by demons or fallen angels, who wandered about the earth, formed attachments to such mortals as pleased them best, and caused themselves ... to be adored as divinities. ... The fact of the actual existence of such beings as angels, it is for others to question...” (Preface, rpt. in Gustafson, lxiii-lxiv).

⁴⁵ See Canto I of *Zóphiël*, specifically sections XIX-XXII; XLVII-XLVIII.

of vivacity, Brooks's morning glory's vividness frees us from having to focus only on what is immediately present in the scene.⁴⁶ The poem moves away from one convention of immediacy (the vivid flower) to another convention of immediacy (the address).

Brooks's address to the morning glory also considers the vivid's strange tendency to signify both that which flickers and that which absorbs.⁴⁷ Because the morning glory is normally "too bright and pure" to stay open and visible midday, its vividness is linked to how briefly it opens. Because this particular morning glory is so very "bright and pure" in its suspended openness, its vividness is linked with its ability to hold our attention. We see that vividness here turns on a dime between two categories of time: the bright quickness that almost fails to register in human perception, and the sustained intensity that seals off the perceiver from regular time. This suggests that the vivid, like the typical morning glory, might be difficult to sustain, but also that the vivid, like the pull of the open morning glory, might also absorb us and prove difficult to disengage from. That the passage identifies both temporalities and their differing demands on the perceiver's attention suggests that Brooks is aware of wanting to produce a forceful but non-threatening engagement between her readers and her poem.

Along with coexisting temporalities – the fleeting and the fixed – this passage also highlights the coexistence of two kinds of address. Just as the description of the morning glory and the footnote's reference to Lethe signal certain conventions of immediacy and intensity, so does this written call to the "Sweet flower!" display a potential portal to the conventionally immediate and intense. The conspicuousness of Brooks's address to the "Sweet flower!" alerts

⁴⁶ For a transhistorical theory of how flowers in literature offer us access to "the felt experience of image-making," see Scarry. Brooks's morning glory passage richly engages Keats's "The Eve of St. Agnes" (1820), another poem in which there are no actual roses but in which figurative roses, and roses as figures for thoughts and visions abound. Gruesz ("The *café*tal," 60 n26) and Larson ("The Historical Epic," 42) also note the Keatsian qualities of Brooks's language, though not with regard to this particular poem.

⁴⁷ I'm grateful to Marjorie Levinson for a generative conversation about this seeming contradiction.

readers to the transparently rhetorical aim of the figure. This address, however, does not posit or perform an I-Thou relationship, as we might expect. Instead, as part of the internal swerve mentioned earlier, this address to the vivid morning glory offers a mini-sermon on the dangers of investing too much in mental images and ideas. Addressing a flower, the sermon involves a “we” (“...we waste”), and inveighs against the relationship between the we and *the vehicle* that describes the morning glory (not the open morning glory itself). It is an address against some of the general aims of address, against an all-consuming belief in rhetorical or imaginative presence. The sermon-esque lines lament the ways in which “we” “waste / Life on a thought, and rob reality,” suggesting both that we waste our “Life” and that we confer Life (vivacity) on something immaterial. Egla’s mother will echo this sermon in just a few pages, when she accuses the unmarried Egla of “wast[ing] upon a thought-love life and charms” (I.xl.4), where a “thought-love” becomes the object of Egla’s desire. Like the earlier shift from describing to addressing the flower, this passage shifts as well: it opens by signaling intensity in one way (“Sweet flower!”) and closes with another (the aphoristic moral warning).

While this mini-sermon might seem to work against the absorptive pull of the flower, the complete address (both its opening exclamation and its concluding moral warning) is better understood as one of many conventions of intensity that Brooks offers to readers to invite them to enter into a particular reading experience. As Virginia Jackson has argued, John Stuart Mill’s oft-cited theory of lyric as a form of address that pretends not to have an audience “[was], in 1833, still enmeshed in the complexity of various genres of address, especially in written verse” (*Dickinson’s Misery* 132). Brooks’s address to the morning glory is “enmeshed” in a mode of address that actively imagines and acknowledges being part of a community. The poem does not mock or subvert moralizing moments such as this; vividness clearly carries risks as well as

possibilities because you can believe in or be strongly affected by a harmful idea, and this is a risk that Brooks acknowledges. Nor, however, does the poem straightforwardly endorse these mini-morals: Eglá's "thought-love" turns out to be real, and she does not "waste" her life on a fantasy, making her mother's advice both sound and wrong. We can see that this passage is not only enmeshed in "various genres of address" but in various generic gestures towards the immediate and intense.

In her awareness of vividness as fleeting and her frequent use of gemstone and flower imagery, Brooks shows a shared interest in some of the qualities Theo Davis calls "ornamental aesthetics." A non-representational poetic Davis finds in Thoreau, Dickinson, and Whitman, ornamentation can be described as the physical and mental practices of placing ornaments on objects to select certain things for notice and to come into relation with what is present. Dickinson, for example, emphasizes buoyancy: being placed or placing in Dickinson's poems is characterized by "uprooting and departure," "lightness," and changeability (*Ornamental* 90; 92), as opposed to Cicero's oratorical embellishment that aims to hold the audience's attention (114). Dickinson, Davis argues, invests almost entirely in the movement of attention itself rather than in attending to a particular object or idea to keep the mind engaged (116). As we saw with the appeal to "Constancy" at the start of this section, and with vividness as a potentially bright and fleeting flicker, Brooks is also aware of attention as contingent and unstable. In her poem, however, she takes more of a Ciceronian than a Dickinsonian approach to this quality of mind, focusing on holding her readers' attention through varied embellishments. The question Davis asks through Dickinson—"When do we, as readers, turn away from poems? When are we done reading?" (117)—are the questions Brooks does not want to give her own readers a chance to ask. We find in *Zóphiël* a text structured around numerous invitations to brief encounters with

the conventionally intense. In the vivid folds of time within the grove of acacias, a grove that draws attention to itself as a miniature allegory of aesthetic experience, we are asked to believe in and wonder at the morning glory even as we are reminded that the vivid can border on the delusional. Brooks cultivates the doubleness of the vivid's temporal structure by providing a wide variety of conventional portals to intense aesthetic experience, inviting readers into frequent all-absorbing figures for brief periods of time.

Multiple Intensities: Amplifying *Zóphiël*

Mabbott believed critics had unfairly “overlooked” this “very ethereal passage—to a tropical flower,” but he supported the widespread regard for two other short excerpts from *Zóphiël*: (1) the “Twilight Song” and (2) the “great lines allegorical of marriage.”⁴⁸ Van Wyck Brooks returned to these two passages in *The Flowering of New England* (1952). Calling Brooks's notes “an armoury of exotic learning” and describing her fancy as “a Cuban jungle, riot[ing] with Byron and Thomas Moore,” Van Wyck Brooks praised both the poem as a whole and, through Southey, these two passages in particular.

The good-hearted Southey, who gave her [Brooks] a lift [...] never wearied of quoting the lines that began, “And as the dove from far Palmyra flying.” Of *Egla's Song*, he said again and again that it was “far superior” to Sappho. The poem as a whole had a glow and movement that made it one of the best of a short-lived school, on either side of the ocean. The song was destined for a longer life. (162)

It was not only Mabbott and Southey who “never wearied of quoting” these lines and praising this song: the entire nineteenth and early-twentieth reception of *Zóphiël* consistently singles out one or both of these two passages to represent the intense passion of *María del Occidente*. In *An American Friend of Robert Southey* (1913), Ruth Shepherd Granniss provided anecdotal evidence that readers in the early twentieth century still remembered these same extracts: in

⁴⁸ “*María del Occidente*,” 420; 419.

response to Granniss's queries about Brooks, one reader quoted "And as the dove from far Palmyra flying," while another mentioned "having preserved in a scrap-book the *Song of Egla*, cut from *The Boston Transcript* many years ago" (5). Of all the passages reprinted in various magazines, anthologies, and newspapers, these were the two passages readers almost could not help but encounter, whether or not they knew the passages came from *Zóphiël*.⁴⁹

Because *Zóphiël* was too long to be reprinted in its entirety, it should not surprise us that reviewers and anthologists relied on excerpts of the poem to represent it to a broader readership, or that readers would remember only small selections from the poem. "Passages appropriate for extracts or mottoes, may be found in almost every page of *Zóphiël*," gushed *The Southern Literary Messenger*; "the theologian, the cosmogonist, the philosopher, the alchemist, the historian, the painter, the sculptor, the novelist, the musician, and the 'petit maitresse,' may find stanzas savoring of the taste of each" (547). Despite this vaunted variety in subject matter, however, the two excerpts listed above, both from the sixth canto, quickly emerged as the most common extracts of the poem. Curiously, these two passages are linked, not only by proximity but as part of a series of appeals to twilight and as a sustained meditation on abandon and abandonment. They are linked and in turn link temporality, intensity, and amplification.

⁴⁹ Both "Song" and the lines allegorical of marriage can be found referenced by or reprinted in the following: *The Poets and Poetry of America*, ed. Griswold (1842); *The Poetry of the Affections*, ed. Griswold (1846); *The Estray*, ed. Longfellow (1847); *The American Female Poets*, ed. May (1848); *The Female Poets of America*, ed. Griswold (1849); *The Female Poets of America*, ed. Thomas Buchanan Read (1855); "Preface" by Gustafson, *Zóphiël* (1879); *The Family Library*, ed. William Cullen Bryant, et al. (1880); *A Library of American Literature*, eds. Stedman and Hutchinson, vol. 5 (1891); *An American Anthology*, ed. E.C. Stedman (1900); Granniss, *An American Friend of Robert Southey* (1913); Mabbott, "María del Occidente" (1926); Van Wyck Brooks, *The Flowering of New England* (1952). "Song" can also be found in: Charles Lamb's response to the poem; Southey's letter to Anna Eliza Bray, qtd. in Gustafson (xviii); and Mabbott, "Brooks, Maria Gowen" (1928). It was also set to music and sold as sheet music. The "lines" can also be found in: Southey's *The Doctor, &c.* (1834); Anna Eliza Bray, *Trelawney of Trelawne, or The Prophecy* (1837); *Southern Literary Messenger*, "Biographical Sketch of María del Occidente" (1839); *The Floral Offering*, ed. F. S. Osgood (1847); George Saintsbury, *A History of English Prosody from the twelfth century to the present day*, vol. III. (1910). This is, obviously, an incomplete list. Notices of Southey's *The Doctor, &c.*, for example, also reprinted the excerpt from *Zóphiël* that Southey had included.

Zóphiël's extent—its intellectual scope, its intensities, its page-count—was integral to its visibility as a poetic accomplishment. “In epic poetry,” proclaimed the *Southern Literary Messenger*, “*Zóphiël* is destined to hold a distinguished rank” (547). Whether or not everyone described the poem as an “epic” (Southey described it as a “longish poem”), the poem’s intellectual and aesthetic ambitions seem to have been part of what caught reviewers’ attention. Although Edgar Allan Poe made numerous critical statements in the 1840s *against* long poems, which he felt showed only “sustained effort,” he did praise Brooks for her “sustained ideality” in *Zóphiël*.⁵⁰ In 1845 (the year Brooks died), Poe was still citing “The Bride of Seven” as one of the only original long poems produced by an American poet.⁵¹ But the poem’s extent was also seen by some as one more excess in a poem of six cantos, learned footnotes, and the titular seven husbands. Ingraham concedes in his biographical sketch of Brooks that “she sometimes rests on a single circumstance a little too long, and occasionally dresses her sentences in richer drapery of words than they can bear[.]”⁵² Washington Irving’s reported comments are more direct: “I apprehend the faults that may be found in it are on the side of exuberance as to ornament, and amplification as to narrative.”⁵³ What “too long,” too rich, “exuberance,” and “amplification” have in common is excess, a trend Poe confirms in identifying Brooks’s faults in *Zóphiël* as “chiefly bombast and extravagance.”⁵⁴ When Irving cites “amplification as to narrative” as a weakness in the poem, he seems to mean that the narrative is too long—that it has been extended in ways that weaken the poem. Since narrative is also a temporal structure, Irving’s

⁵⁰ Poe ridicules the “sustained effort” of long poems in “The Poetic Principle” (1850). Poe praised Brooks’s “sustained ideality” in a review of Frances S. Osgood’s poems in the *Southern Literary Messenger*, August 1849.

⁵¹ *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, Dec. 1845.

⁵² *Southern Literary Messenger*, 547.

⁵³ Qtd. in *ibid.*, 544.

⁵⁴ *The Broadway Journal*, v. 2 (1845/46): 293

comments concern the reader's experience of time. Brooks appears to need to de-amplify her poem in size and ornament in order to amplify the impressions her poem leaves on readers.

De-amplifying the poem's size to amplify its effects certainly emerged as a popular assessment of the poem: Van Wyck Brooks's claim that "Song" was "destined" to outlast the long poem of which it was a part, combined with Mabbott's earlier acknowledgment that "Song" was "the finest thing in the poem," suggests consensus concerning the exemplarity of these stanzas, and an easy or even teleologic excising of a short-poem with a first-person pronoun from a long-poem with a variety of characters and modes. It would seem to confirm the Longinian tradition that M. H. Abrams identifies: the way that critics such as Coleridge, Hazlitt, Mill, and Poe made intensity "one of the most familiar modern criteria of aesthetic value," and associated intensity with brevity, a scene, a fragment (132).⁵⁵ As Jackson has argued, however, "[w]hat has been left out of most thinking about the process of lyricization is that it is an uneven series of negotiations of many different forms of circulation and address."⁵⁶ As we saw in the previous section, *Zóphiël* offers a useful example of a single long poem displaying "many different forms of ... address" and other conventions of intensity. Both the poem's reception and the poem's rhetorical patterns illuminate an "uneven series of negotiations" about how to engage and affect the reader. For while Southey compared "Song" to Sappho's "Ode to Aphrodite," we might recall that "Song" was not the excerpt he used to describe Brooks as the "most impassioned and most imaginative of poetesses." That epithet was awarded Brooks for the four-stanzas preceding "Song," four stanzas that appear to describe a similar mental state attached to the same time of

⁵⁵ See especially "Longinus, Hazlitt, Keats, and the Criterion of Intensity," 132-138. For more on the Romantic fragment, see Marjorie Levinson, *The Romantic Fragment Poem: A Critique of a Form* (1986). Keats's description of poetry readers enjoying "a little Region to wander in where they may pick and choose, and in which the images are so numerous that many are forgotten and found new in a second Reading" (qtd. in Abrams, 136) might remind us of Dorothy Wordsworth's description of reading Southey. Brooks differs in that she seems not to want to give readers a chance to pick and choose.

⁵⁶ *Dickinson's Misery*, 8.

day, but from the more distanced perspective of a moral adage, the “And as a dove from far Palmyra flying” stanzas. Instead of being praised for its performance of a lonely heart’s “utter abandonment . . . in a consuming flame of unselfish love,” these stanzas were often referred to as “allegorical.” It might seem strange to think that a miniature “allegory” referencing Plato and involving an extended simile of a dove, and a “song” performed by a love-sick and potentially possessed woman could be praised on similar terms, but in fact many nineteenth-century reviewers admired both, read both in terms of Brooks’s person, and used both as evidence of the poet’s exemplary “passion.” The passages were not interchangeable, but they appear to be “synonymous” in terms of how nineteenth-century readers responded to them. Why might a philosophical adage and a first-person “song” seem to produce similarly intense effects?

The very term Irving used to describe *Zóphiël*’s weakness—“amplification”—offers us insight into Brooks’s positive aesthetic aims, as well as insight into why two aesthetically-distinct excerpts might have been used to represent the same quality. As a rhetorical term, amplification denotes an increase in either amount or significance for the purpose of persuasion. For Hugh Blair, amplification “consists in an artful exaggeration of all the circumstances of some object or action which we want to place in a strong light, either a good or a bad one. It is not so properly one Figure, as the skilful management of several which we make to tend to one point” (*Lectures*, 193). Wanting to firmly persuade another person of one’s perspective, one elaborates upon any relevant aspects of the topic. Blair lists terms of magnification, enumeration, comparison, and climax of thought as all being figures that, either individually or together, produce a rhetorical amplification. This figure that is the “skilful management” of multiple figures strengthens the persuasive force of your idea by extending the amount of time and attention a reader or listener must give to it. The reader can then see the idea, object, or action vividly, as if “in a strong

light.” George Campbell’s *Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776) reveals a similar understanding. Campbell mentions “amplification” in passing in the chapter “Of Vivacity As Depending on the Number of Words.” While Campbell mostly promotes the idea that brevity yields the greatest vivacity, he allows for two exceptions involving synonyms: when one employs an obscure word, and “when the language of the passions is exhibited” (368). Multiplying the number of words used to describe the same object or feeling communicates passion, and is justified in “the popular and declamatory style” and as accompanying “the pathetic” (368). Amplification, then, was believed to function as both a sign of the writer’s passion and as a tool for affecting the reader.

“Amplification” played a far more central role in Joseph Priestley’s *A Course of Lectures on Oratory and Criticism* (1777). Priestley separates amplification from more particular figures (such as similes and apostrophes) and foregrounds it as one of the fundamental components of criticism. Part One of his *Course of Lectures* addresses the purpose of oratory and criticism and the proper use of amplification. Priestley provides a good synthesis of the ideas we have seen in Blair’s and Campbell’s uses of the word. He begins by emphasizing that “amplification, or enlargement, is nothing more than a collection of such arguments and observations as tend to confirm or illustrate the subject of it; and therefore,” he adds, “not a sentence, or a word, should be inserted that doth not improve the sense, and tend to make the apprehension of the reader, or hearer, either more *just*, or more *strong* and lively” (26). For Priestley, amplification is the everything else beyond the topic itself that makes you care about the topic. Like Blair, Priestley sees amplification as placing “all the circumstances of some object or action . . . in a strong light,” while like Campbell, Priestley is preoccupied with the minimum quantity of language necessary to produce the maximum effect.⁵⁷ “A *narration* or *description* is concise, when only a

⁵⁷ For a useful summary of different eighteenth-century ideas about the purpose of description in rhetoric, see Hauser, 33-36. Hauser distinguishes between Campbell’s “vivacity” and Priestley’s “amplification” when

few of the most important particulars are mentioned, and amplified and enlarged by a more minute detail. The former is sufficient, where it answers a writer's purpose barely to inform his reader of the *reality* of an event; the latter is necessary, if he be desirous that the reader be *interested* in it, and *affected* by it" (28). We can see that amplification need not be synonymous with diffuseness; rather, it emerges here as the elaboration required to interest and hold a reader's attention.

For these rhetoricians, questions of interest, affect, and affectation revolve around issues of distance, both the distance between persons and the amount of time and space devoted to amplifying ideas. As Davis observes of Cicero, ornamental rhetoric is less about the materiality of language than about "duration and interest" (*Ornamental* 114-115). But there is more to think about regarding these terms and how particular rhetorical strategies were thought to affect them.⁵⁸ For instance, Priestley grants the use of well-placed and brief digressions as a tool to persuade an audience of the speaker's genuineness: "Whatever, likewise, hath the appearance of *present thought*, and *extempore* unprepared address, contributes not a little to make a person seem to be in earnest. He then seems to speak from his *real feelings*, without having recourse to artificial helps" (111). But Priestley cautions against the abuse of such awareness, warning that "any prudent and considerate person" will avoid "phrases and modes of address, expressive of *earnestness*, when they do not really feel these emotions..." (115). Although the "appearance of *present thought*" will, by seeming to minimize the distance between the orator's thoughts and speech, increase the likelihood of affecting the listener, Priestley does not want there to be

considering the role of description in "mediating change in prudential matters." For my purposes, I think it's fair to see "amplification" and "vivacity" as concepts that share an interest in how language persuades through not only description but intensification.

⁵⁸ Davis, *Ornamentation*, 153, also briefly describes Whitman's ornamental aesthetics in terms of "amplification." She does this by way of George Puttenham's *The Art of English Poesy*, as discussed by Susan Stewart in *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* (2002). While Davis's interest in Whitman's amplification resonates with my interest in Brooks's, Davis approaches amplification as part of a transhistoric, ornamental poetics and lyric humanism, whereas I am historicizing amplification via eighteenth-century rhetoric, oratory, and Brooks's nineteenth-century reception.

distance between what an orator purports to feel and what he “really” feels. Hoping to facilitate one mind acting on another, Priestley hopes never to enable a gap between a writer or speaker’s “actual” feeling and their audience’s perception and experience of that feeling.⁵⁹ While acknowledging that “*Vivid ideas* and *strong emotions*” are commonly “associated with reality,” and so impart a reality to their sources, Priestley rejects amplification for false or manipulative ends (89). The challenge is figuring out how much to enlarge or magnify an idea so that your efforts at amplification bring the reader closer to your thinking and feeling, but do not introduce any unnecessary delays or distance into the text.

Along with these eighteenth-century rhetoricians and nineteenth-century reviewers, Brooks was preoccupied with the problem of how to hold a reader’s attention as well. Concerned with complaints about *Zóphiël* being “difficult,” Brooks concerned herself with instructing readers in how to read her poem. In the Preface to her commercially unsuccessful second edition to the poem, Brooks provided explicit directions for how best to read a poem like *Zóphiël*:

One or two short articles, in journals of this country [the United States], object to this poem as being difficult to understand; but those who make the objection, probably, read it hastily, and confused themselves by looking from the verses to the notes and back again, when the attention was distracted. It will be better to read the story as it was composed, without reference to explanations or comments till the whole is finished. The notes can be read afterwards with equal advantage. Indeed they are merely added, to show how much authority exists for every incident and allusion of a narrative imagined under the influence of soft luxuriant tropical scenery; where the writer drew solely from nature, and had access to no books at all relative to the subject. *Zóphiël*, if read in the manner proposed will be found as simply arranged and as easy to comprehend as the tales of “Arabian Nights” or any common novel. (vi)

Brooks diagnoses readers’ confusion as a problem of readers’ time (“read it hastily”), managing the space of the page (“by looking from the verse to the notes and back again”), and genre (long poem with notes). Her solution is to streamline readers’ experience so that the intensities of the

⁵⁹ Metaphors, for example, allow us to “communicate the same ideas, in the same strength, to the minds of others” (188) while minimizing any “sensible excursion from the ideas that engage [the mind’s] attention” (181).

poem are not interrupted. Comparing her poem to “the tales of ‘Arabian Nights’ or any common novel,” Brooks invokes genres associated with wonders, readerly absorption, and distinctive serialities, urging her own readers to seek similar experiences of “sustained ideality” within the pages of *Zóphiël*.⁶⁰

Because Brooks aimed to make a lasting impression on readers through her poem, she experimented with how she might amplify her textual intensities. More than just accumulating objects and signs of the exotic, she attempted to hold an affect steady and “in a strong light” by repeatedly presenting the same intensity-source, often through a variety of conventions. We can see this basic principle of amplification at work in the Palace of Gnomes when Brooks’s narrator asks us five different times to gaze on jewel-encrusted art objects and “sparry portals,” wonders of the deep that could just as easily be life forms trapped in art as works of art coming to life. In the Palace, Brooks first presents two submarine bowers of spar: “And, deep in either bower, a little throne / Looked so fantastic, it were hard to know / If busy Nature fashioned it alone, / Or found some curious artist here below” (III.lix). This suspension of judgment becomes a refrain, repeated four more times in the space of four pages as the narrator is “[m]ade dubious if [what she sees is] of nature or of art” (III.lxxxiv.2). Brooks does not encourage the reader to “move away from” the text; rather, she is interested in having the reader become more and more dazzled by what the text can transmit to or impress, vividly, upon them.⁶¹

While the jewel-encrusted wonders solicit readerly interest through repetition, the amplification Brooks uses elsewhere in the poem is more complicated. Like Blair’s notion that

⁶⁰ For an account of Victorian poets’ attempts to vary the amount of labor required of their readers, so as not to strain the reader’s attention, see Tucker, “Over Worked, Worked Over,” in *The Feeling of Reading: Affective Experience & Victorian Literature*, ed. Rachel Ablow (2010). Tucker argues that Victorian poets hoping to succeed in the marketplace understood the labor required of reading poetry, and so adopted “energy-saving devices,” especially in their meters, to build in recovery periods.

⁶¹ The phrase “moving along with” comes from Davis, *Formalism*, 74.

amplification is “not so properly one Figure, as the skilful management of several,” Brooks amplifies key scenes or moods by managing multiple conventions of intensity. We have already seen this at work in the grove of acacias, in which Brooks manages the trope of the enclosed garden, a description of a single flower, tropical flora, aestheticized footnotes, an apostrophe, and a moral adage, all within a small textual space, to attract and hold the reader’s attention while reassuring the reader that they have no reason to fear being corrupted by the poem. We see it again with the lines “allegorical of Marriage” and Egla’s “Song,” two different conventions of intensity that Brooks skillfully manages so as to amplify and extend her poem. Although readers over time have extracted these passages so as to amplify their effects, when read together and alongside two other descriptions of sunsets, they seek to sustain an ideal of intensity that is by definition impossible to sustain.

In all three presentations of twilight that commence the sixth canto, Brooks emphasizes the instability of this particular time of day. In the opening description of twilight, for example, the landscape appears impassioned as color floods the scene: “A tender flush / Of blended rose and purple light o’er all / The luscious landscape spread,—like pleasure’s blush, . . .” (VI. I.5-6). Even as the landscape appears saturated with color and light, this very saturation suggests a void (“like heaven dissolved”) to follow. Brooks presents twilight as a distinct category of time in which heightened beauty seems to permeate the scene while also threatening to disappear. The immersive experience of gazing on the color-suffused and light-gilded landscape underscores, within the poem, how fleeting the immersion will be. Converting one kind of vividness (the flicker) into another (the steady) is the transparent aim of the opening of Brooks’s final canto. The two oft-quoted passages appear within a few sections of each other:

The bard has sung, God never formed a soul
Without its own peculiar mate, to meet

Its wandering half, when ripe to crown the whole
Bright plan of bliss, most heavenly, most complete.

But thousand evil things there are that hate
To look on happiness: these hurt, impede,
And, leagued with time, space, circumstance, and fate,
Keep kindred heart from heart, to pine and pant and bleed.

And as the dove to far Palmyra flying
From where her native founts of Antioch beam,
Weary, exhausted, longing, panting, sighing,
Lights sadly at the desert's bitter stream;

So many a soul o'er life's drear desert faring,--
Love's pure congenial spring unfound, unquaffed,--
Suffers, recoils; then, thirsty and despairing
Of what it would, descends, and sips the nearest draught. (VI.iii-iv)

Song.
Day in melting purple dying,
Blossoms all around me sighing,
Fragrance from the lilies straying,
Zephyr with my ringlets playing,
Ye but waken my distress:
I am sick of loneliness.

Thou to whom I love to hearken,
Come ere night around me darken:
Though thy softness but deceive me,
Say thou'rt true, and I'll believe thee.
Veil, if ill, thy soul's intent:
Let me think it innocent!

Save thy toiling, spare thy treasure:
All I ask is friendship's pleasure:
Let the shining ore lie darkling;
Bring no gem in lustre sparkling;
Gifts and gold are nought to me:
I would only look on thee;

Tell to thee the high-wrought feeling,
Ecstasy but in revealing;
Paint to thee the deep sensation,
Rapture in participation,
Yet but torture, if compressed
In a lone unfriended breast.

“Song” (associated with Sappho) tends to be associated with the bliss afforded by conventions of suffering. The former is considered moral while the latter appears “aesthetic” and/or lyric.

Thinking of these sections as figures for the same idea, it is possible to see both how Brooks might have attempted to amplify her poem by relying on a wide variety of conventional intensities *and* how nineteenth-century readers recognized the third-person “allegory” as equally intense as the first-person “song.”⁶²

“Song” notably features a woman insisting that an aestheticized and otherworldly figure be present with her in the world. Like Gertrude seeming to weep and smile with “Shakespeare’s self” in Pennsylvania, Egla wants Zóphiël himself to keep her company. The language of “Song” immediately suggests a mental seduction, but it is also possible to read this song as a reader’s appeal against any lingering distance between herself and the aesthetic she has begun to believe in. Even as Egla appeals to Zóphiël to abandon gems and gold in favor of returning to her, she does not set aside the overtly aesthetic. Rather, she imagines a highly aestheticized dialogue in which they will relate “high-wrought feeling” and “paint” sensations for each other. Egla’s visual language spills over into highly tactile language: in addition to feeling being wrought and sensations being painted, day melts, Zóphiël’s kindness is a “softness.” The scene echoes Egla’s first encounter with Zóphiël, when he appeared in a burst of light and his transparent wings dazzled Egla, they were “so bright . . . as shaped from some new rainbow” so that he seemed “clipped . . . round” in “Rosy light” (LXX). That scene in turn conjures up and inverts the gender roles in “The Eve of St. Agnes”: Egla looks upon Zóphiël as Porphyro looks upon Madeline when “[r]ose-bloom fell on her hands” and “She seem’d a splendid angel, newly drest, / Save wings, for heaven” (l.220; 223-224). In the mixture of brightness and rainbow tints, however, the

⁶² See Loeffelholz, chapters one and two, for an examination of two “early nineteenth-century poets [Davidson and Sigourney] whose access to authorship was rooted in schooling” and whose roles as persons and as figures shaped and were shaped by the emerging “domestic-tutelary complex” (4).

scene might remind us even more strongly of the Iris-like figure in Percy Bysshe Shelley's "The Triumph of Life." That figure is described as "a shape all light"—a line that Victorian readers came to associate with Shelley himself.⁶³ In the next chapter, we will explore tactility and luminosity further by tracing how images of light and silver acquire materiality and involve themselves with other beings in Shelley's poetry and nineteenth-century U.S. reception.

⁶³ Adela Pinch, "A Shape All Light," *Taking Liberties with the Author: Selected Essays from the English Institute*, ed. Meredith L. McGill (2013): para.114.

Chapter 3

Luminous Distance: Shelley in the Nineteenth-Century United States

In previous chapters we have encountered writers and readers eager to assert that a poem impresses them so strongly, it seems to confer familiarity with a distant time or place. Although for some twentieth- and twenty-first century scholars, the focus has been on how accurately various poets and poems describe historical realities and actual landscapes, early nineteenth-century poets and their readers show a willingness and desire to believe in distant places based on the poem's aesthetic force, a force that relies more on recognizable tropes of intensity than on an adherence to faithful mimesis. Campbell's Gertrude describes Wyoming in terms of European and Eastern landscape touchstones, cordoning off a space within the poem (and an entire canto of the poem) to imagine its heroine reading within the framework of a luxurious and obviously inaccurate Pennsylvania. Poets such as Drake and Halleck, Sigourney and Willis, saw this poem's vividness as a given, a given they could leverage and build on, not a truth-claim to debunk, in their own poetic productions. Seeing vividness as an aesthetic category shaken free of any obligations to accuracy, we have been able to understand how Brooks anticipates and responds to readers' desires for the real by incorporating exoticized descriptions of Cuba, along with Ovidian mythologies, Southey's romances, and compressed "songs" into *Zóphiël* in order to imagine renewing her hold on her readers' attention over and over again. Although readers from the nineteenth-century to the present tend to give priority to Brooks's references to Cuba, Brooks herself is interested in how readers' fantasies of accessing Cuba through her poem might help her

sustain a masterful poetic production and generate literary fame. Distance in time and space, the very things that one might expect would inhibit vividness, have emerged as mechanisms for its production.

From our vantage point, Percy Shelley's poetics of landscape description clearly share in this early nineteenth-century insight that spatiotemporal distance might serve as the necessary precondition for aesthetic vividness. As "Mont Blanc" suggests, a vacancy in vision, description, and knowledge need not remain vacant once the human mind considers it. Unable to view the snows descending upon the top of the Mountain, the poet-figure in "Mont Blanc" turns this lack of visual access into an invitation as well as an authorization to fill descriptive gaps. Viewing that which is distant as an opportunity to posit closeness arises in Shelley's poems not just in response to sublime European landscapes, but also and even especially in response to exotic non-European locations. If we look closely at Shelley's poems set in Italy, Greece, Northeast Africa, and India, we can see that, like Campbell and Brooks and many writers of the period, Shelley's descriptions of real places located at a distance from Anglo-American readers rely heavily on literary topoi—or, inverting this, that his highly figurative descriptions still point to or name actual places in the world. The Advertisement to *Epipsychidion*, for example, invites us to read the poem as referencing a particular island in the Aegean Sea. Yet just by describing the island as "one of the wildest of the Sporades," Shelley infuses that archipelago with the mythological and romantic. Further, his description of the "lone dwelling" on that distant island emerges from a similar impulse as the impulse to describe the peak of Mont Blanc, and in terms that might remind us of Campbell's description of Gertrude's reading grotto, or of Brooks's description of Egla's grove of acacias:

It scarce seems now a wreck of human art,
But, as it were Titanic; in the heart

Of Earth having assumed its form, then grown
 Out of the mountains, from the living stone,
 Lifting itself in caverns light and high:
 For all the antique and learned imagery
 Has been erased, and in the place of it
 The ivy and the wild-vine interknit
 The volumes of their many twining stems;
 Parasite flowers illumine with dewy gems
 The lampless halls, and when they fade, the sky
 Peeps through their winter-woof of tracery
 With Moon-light patches, or star atoms keen,
 Or fragments of the day's intense serene;—
 Working mosaic on their Parian floors.
 And, day and night, aloof, from the high towers
 And terraces, the Earth and Ocean seem
 To sleep in one another's arms, and dream
 Of waves, flowers, clouds, woods, rocks, and all that we
 Read in their smiles, and call reality.¹

Shelley here describes an intensely lovely and secluded bower located at a distance from the poem's scene of address as well as from Anglo-American readers, and filled with almost otherworldly sensory impressions: moonlight, wild vines, illumined flowers. This bower is similar to the enclosed spaces described by Campbell, Brooks, and other writers of the period in that it blurs the boundaries of inside and outside, natural and artificial. Yet it is also strikingly unlike those enclosed spaces for there are no human figures in Shelley's scene. Instead, weighty and book-like vines ("in volumes") replace (as with their own agency) human-made imagery. That which is distant and difficult to perceive in material terms (light, the sky, the stars) seems close and tangible, as the "patches," "atoms," and "fragments" of light appear to compose a material mosaic on the ground. Nature does not "reclaim" art here so much as recompose it. The distance in time and space—between the poet-figure and his addressee, and between the

¹ Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Epipsychidion*, ll.493-512, in *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, eds. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, 2nd edition (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2002). Unless otherwise noted, all citations of Shelley's poetry and prose will be from this edition. Poetry will be cited by line numbers within the poem, while prose will be cited by page number within the edition.

Sporades and Anglo-American readers—creates a recognizable vacancy that Shelley’s description might fill—as with material patches of Moon-light—with imaginative vivacity.

Despite these thematic and aesthetic similarities between Shelley’s poems and the poems we have previously investigated, however, nineteenth-century US readers did *not* link Shelley’s poetry and poetics with poems such as *Gertrude* or *Zóphiël*, for in the case of Shelley they perceived a far greater distance than either time or space that needed to be overcome: the ontological distance between the ethereal poet and the material world. While “ontology” can refer to a number of things — such as existence, essence, Being, metaphysics, systems of classification — and thus seem unhelpfully abstract, it is a pervasive term in Shelley criticism and in recent ecological thought. I use it in this chapter to mean “being” or “beings,” and I use “ontological distance” to describe a difference between kinds of being, for to most nineteenth-century American readers, Shelley and his poems appeared to be so ethereal as to be almost alien. Thus, although Shelley’s *Alastor*, *Epipsychidion*, and *Prometheus Bound* all travel through and to new and distant places, Shelley’s poems did not engender a new poetic topos like Wyoming, nor did his association with Italy and his use of European locations in his titles lead to sustained claims about sensing Italy or Greece as we saw with Cuba and *Zóphiël*. Rather, to chart Shelley’s nineteenth-century US reception is to chart a shift from critics’ complaints that Shelley is too distant from a shared external reality, to critics’ qualified celebrations of Shelley’s skylark-like distance from the “muck” of reality. Even as the emotional valence of distance changes, there is not a change in the perception of distance itself. It is not Shelley’s place of writing, nor the location of places within his poems that made him appear distant from and to nineteenth-century Americans but rather his poetics, and biographical descriptions of his very being, that appear to keep him at a distance from their world. Reviews and poems articulate this distance

explicitly, but here we might note that such distance even manifests obliquely in the absence of an “American Shelley.” Throughout the nineteenth-century American writers had branded themselves or been branded as American versions of recognizable British romantic poets: Bryant was the American Wordsworth, Sigourney the American Hemans, Halleck the American Byron, Drake the American Keats. Despite the fact that Shelley’s paternal grandfather had been born in colonial New Jersey, despite Shelley’s scattered fans throughout the nineteenth-century US, and despite his known commitment to political liberty, no one publicly claimed the moniker “American Shelley.”² This lack of “American Shelley” points to the persistent, intriguing entanglement of geography and ontology in Shelley’s nineteenth-century American reception. As we shall see, when American writers imagined Shelley, they tended to focus on grounding him in distinctly material, literal ways. For US readers, it was not just Shelley’s exotic scenes that were distant; the historical Shelley and his extravagant figures seemed so ethereal as to be ontologically distant from Americans’ lives as well.

This growing tendency on the part of nineteenth-century US readers, writers, and critics to celebrate Shelley’s distance from material concerns while also insisting that he reconnect—literally get his feet on the earth—with the world finds its most ardent iteration in Elinor Wylie’s novel, *The Orphan Angel* (1926). That Wylie, a celebrated American poet, was “obsessed” with

² Even if the phrase “American Shelley” appeared, the phrase does not stick to any single poet. It is possible James Russell Lowell called George Woodberry the “American Shelley,” although I have not been able to find a reliable source to confirm this. The fact that Woodberry edited the American centennial edition of Shelley’s complete poems suggests that “American Shelley” could refer to Woodberry’s editorial and critical work just as much as to his poems. Numerous American poets were described as being keen readers of Shelley, among them James Gates Percival, Poe, and Lowell himself. This did not result in the epithet being assigned to them. As late as 1891, however, a British critic, reporting on a debate between Theodore Watts and William Dean Howells concerning the quality of American literature, imagined Watts as saying: “Yes; you have divagations with whisky and the lasses, oh; but where is your Burns? You have no terrible poetic scandals; but where is your Byron, and whom do you regard, at present, as the American Shelley?” This suggests that the *lack* of an “American Shelley” was still recognized by transatlantic critics at the approach of the twentieth century. For the imagined Watts comment, see “Americans and Their Books,” *London Daily News* (October 1891): 4-5. Rpt. in *Critic*, n.s. 18 (July 23, 1892): 48. Rpt. in *Emily Dickinson’s Reception in the 1890s: A Documentary History*, ed. Willis J. Buckingham (Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 1989): 217-219.

Shelley was well known to her twentieth-century contemporaries. But her investments in and attachments to Shelley manifested not only in her own and others' descriptions of her mental and emotional life, but most significantly in her writing.³ *The Orphan Angel*—mailed to 50,000 American homes as one of the first Book-of-the Month club picks—springs from a single counterfactual premise: what if, instead of drowning in 1822, Shelley had been rescued by an American clipper ship, and had led a second existence in the early national United States?⁴ *The Orphan Angel* imagines this scenario in bizarre and loving detail: an American sailor (David Butternut) rescues Shelley in the Gulf of Spezia, and the two men cross the Atlantic, undertaking a quest to rescue an ideal woman, Silver Cross. This quest takes them across New England, through the mid-Atlantic states, south to Kentucky, west to Missouri, and eventually to San Diego and the shores of the Pacific. Wylie's contemporaries emphasized that the route undertaken by the fictional Shelley and Davy (and, with them, the reader) is as mappable as it is fabulous. This critical preoccupation with the geographical and historical veracity of a novel springing from such a blatantly counterfactual premise suggests a displacement of stakes from the poet's ontology—the poet's resurrection and his ethereal embodiment—onto America's historical geography.

Wylie's novel, while quirky, represents a serious culmination of and response to the trends we have noted in Shelley's nineteenth-century US reception, specifically, the tendency to critique Shelley as being too distant from a recognizable "real world" existence. Karen Swann has characterized the Shelley circle's representations of posthumous Shelley as "cultic but not naive," rooted in their keen readings of Shelley's poems, and we can extend this insight to

³ For Wylie's intense devotion to Shelley in the context of Victorian Shelley love and the history of modern emotion, see Pinch, "A Shape All Light," in particular the final section, "Fade to White," para. 145-149.

⁴ Hoyt, 124, provides this statistic. See also Janice Radway, *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste, and Middle Class Desire* (1999) for a history of the book-of-the-month club as an institution.

Wylie, who offers a different, US-specific Shelley-inflected fantasy of the aesthetic no less deserving of the “cultic but not naive” epithet.⁵ Throughout *The Orphan Angel*, Wylie’s Shelley—renamed Shiloh—is described as a luminous angel, an extraterrestrial figure insistently walking on the earth, yet also walking through US landscapes that seem sown with glitter instead of grain. These landscapes rework the glitters and sparkles, the visualized sounds and palpable light, that compose numerous spaces in *Alastor*, *Epipsychidion*, and *Prometheus Unbound*. Wylie’s threading of the early national US with marks of vividness in the form of materialized brightness emerges both from Shelley’s poetics and from his nineteenth-century US reception, illuminating how Shelley’s own descriptions of distant places—Italy, the Indian Caucasus, Demogorgon’s realm—present themselves as interfused with a simultaneously material and otherworldly aesthetic. Marks of the ontologically distant compose the real world on the page.

This chapter analyzes Shelley’s poetics of landscape description, the nineteenth-century US reception of Shelley, and this reception’s culmination in a twentieth-century imagining of a nineteenth-century “American Shelley.” The argument builds cumulatively and ultimately uses the imagined American Shelley to authorize new readings of Shelley’s “involved” poetics and ideals of vividness. While earlier chapters have focused on geographical distance, this chapter will foreground ontological distance and the desire to, in Shelley’s words, “overleap” the distance or “the interval between us.”⁶ Shelley’s long-nineteenth-century US reception makes clear that in Shelley’s poems geographical distance stands in for ontological distance, even as ontological distance underscores geographical distance. Considering this claim within the framework of understanding vividness as an historical aesthetic category allows us to step out of tired binaries such as “real/ideal,” which frequently structure Shelley scholarship, and into a

⁵ Swann, n. pag.

⁶ “On Love,” 504; 503.

historically enriched and expanded vocabulary for reconceptualizing the relationship between being in the world and being on the page.

“Other flowering isles must be”: Ontology Via Shelley’s Distant Places

Like Southey, Campbell, and Brooks, Shelley chooses to set many of his poems in what for most Anglo-American readers would have been exotic settings and distant countries. Islands in the Aegean Sea, the Indian Caucasus, Egypt, Mont Blanc, the Euganean Hills: these places are all referenced in titles or in particular lines of Shelley’s poems, and Shelley had travelled to some of the “distant” places he referenced. Yet these traces of the referential do not mean that Shelley’s poetics seek faithfully to represent a place. “Lines written among the Euganean Hills,” for example, while its title sounds grounded in a particular Italian landscape, opens and closes with an allegory of the sea of Misery, an allegory that frames the poem’s presentation of Venice, Padua, their histories, and the Hills themselves. Meanwhile, the “windless bower” envisioned at this poem’s conclusion echoes descriptions of the cave in *Prometheus Unbound*, the Witch of Atlas’s cave, the forest in *Alastor*, the pathways and pleasure-dome on the Greek island in *Epipsychidion*—and these echoes render the connection of this Shelleyan topos across poems more insistent than the attachment of any particular enclosed space to a particular locale. Even in a poem such as “Euganean Hills” that performs a version of the eighteenth-century prospect poem and “maps” portions of northern Italy, Shelley’s primary aim is not to depict northern Italy “as is”; rather, in actively interpreting Venice and Padua on a historical scale, as well as human suffering in an allegorical context, “Euganean Hills” meditates on what has been and what might be *as part of* faithfully representing what “is.” Shelley states as much when, in the prose fragment “On Life,” he discusses his dissatisfaction with philosophical materialism’s inability to account for the vast temporal scale of existence: “man is a being of high aspiration ‘looking both

before and after,' whose 'thoughts that wander through eternity,' disclaim alliance with transience and decay, incapable of imagining to himself annihilation, existing but in the future and the past, being, not what he is, but what he has been, and shall be" (506). Representing only what "is" cannot be the aim of a Shelleyan poetics of place. Defining existence narrowly, restricting it only to what is immediately present, would (in this view) be a more unfaithful representational strategy than unfaithful mimesis itself.

To say this is not to ignore the political stakes of unfaithful mimesis. Empire's unequal distribution of power over time and space changes the stakes of unfaithful mimesis significantly, especially when considering Shelley's poems set in the Orient. Saree Makdisi has argued that this inclination not only to fill vacancies but to *see* vacancies as such—the impulse we saw on display at the end of "Mont Blanc"—grows sinister in the context of European imperialist projects in the Orient, as it implies that the Orient *needs* European intervention (143-44). Indeed, the passage from *Epipsyichidion* with which I began this chapter could be considered prime evidence of this imperial impulse, for in that passage describing the Aegean pleasure-dome a presumably European subject romanticizes the loss of the marks of another culture, and erases human labor in favor of myth, presenting the island both as his own discovery and as something to be reclaimed or repurposed. Makdisi makes visible the ways in which Shelley's production of an Orient on the page helped construct a particular kind of British imperialism and Orientalism, one that sought to integrate "the East" into "the West's" modern spatio-temporal system. While this illuminates Shelley in and imagining the East in the early nineteenth century, it leaves unaddressed Shelley in and imagined by the newly established United States. Without forgetting that the US is involved in the global capitalist and imperial systems Makdisi historicizes, I assert that there are important differences in how Shelley's poetry, including his poetics of landscape

description, matters in this differently postcolonial context, especially when we consider the nuanced ways in which historical readers read Shelley.⁷

How did US readers respond to Shelley's poetics of description? They were critical, but not for the same reason as Makdisi. For nineteenth-century US readers, the problem with Shelley's descriptions was not that they were inaccurate but that they lacked the force to make a sustained impression. While Campbell's inaccurate Wyoming had established a new topos, Shelley's abundant figures failed (many readers complained) to impress them strongly enough to facilitate belief—a point upon which I will elaborate in the next section. Sources do after all have a tendency to get lost in Shelley's descriptions.⁸ An early twentieth-century biographer of Emerson, for example, attributed Emerson's hesitations about Shelley to Shelley's landscape descriptions offering only “the vapor of landscape.”⁹ And though Margaret Fuller, an early admirer of Shelley, suggested that the effects of Shelley's poems were analogous to the natural world, she writes only of “the waterfall, the rivulet, the notes of the bird and insect world” in general, not of a strong tie between a particular place and a particular poem. Furthermore, she writes of sensing how Shelley himself has been impressed by Nature, but not of being impressed, as if physically, by Shelley's poems. Instead, she describes the poems as producing a “a rush, [a] flow, [a] delicacy of vibration,” which suggests fluidity but not necessarily a striking image or

⁷ For US Orientalism, see Malini Johar Schueller, *U.S. Orientalisms: Race, Nation, and Gender, 1790-1890* (U. of Michigan Press, 2001) and Susan Nance, *How the Arabian Tales Inspired the American Dream, 1790-1935* (UNC Press, 2014). Schueller identifies three different Orientalist focal points (Barbary, Near East, and Indic Orientalisms) and shows how nineteenth-century American writers attempted to stabilize the US nation by projecting raced, gendered, and sexed concerns onto Eastern others. By contrast Nance theorizes how Americans of varied social identities engaged in “playing Eastern,” performing Eastern identities and stereotypes in person and in print for a variety of purposes. Nance's attention to the varied ways in which actual historical readers, writers, and performers used a seemingly monolithic discourse resonates strongly with my own interest in and approach to vividness.

⁸ See Pinch, especially para. 122, for how Shelley lovers understood and used the “chain of attachments” in Shelley's poetry, prose, and life, to theorize a particular theory of authorship.

⁹ Qtd. in Power, 23.

force such as we have come to associate with the vivid.¹⁰ Although some of Shelley's poetic figures such as the Visionary in *Alastor* and Asia in *Prometheus Unbound* dramatize the desire to seek out the source of what they have seen or heard, Shelley's own nineteenth-century US readers had a stronger sense of his poems' own "delica[te] vibration[s]" and descriptive "vapour[s]" than they had of any particular source or reference, which typically remains obscure.

Rather than seek out the sources (geographical or literary) for Shelley's descriptions, I wish to suggest that exotic places function in Shelley's poems as a means for considering ontological questions, for Shelley's exotic scenes feature encounters between distinctly different kinds of beings, and kinds of being. Though one scholar has characterized *Alastor* as a "narrative of non-encounter," this is only true if we privilege person-to-person encounters.¹¹ As Timothy Morton emphasizes, Shelley out-Wordsworths Wordsworth "in his presentation of intimate contact with other (sentient) beings." We can see this intimate contact everywhere in *Alastor*, which is full of encounters between different beings and aspects of existence—plants, insects, light—even as its Visionary relentlessly pursues a figure that may or may not exist. Shelley further explores how describing alternate existences as if they were distant places might affect our own existence in the world. "Euganean Hills" concludes not with a description of the Italian landscape, but with a consideration of another possible place that might enable an alternate state of being:

Other flowering isles must be
In the sea of Life and agony:
Other spirits float and flee
O'er that gulph: even now, perhaps (ll. 335-338)

¹⁰ "The rush, the flow, the delicacy of vibration, in Shelley's verse can only be paralleled by the waterfall, the rivulet, the notes of the bird and insect world" ("Modern British Poets," 69). Fuller singles out Shelley for two particular gifts: "fertility of Fancy" and "sympathy with Nature." "To [Nature's] lightest tones *his being* gave an echo," writes Fuller (69, my emphasis). "Modern British Poets" appeared in *Papers on Literature and Art* (1846).

¹¹ Makdisi, 143; Morton, "Introduction," 9. Morton elaborates on this claim about Shelley's attention to humans' coexistence with the nonhuman in "An Object-Oriented Defense of Poetry."

Meditating on and from the Euganean Hills prompts a mental movement to an unspecified Elsewhere, a “healing paradise” that harbors not only “me, and those I love” but also helps the “polluting multitude” to change.¹² For an example even less tethered to a conventional “real,” we find First Faun modeling a similar move in *Prometheus Unbound*, musing on sounds whose sources remain obscure: “If such live thus, have others other lives” (II.ii.83)—an ontological query all the stranger since posed by a mythological creature about musical spirits. Shelley’s preoccupation with filling vacancies and accessing geographically distant places—whether inaccessible due to scale (“Mont Blanc”) or vegetation (the forests and natural bowers in *Alastor*, *Epipsychidion*, and *Prometheus Unbound*)—can be understood as a *desire* to make contact across ontological distance in order to reconceptualize existence itself.¹³

Shelley places pressure on two key ontological distinctions: the distinction between the human and the natural world, and the distinction between the sensory world and ideas. As mentioned in relation to *Alastor*, Shelley rethinks distance between humans through representations of encounters with and within the natural world. He writes in “On Love”:

Hence in solitude, or in that deserted state when we are surrounded by human beings and yet they sympathise not with us, we love the flowers, the grass, and the waters and the sky. In the motion of the very leaves of spring in the blue air there is then found a secret correspondence with our heart. There is eloquence in the tongueless wind and a melody in the flowing brooks and the rustling of the reeds beside them which by their inconceivable relation to something within the soul awaken the spirits to a dance of

¹² ll. 355; 343; 356; 370.

¹³ For arguments concerning the hetero-ontologicality produced by realism, and the “colonial effect” and “ontological imperialism” this hetero-ontologicality enables, see Freedgood (“Hetero-ontologicality” and “Fictional Settlements,” respectively). Like Freedgood, I am interested in how reference, “reality,” and “fictionality” interact. Beyond the obvious difference of our chosen time periods and genres, our claims differ most in terms of how we approach ontological difference: for Freedgood, fictionality/factuality is a binary that realist fiction threatens by creating an open circuit between the two; we must understand the stakes, she argues, of being able to decide ourselves, each time we read, what is true and what is not. While I take Freedgood’s point, I read Shelley as suggesting that such a binary as “fictional/factual” or “real/ideal” is a particular but limited attempt to describe a relationship, a description we must not mistake as having ontological or epistemological priority. For more on Shelley’s prioritizing of relations, see Morton, “An Object-Oriented Defense.”

breathless rapture, and bring tears of mysterious tenderness to the eyes like the enthusiasm of patriotic success or the voice of one beloved singing to you alone.¹⁴

Morton invokes “On Love” as evidence that, for Shelley, “Communion with nature . . . is a function of our desire to reach out and touch something or someone, the nerve-tremblingly acute way in which our sensibility meets our conscious mind,” and he has elsewhere argued that Shelley’s poetics (read through the lens of object-oriented ontology) show us that poems are “non-human agents.”¹⁵ I wish to argue a related point: that *figurations of nature* in Shelley’s poems of distant places stand in for a desire to be in contact with an other, or another way of being. “Communion with nature” is more than a byproduct or function of desire: as Morton would agree, it is an active and *equal* substitute for communion with humans, for Love, says Shelley, is “the bond and the sanction which connects not only man with man, but with every thing which exists” (504). What’s more, Shelley suggests that representations of nature might perform the same service, for representations are also part of the “every thing which exists.”

Representations of nature can thus stand in for a desire for connection in our lives. As we saw in the passage from “On Love” quoted above, a person’s desire for the kinds of belonging and intimacy facilitated by poetry (such as national belonging, or intimacy with the beloved) may be satisfied by a landscape infused with eloquence and melodies—or, by a description of the landscape as infused with human arts. This sense of an “inconceivable relation” between the natural world, the arts, and human beings, receives further articulation in “On Life,” in which Shelley honors mental states such as reverie that do not distinguish between the self and the world, claiming that these states correlate strongly with “an unusually intense and vivid apprehension of life” (507). For Shelley such a lack of rigid categorization results not in

¹⁴ “On Love,” 504.

¹⁵ Morton, “Introduction,” 9; “An Object-Oriented Defense of Poetry,” 215.

ontological confusion, but in heightened understanding. Shelley undoes a range of distinctions, from self/world, to I/you, to a central binary of British empiricism: “The difference is merely nominal,” writes Shelley, “between those two classes of thought which are vulgarly distinguished by the names of ideas and of external objects” (508). By refusing to recognize the difference between mental objects and external objects as an ontological difference, Shelley makes it possible to understand representations of external objects as having the same force as the external objects themselves. In other words, whether or not one actually communes with actual nature, whether or not a poem describes an actual scene, whether the flowers, grass, waters, and sky are around you or in your mind, descriptions of connections with and within the natural world might stand in for a desire for our existence to be other than what it is—or than it appears.¹⁶ When encountering any kind of distance between ourselves and others, or between ourselves and ourselves, Shelley suggests we can turn to nature on the page and in our minds as well as in the world to stand in for the closeness we long to experience. Distant and exotic locations’ more markedly described geographical differences force these questions of ontology to the surface. Reading Shelley’s references to and descriptions of distant places as explorations of possible ontologies will help us understand not only Shelley’s poems but also nineteenth-century US readers’ responses to Shelley’s figures and the figure of Shelley.

“American Shelley”: Shelley’s Reception in the Nineteenth-Century United States

Shelley’s distant, exotic scenes played a supporting role in nineteenth-century US critical assessments of and concerns over Shelley, for Shelley’s propensity for figurative language

¹⁶ See, for example, “Euganean Hills,” ll.285-319, even especially ll.310-319, in which all living things “Interpenetrated lie / By the glory of the sky.” In this passage, a description of what is (“Noon descends arounds me now”) surges into something other-worldly (“a soft and purple mist / Like a vaporous amethyst”) and seems to realize the “healing paradise” imagined at the end.

seemed symptomatic of a larger problem: Shelley's distance from everyday existence. Surveying Shelley's nineteenth-century US reception while paying particular attention to this call for a physically grounded Shelley will help us approach Shelley's work outside of a real/ideal binary. In wishing for a differently materialized Shelley US readers press for neither Shelley the political radical nor Shelley the unearthly skylark but for a Shelley they could believe as both beautiful and capable of participating in their everyday lives.¹⁷ Since 1822, Shelley's life, death, and reception have been the subject and actively-made object of numerous critical and popular narratives, with most scholarly reception studies illuminating his nineteenth-century British reception. While there are certain overlaps between the American and British reception of Shelley—a preoccupation with proving Shelley was Christian, for example, and a tendency to read the historical Shelley according to the figures of his own poems—one significant difference also emerges. Adela Pinch has delightfully shown how late Victorian Shelley lovers “tended not to think of Shelley as having, or having ever had, much of a material existence” (para. 122). Pinch reveals how Shelley as a spiritual being, “a shape all light,” a sound, predominates in these accounts, and enables a theory of highly mobile, transferential love to emerge from the Shelley-lovers' notion of authorship.¹⁸ Pinch's account of Victorian Shelley love throws into relief the tendency on the part of numerous nineteenth-century Americans to critique Shelley with a language of the body and even to imagine re-embodying him—not to let him stay a spirit, shape, or sound, but to insist that he make physical contact with the world. While I will give brief

¹⁷ For overviews of Shelley's British reception, see Morton, “Receptions,” 36; Stabler, especially 657-661; and Barcus, ed. Both Morton and Stabler track the enduring tension between Shelley the politically-engaged and Shelley the ethereal. For a reading of how the Shelley circle created the posthumous figure of Shelley through their reading of Shelley's own slumbering forms, see Swann. For a history not of Shelley's reception but of “Shelley love,” see Pinch. For Shelley's US reception, see Power, *Shelley in Nineteenth-Century America* (1940), as well as Barcus, ed. I am especially indebted to Pinch, for sharing with me the Wylie/Shelley connection, and (in a different way) to Power, whose work in physical archives on Shelley's US reception supplemented my work in digital archives, not only saving me time but also identifying sources I might not otherwise have discovered.

¹⁸ Pinch, para. 115. Pinch's essay also illuminates how author love, and Shelley love in particular, contributed to early British psychoanalytic object relations.

attention to the range of nineteenth-century US readers' responses to Shelley's political, social, and religious beliefs, this section ultimately focuses on one strand of Shelley's US reception: admiring a dazzling figure while critiquing that figure's distance from daily, embodied existence.

As we might expect Shelley's initial US reception focused on the scandal of his religious beliefs and, to a lesser extent, on his political beliefs and social values. In the 1820s and 1830s, the critical conversation surrounding Shelley centered on morality as much as physicality. Given his expulsion from Oxford, many critics feared Shelley's atheistic beliefs would have a pernicious influence on readers. Periodical articles of the 1830s lamented Shelley's atheism, while articles from the 1840s forward to the century's end tried either to separate the man from the poet, or to argue that Shelley was becoming Christian on the basis of his poems.¹⁹ One H. W. P., for instance, published a poem, "The Death of Shelley—A Vision," in the May 1849 *American Whig Review*, a poem which imagines Shelley drowning while reassuring readers that he drowns as a Christian. The prominent travel writer and essayist Henry Tuckerman proposed that "[s]peculatively [Shelley] may have been an Atheist; in his inmost soul he was a Christian," while Margaret Fuller went further, asserting that, "[h]ad Shelley lived twenty years longer, ... he would have become a fervent Christian."²⁰ Preoccupied with Shelley's religious beliefs, American critics initially paid less explicit attention to his social and political beliefs. G. G. Foster's 1845 edition of Shelley's poems (the first "complete American edition") linked Shelley with Fourier, but explicit discussion of political reform surfaces less frequently than we might

¹⁹ To place this preoccupation with Shelley's faith in a historical context beyond Shelley's biography, see Richard Carwardine, *Transatlantic Revivalism: Popular Evangelicalism in Britain and America* (1978) and Jon Butler, *Awash In a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (1990). This belief that Shelley would have become a Christian was popular in Britain as well. See Pinch, para. 117.

²⁰ Tuckerman, 258; Fuller, qtd. in Power, 19.

expect.²¹ In fact, one of the most explicit invocations of Shelley's politics to surface in antebellum poetry occurs strangely in "Ariel" (1833), a pro-South poem by the future Confederate officer Albert Pike. In this pro-slavery, pro-states'-rights allegory, Shelley (Ariel) and the poet-figure lament tyranny in the form of an encroaching federal government, and bigotry in the form of Northerners' "intolerance" for slavery.²² Late in the poem Pike argues that it is not slavery that serves Bigotry, but the North's condemnation of slavery; that it is not the South but the North that threatens the union due to "Fanaticism" and "treason" on the part of Northern abolitionists. The poem invokes Shelley's opposition to tyranny and his love of liberty as shared knowledge, yet puts this figure of Shelley to work on behalf of chattel slavery, a cause the historical Shelley opposed. This is an extreme example that nonetheless points to the fact that Shelley had as many if not more unqualified admirers in the antebellum South as in the North.²³ While Americans from multiple regions read Shelley before the Civil War, their praise for him was qualified by their reservations about his religious and, to a lesser extent, political beliefs.²⁴

²¹ For instance, an 1896 *Poet-Lore* article comparing Shelley and Whitman highlights that "[t]hey were both, in their respective ways, revolters against the tyranny of ecclesiasticism and the State; both waged war against oppression of all kinds, and against the mastery of conventionality; both were protagonists of man, of democracy, and of liberty" (332)—and yet this article (a) is late in the century and (b) still stands out as anomalous for paying such explicit attention to Shelley's politics. See Isaac Hull Platt, "Shelley and Whitman: A Comparison and a Contrast," *Poet-Lore*, vol. VIII (1896): 332-342. See also Davis, *Ornamental Aesthetics*, 141-183. Davis's reading of Whitman's use of "honorific lighting" (144) and his "sense that literary form is part of lived experience" (156) suggests further overlaps between Whitman's and Shelley's poetics; however, her reading of Whitman also reveals a twenty-first century version of the nineteenth-century fantasy on display in Shelley's nineteenth-century American reception.

²² "Ariel," XXXIX, l. 3.

²³ In addition to Pike, Poe, Henry Timrod, Thomas Holly Chivers, Paul Hamilton Hayne, Edward Coote Pinkney, and Sidney Lanier have all been named as avid readers if not imitators of Shelley. See Power, "The South: Southern Shelleys; *The Southern Literary Messenger*" in *Shelley in America in the Nineteenth Century*, 87-98. Power helpfully identifies numerous Southern white male poets who loved Shelley. However, this correlation between Shelley and not just "the South" but a specific demographic in the slaveholding South is in need of more thorough, current, and nuanced analysis—an analysis it is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide, but that I hope future scholarship might remedy.

²⁴ From the evidence offered here, it might seem that Northern writers are preoccupied with Shelley's religious beliefs while Southern writers are engaging with his romantic landscapes and/or with warped versions of his political beliefs. I acknowledge this possibility but I make no such claim. The purpose of this paragraph is to acknowledge in broad strokes Shelley's initial US reception and the ways in which it touched on topics we might expect, such as his atheism and opposition to tyranny. More could be said on each of these topics, but my focus in this section is on how the languages of the body and of dazzling light emerge together in his US reception.

Few antebellum Americans made the argument that Shelley's ideas belonged in the United States. When, however, some did argue that the US was uniquely positioned to receive Shelley, they focused not on their new republic's political commitment to liberty but on their distance in time and space from Great Britain. America's geographical and historical distance, as well as their political and cultural difference from Great Britain became a way to imagine for Shelley an alternative destiny. Tuckerman, for instance, elects the US as a more objective audience for Shelley than Britain could ever be: "Whatever views his countrymen may entertain, there is a kind of *living posterity* in this young republic, who judge of genius by a calm study of its fruits, wholly uninfluenced by the distant murmur of local prejudice and party rage" (254, my emphasis). While national identity and national differences are clearly part of Tuckerman's claim, they are subsumed by a spatiotemporal distance which Tuckerman imagines as cleansing the aesthetic so that it might be viewed disinterestedly. In linking the US with a "living posterity," Tuckerman echoes Washington Irving's 1815 biographical sketch of Campbell in which Irving describes the United States's distance from Britain and its politics in terms of "posterity." The Atlantic, Irving had written, "rolls between us, like a space of time," freeing critical assessments from local bias.²⁵ Writings such as these invoke the United States as a place where authors could glimpse their literary afterlives.²⁶ The US thus serves as both the geographical destination and the metaphysical destiny of nineteenth-century British poetry in general—and of Shelley's poetry in particular.²⁷ This tendency was so strong that even Julia Power's *Shelley in America in the Nineteenth Century* (1940) opens by proclaiming: "Percy

²⁵ Irving, 233.

²⁶ McGill notes that British poets also often considered American readers and their responses as "something like a present-tense index of future fame" given the ways in which "this [transatlantic] field of reception was foreign, unpredictable, and fundamentally ungovernable" ("Introduction," *The Traffic in Poems*, 5).

²⁷ This language also evokes Shelley's *Defense*: "No living poet ever arrived at the fulness of his fame. The jury which sits in judgment upon a poet, belonging as he does to all time, must be composed of his peers: it must be impanelled by Time from the selectest of the wise of many generations."

Bysshe Shelley is so closely associated with America that it would seem as though his wandering spirit, ‘mingling with the elements’ for almost a century, had at last found a haven in a land where he is appreciated not by ‘the few’ but by the many” (1). While admitting to Shelley’s lack of interest in the US and documenting nineteenth-century US readers’ qualms about Shelley, the book nonetheless leads with the idea that it was Shelley’s destiny to come to the US.

US critical assessment of Shelley’s poems shifted over the course of the nineteenth century from a preoccupation with critiquing or apologizing for Shelley’s religious and political beliefs, to a preoccupation with the poems’ dazzling distance from a material and recognizable reality. This trend held true on both sides of the Atlantic, but with an important variation—one we can see by first distinguishing the US response from the British response, and then by showing how this US response gained prominence in the post-bellum period. One recent overview of Shelley’s nineteenth-century British reception begins as follows: “Often eclipsed by the glare of biography, critical writing on Shelley in the nineteenth century was polarized between views of his works as otherworldly and all too earthly.”²⁸ In the US context this polarization flattens into two sides of the same coin: while there are numerous comments in both countries concerning the otherworldly elements of Shelley’s work, in the US these comments beget complaints about Shelley’s *lack* of earthly connection (rather than resting alongside complaints of Shelley’s work being “too earthly”). Matthew Arnold’s well known, late century assessment of Shelley as a “beautiful and ineffectual angel beating in the void his luminous wings in vain,” haunts even receptive Shelley readers, and yet Arnold’s comments had been anticipated with a difference by earlier American Shelley readers as well.²⁹ Leading antebellum figures William Ellery Channing and Elizabeth Oakes Smith named as early as 1840 the

²⁸ Stabler, 657.

²⁹ Qtd in Power, 24, and dated 1881.

problems of Shelley's otherworldliness: Channing described Shelley as "a seraph gone astray," while Oakes Smith claimed he had a "satanic form" whose "vacillating footsteps" required redirection towards the angelic. "His muse never treads the earth," complained *The American Whig Review*, "except on her favorite stiltes, egotism and agitation" ("Characteristics of Shelley," 535). By the 1860s there were complaints that he had "fire and wings" but could not "stick to the earth," or (nearly identical) that "his muse has only wings and not feet. It could soar into ideal heights, but it could not walk on earth."³⁰ First as a seraph or a satanic creature, then as a more ambivalently luminous spirit, Shelley appears distant from human beings in these descriptions. Crucially, even as these American writers' assessments lose their moral tinge, they critique Shelley less for being "ineffective" than for being too distant from the earth to begin with.

Mid to late nineteenth-century assessments celebrate Shelley's splendid airiness. Yet even as more readers admired Shelley's dazzling, distant figures they lamented Shelley's lack of understanding of "real" life, and they expressed this lament in terms of Shelley's body. When reading Shelley, claimed *The American Whig Review*, "...the reader is always conscious of some primary defect, that vitiates the whole writing. Shelley never enters into the *sober sadness* of human life—into the *reality* of all that real persons do and feel" ("Characteristics," 536). Walt Whitman, responding to this article and as well as one in the *North British Review*, commented in a notebook that Shelley "[w]as not healthy, or rather not rudely so."³¹ While Whitman draws on both articles' comments about Shelley's "sickliness," being "healthy" is, for Whitman, an

³⁰ Channing, qtd. in Power, 50; Oakes Smith, as "Mrs. Seba Smith," qtd. in Power, 95, dated 1840; *Southern Literary Messenger* (Dec. 1846), qtd. in Power, 98; W. W. Story, *Conversations in a Studio* (publ. 1890; written 1830-1850), qtd. in Power, 52.

³¹ Whitman, Walt. *Notebooks and Unpublished Prose Manuscripts: Walt Whitman*, Vol. 5, ed. Edward F. Grier (NYU Press, 1984), p.1780. The manuscript does not appear to be dated. The articles are both from 1847, though there is also a clipping of "To a Sky-Lark" from the mid-1850s.

ideal highly charged with nationhood and the poet's ability to embody the nation.³² To describe Shelley as "not rudely" healthy suggests a lack of vigorous health, but also potentially a lack of common or rustic health that "Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs" would value. About twenty years later, in 1874 the respected essayist, poet, and professor George H. Calvert, in an overwhelmingly positive essay on Shelley, writes: "Shelley's incarnations lack the earthly element: he has too much nerve and not enough muscle. Hence in his "Prometheus Unbound," stamped as it is with greatness, the conception is not vividly accomplished. The Gods and Spirits and Impersonations that play around Prometheus have not enough red blood in their arteries" (134).³³ And an 1896 *Poet-Lore* article comparing Shelley to Whitman, stressed, "Shelley certainly 'walked upon the winds with lightness[, ' while] Whitman's feet were firmly planted upon the ground" (334). Shelley appears to these nineteenth-century American readers as more interested in an ethereal elsewhere than in a recognizable, shared reality. Unlike Shelley's reception in Great Britain, however, American readers have a tendency to highlight the language of the body — "nerve," "muscle," "feet," "red blood in [the] arteries" — in order to draw attention to this distance between Shelley's poems and themselves. Rather than further etherealize Shelley into "a shape all light," many US readers and writers entertained the idea of *materializing* Shelley, using an idea of corporeality to critique both Shelley and his poems.

US readers wanted to be not only dazzled, but to see that dazzle as connected to something real. William Hazlitt's 1824 review of Shelley's *Posthumous Poems* named a distance between Shelley and his readers due to Shelley's language, which Hazlitt described as a "glittering obscurity" (Barcus, 340-1). But this combination of visual splendor and

³² To take just one example: "You will hardly know who I am or what I mean, / But I shall be good health to you nevertheless, / And filter and fibre your blood" (*Leaves of Grass*, 1855, p.88).

³³ Calvert quotes a Shelley letter in support of his assessment: "As to real flesh and blood, you know that I do not deal in those articles," writes Shelley to Gisborne. "[Y]ou might as well go to a gin-shop for a leg of mutton as expect anything human or earthly from me" (qtd. in Calvert, 133). The quote is in reference to *Epipsychidion*.

inaccessibility—integral to Shelley’s poetics and reception—produced for US readers not just semantic confusion (which is Hazlitt’s emphasis) but as I have been suggesting ontological confusion as well. “Your elements were different, and apart— / The world’s and thine,” sigh-praises South Carolinian Henry Timrod’s spirit of Poesy to a Shelley-figure.³⁴ And in 1845, Hawthorne published a satirical short story, “P.’s Correspondence,” that trades on many of these assessments and fantasies concerning Shelley. Looking briefly at Hawthorne’s counterfactual story—in which Shelley is still alive in London—will usefully suggest some of the common knowledge Hawthorne assumed his readers shared concerning Shelley, while also expanding upon how US readers responded differently to Shelley’s “glittering obscurity” when they suggested that Shelley and his incarnations needed re-incarnating.

In Hawthorne’s story, a mentally insane character, P., writes to the narrator about his belief that he is living in England where he is able to observe or run into all the British writers we had “mistakenly” believed to be dead: Byron, Campbell, Scott, Keats, Burns, and, of course, Shelley. All of the romantic-era poets have not only not died, they have evolved into humorous commentaries on their former selves: Byron has gained weight and is censoring *Don Juan*, no longer recognizing quotes he has removed; Campbell is heading to Wyoming but seems “as unsubstantial as Hope.” In the world of Hawthorne’s story, P. reports that Shelley has “been reconciled to the Church of England” and is still writing poetry:

Without touching upon their religious merits, I consider the productions of his maturity superior, as poems, to those of his youth. They are warmer with human love, which has served as an interpreter between his mind and the multitude. The author has learned to dip his pen oftener into his heart, and has thereby avoided the faults into which a too exclusive use of fancy and intellect are wont to betray him. Formerly his page was often little other than a concrete arrangement of crystallizations, or even of icicles, as cold as they were brilliant. Now you take it to your heart, and are conscious of a heart-warmth responsive to your own. In his private character Shelley can hardly have grown more gentle, kind, and affectionate than his friends always represented him to be up to that

³⁴ Henry Timrod, “A Vision of Poesy” (1860).

disastrous night when he was drowned in the Mediterranean. Nonsense, again,—sheer nonsense! What am I babbling about? I was thinking of that old figment of his being lost in the Bay of Spezzia, and washed ashore near Via Reggio, and burned to ashes on a funeral pyre, with wine, and spices, and frankincense; while Byron stood on the beach and beheld a flame of marvellous beauty rise heavenward from the dead poet's heart, and that his fire-purified relics were finally buried near his child in Roman earth. If all this happened three-and-twenty years ago, how could I have met the drowned and burned and buried man here in London only yesterday?

Smuggled into Hawthorne's satire is a fair representation of this prevalent nineteenth-century feeling about Shelley: that "his page was often little other than a concrete arrangement of crystallizations, or even of icicles, as cold as they were brilliant." Further, even as Hawthorne's statement echoes Hazlitt's earlier "glittering obscurity," it does so in a way specific to Shelley's US reception: Hawthorne suggests that the cold brilliance of Shelley's poems exclude not just comprehension but "human love," thus framing "glittering obscurity" as an effect of Shelley's distance from fellow humans and his failure to "dip his pen into his heart." Emerson recorded a related note in his journal of 1842: "Elizabeth Hoar says that Shelley is like shining sand; it always looks attractive and valuable, but, try never so many times, you cannot get anything good. And yet the mica glitter remains after all."³⁵ And Tuckerman described Shelley's "glittering" images as the very opposite of the vivid: "In general, the scope of his poems is abstract, abounding in wonderful displays of fancy and allegorical invention. . . . This lack of personality and directness, prevents the poetry of Shelley from impressing the memory like that of Mrs. Hemans or Moore. His images pass before the mind like frost-work at moonlight, strangely beautiful, glittering and rare, but of transient duration, and dream-like interest."³⁶ Employing the language we've seen associated with vividness since Hume's *Treatise*, Tuckerman distinguishes the impressions Hemans and Moore are able to make on readers' memories from the "frost-work at moonlight" Shelley offers. Hawthorne, Emerson, Hoar, and

³⁵ Qtd. in Power, 23.

³⁶ *Rambles and Reveries*, 250.

Tuckerman agree both that Shelley can sparkle like something ethereal or of “dream-like interest,” and that he cannot—without being unburied, unburned, and undrowned—impress the mind (*physically* impress it) with his poems. Despite his images being strangely beautiful, Shelley’s ontological difference, US readers believed, prevented his descriptions from leaving their mark. In order to “take [Shelley] to your heart,” Shelley would need to be remade.

Vividness and the “lacquered viridian gloss” of Elinor Wylie’s *The Orphan Angel*

It was not until 1926 that an American writer managed to ground Shelley on the earth—and doing so involved not only imaginatively resurrecting him, as Hawthorne had done, but imaginatively relocating him to the early national United States. Wylie’s *The Orphan Angel* begins in Leghorn harbor, pulling Shelley from the sea, but unfolds primarily in the United States and Mexico—land that Shelley (renamed Shiloh) travels insistently by foot as if in response to his nineteenth-century critics. One twentieth-century critic, Stephen Vincent Benét, offers this rhapsodic description of what the reader will find in Wylie’s novel:

Here is a head-dress of eagle feathers taken from an Aricarax [sic.] chief and a volume of Condorcet, read by candle on a flatboat. Here is *The Missouri Intelligencer* and Tom O’Bedlam’s song. And here, in a frame that has the hard bronze of Latin within it as well as the silver, is the picture of a lost America and, wandering through it, two strange companions, a Yankee boy called David Butternut and another who walks as swiftly as the West wind. ...³⁷

This description usefully showcases the range of historical and cultural materials described, referenced, and quoted throughout Wylie’s novel. This diversity of historical objects and texts—an indigenous head-dress, a book of mathematics in French, a US print periodical, a British ballad—all mix together within the burnished frame. Repeating “Here is... Here is...” Benét suggests that the reader will see or behold these material and textual objects *as present by*

³⁷ Wylie, *Collected Prose*, 324.

reading the novel, and that the cumulative effect will be to see “the picture of a lost America.” Benét’s evident admiration for this mixing of historical materials and cultural productions echoes praise for what he earlier calls “that peculiar mixture of luminous beauty and wild earth” that makes up *The Orphan Angel*. “[L]ost America” emerges as integral to the narrative of this embodied spirit striding across it—but to focus only on recovery and geography overlooks the metaphysical extravagance of resurrection at the novel’s core. In Wylie’s novel, Shelley’s radical transformation from dead to alive, his translation from the ethereal to the material, gets packaged as a transatlantic crossing from Europe to the United States.³⁸

The Orphan Angel’s reception in the late 1920s and 1930s divides sharply over whether Wylie’s attention to historical and biographical detail contribute to the novel’s aesthetic success, or to the novel’s aesthetic failure—about whether we should care primarily about the match between history and fiction, or between poet and place. Wylie’s love of Shelley was well known, and her two previous novels had established her willingness to delve into historical, detail-oriented research. For many, Wylie’s penchant for historical research was central to the novel’s success: “Elinor Wylie knows her Shelley sources to the last detail—the freckles, the paper boats, the ‘well-peppered mutton chop,’ even the name Shiloh that Byron used,” writes *The Sewanee Review*. “Her America of 1822 is vividly and, on the whole, convincingly pictured” (367). Her friend Carl Van Doren likewise praises her attention to historical details, and seems to enter into the counterfactual premise of Wylie’s novel in his descriptions of her project: “To write this book would be almost to have Shelley for a visitor and to show him America, which

³⁸ For 1890s historical romances of “lost America,” see Amy Kaplan, “Romancing the Empire,” 92-120, *The Anarchy of Empire* (2002). Most relevant to this chapter is Kaplan’s attention to how many of these romances rely on “the medium of the white male body” (94) to “delineate[] national power that is simultaneously disembodied from territorial boundaries and embodied in the American man” (97). Wylie’s novel departs from the templates Kaplan helpfully describes, most obviously by having a British man and the United States seem to embody one another.

Elinor Wylie loved” for “[t]here were no pains to which she would not go to be accurate. After all, she was setting the stage and preparing her house for Shelley” (361-2; 362). Van Doran treats historical documents, and Wylie’s use of them, as transparent, as offering unmediated access to a historical reality. The one qualifier (“almost”) in his assessment gets lost amid the sense of presence (“to have Shelley for a visitor and to show him America”) and personal knowledge (“which Elinor Wylie loved”) which dominate. Benét reiterates this belief that the novel offers unmediated access to the past when he describes Shiloh’s cross-country route:

[T]he whole journey of Shiloh and David, across the continent, from Boston to San Diego, may seem to the reader, at times, like a fantastic fairy tale. But every stage of that journey could be plotted on a map of the period—and each stage would be right and probable, down to the number of days it took to traverse it and the means of locomotion used. The transmutation of the material is magic; but the little details of food and drink and gear that make a past live again were sought for and gathered from a hundred sources by a mind that seemed to know by instinct where its necessary victual lay. (CP 323)

For Benét, Wylie’s novel is successful not because it makes the fantastic (Shelley resurrected and walking across the US) seem real, but because it makes the historical (days and means of travel, “little details of food and drink and gear”) seem alive. Forgetting or ignoring that Shiloh’s journey *is* “a fantastic fairy tale,” and that Wylie herself had described it as an allegory whose “story is possible, but frankly improbable and strange,” Benét focuses instead on the journey itself as being “right and probable.”³⁹ For him it is the journey’s probability that should amaze us, not the improbable resurrection of a poet. Benét’s and other readers’ praise for *The Orphan Angel* suggests an extreme case of imaginative investment in a “seeming *factuality*”: for them Wylie’s use of historical maps and details seems not just to make probable but to displace the utter counterfactual on which the novel rests.⁴⁰ To have included material sustenance and a

³⁹ Wylie, “Symbols in Literature, in *Collected Prose*, 878.

⁴⁰ The phrase comes from Catherine Gallagher, “When Did the Confederate States of America Free the Slaves?” (2007). Gallagher names statistics “the most attractive innovation in recent counterfactual histories,” for statistics “lend the enterprise [of alternative history] such solidity, indeed, such seeming *factuality*,” they allow the alternative

mappable route without dampening her literary “magic” seem to testify for Benét, and for other readers as well to Wylie’s aesthetic achievements.

Yet to other readers Wylie’s novel floundered with its strange mash up of revived romantic poet and “actual” American cities, rivers, and forests. Harriet Monroe, otherwise a fan of Wylie’s, and E. O. Wilson, a friend, both refused to read the novel. The *Los Angeles Times* asserted, “One feels that Miss Wylie is much more at home in an earlier century,” that “every sentence of Miss Wylie’s seems to require a rich interior; its flavor is lost amid the acrid leaf smoke of the frontier” (C32), while the *New York Times* went further, declaring: “The documentation is superb; every detail of the characterization is defensible; yet the undertaking for which she shaped her life is a failure. The artifice is too patent, the machinery too chance, the very documentation too exact at the expense of lifelikeness. Shelley in the flesh is as ultimately ridiculous as Rosalba in porcelain” (BR5). Referencing Wylie’s *The Venetian Glass Nephew* (1925), in which a living woman is transformed into porcelain so she can protect her relationship with a man made of glass, the *Times* suggests that “Shelley in the flesh” is a comparable metamorphosis or ontological transformation—a transformation that many nineteenth-century readers longed to imagine for Shelley. These criticisms extend from the novel to its novelist, focusing as much on *Wylie’s* supposed being as nineteenth-century critics had focused on Shelley’s. Having established herself through novels set in eighteenth-century England, Persia, and Italy, Wylie herself—as well as her prose style—seems to these reviewers more appropriate

to “seem just as, if not more, probable than the actuality” (“When Did,” 57; 58). Gallagher is describing how allohistories about the US Civil War rely on statistics not only to show that a counterfactual history was probable but also to weaken actual history’s privileged relationship to the truth (59). Gallagher is ultimately interested in why and how counterfactual histories seem able to deliver large scale truths, while Wylie’s technique in her alternative-history novel seems by contrast aimed at continually renewing belief in Shelley’s rematerialized existence rather than at persuading us that the counterfactual “nub” of saving Shelley in the Gulf of Spezzia was just as probable as Shelley drowning. Gallagher is discussing alternative histories, not alternative-history novels, a distinction she emphasizes in “What Would Napoleon Do?: Historical, Fictional, and Counterfactual Characters,” 322. I quote her insight about the role of statistics in lending a semblance of factuality to an alternative history because it helps highlight what is so strange about Benét’s and Van Doran’s descriptions of *The Orphan Angel*.

for a drawing room filled with porcelain, jewels, and brocade, and inappropriate for the various early national U.S. settings she describes. Even Van Doren acknowledges that Wylie's "natural home was in the cities on either side of the great Atlantic lake, not in the shaggy wilderness" (Elinor Wylie, 609). Her aesthetic as well as her chosen geographical locations are understood to reveal something about *her*: Wylie writing the US "frontier" seemed as ridiculous—not as inaccurate, but as incompatible—as Shelley in the flesh. While some readers felt transported by *The Orphan Angel* to an earlier time and place, other readers perceived an insurmountable distance between the poet (whether Wylie or Shelley) and place (the early national US).

The combination of praise for accuracy and research regarding Shelley and the historical US, and censure for misalignment between Wylie, Shelley, and the novel's setting, draws attention to Wylie's use of Shelley and the US to vivify each other. *The Orphan Angel* describes and displays an extensive range of early national United States and North American landscapes. Although Shiloh and David arrive in Boston and, had Wylie chosen, could have remained in New England, traveling into David's (and Wylie's) well-known Maine, Wylie's novel commits to the quest narrative mapped across the expansiveness and diversity of the US and North American landscape. Shiloh and David head from Atlantic coast to Pacific coast by way of Mid-Atlantic, Southern, and Midwestern states, as well as southern and southwestern territories, and along the way Wylie's prose registers changes in light, climate, color, scent, vegetation, and season. Wylie does not just imagine Shelley arriving in the US, an ethereal figure against a realistic backdrop. She imagines him covering as much of the nation and its neighboring territories as possible, making the US landscape an unavoidable if varied and variegated character with which Shiloh interacts. And just as Wylie's US seems more than a place, almost a person, so does Wylie's Shelley seem more than a person, almost a place. Nowhere is this better

seen than in the absence of “Shelley” in the text: although the novel flaunts references to Shelley’s biography and poetry, readers and reviewers understood the man pulled from the sea to be Shelley, and some characters recognize the poet within the novel, the name “Shelley” never appears. Shelley being Shelley is an open secret, for despite all the references to Shelley’s life and writing he is rechristened “Shiloh.” As we have seen, the name can be found in Shelley’s biography (“Byron called me Shiloh before he called me the Snake,” remarks Shiloh (14)), yet Wylie riffs on all the things Shiloh might reference: Byron’s nickname, the Messiah, a Biblical city. For early twentieth-century American readers, it most certainly carried connotations of the horrific Civil War battle as well. Within the novel, Shiloh himself “retain[s] a strong impression that Shiloh is a place rather than a person” (14). This blurring of place and person in the story is echoed in reviews of the novel, which sometimes see Shelley as a pretext to describe the historical United States, and other times see the U.S. as a pretext for reimagining Shelley. And the novel concludes with Shiloh (place of peace) ending up with a place (the Pacific (peaceful) Ocean) rather than with the idealized Silver. In Wylie’s mapping of Shelley’s quest-poems across the early national US, the romance of the “soul within my soul” expands from lover and beloved to include person and place.⁴¹

In Wylie’s novel, realizing Shelley involves not just placing Shelley in the US but Shelley-izing the place, a feat Wylie accomplishes by renaming Shelley as part of the landscape and by infusing her landscape descriptions with heightened, patently unrealistic qualities. Her historical geography cannot realize this luminous being without the newly realized being etherealizing that geography. Gallagher’s formulation for the relationship between historical persons and their alternate histories is helpful here: “there is a difference,” Gallagher explains,

⁴¹ Wylie may take her cue from Shelley, whose *Epipsychidion* not only seeks “this soul out of my soul” in human form, but also describes sensing “a soul within the soul” when describing the island in the Aegean (ll.453-456).

“between one’s history ... and one’s being,” with the alternate history “represent[ing] the essence of the man better than the actual version.” If *The Orphan Angel* suggests that Shelley’s being is most at home in the US, it also suggests that the US is most itself when it has Shelley.⁴² Critical praise for Wylie’s accuracy curiously overlooks her descriptions of states and territories, descriptions which abandon historical details of johnnycakes and the number of miles to St. Louis in favor of the heightened discourse of glitter and gems. Paying close attention to Wylie’s descriptions shows that regional specificity quickly surges into the high and conspicuously literary: “mustard-seeds” give way to “crystal flakes” or “amber motes;” northern thickets are “ambrosial with blackberries” (51) and “[t]he land flowed with milk and melted butter and honey in the comb” (54). In describing Shiloh’s and David’s trek through Virginia, we see not historical Virginia but a scene of exaggerated luxury that Wylie nonetheless wants us to consider “real”:

The ashen-coloured peaks above them were covered with a profusion of azalea and rhododendron bushes, intermixed with the lacquered viridian gloss of cedar and hemlock, and the coppery luxuriance of oak and beech. A variety of mosses and creeping plants carpeted the ground with woven leaves, and fruits of blue and crimson dangling from the wild vine and the brier rose were lovelier than flowers. Below, the clear waters of the Monongahela, fringed by romantic piles of rock, mirrored a golden picture of the scene. (55)

The prose nearly bursts with texture and color. We move from the pale “ashen-coloured peaks” and muted green of “viridian” to the intensity of “blue and crimson,” from copper to gold, all the while being reminded that the landscape is “covered,” “intermixed,” “carpeted,” “woven,” and “fringed.” The scene replicates itself by concluding with a description of the Monongahela, “fringed by romantic piles of rock, mirror[ing] a golden picture of the scene.” The Monongahela is framed (“fringed”) by aestheticized rock (“romantic piles”), yet also serves to frame by mirroring the scene we’ve just read. What’s more, it doesn’t simply mirror (as in reflect or

⁴² Gallagher, “What Would Napoleon Do?”, 328; 325. Again, Gallagher is technically discussing alternate histories (which she defines as including only historical personae) as opposed to alternate-history novels.

double) the scene, it burnishes it, offering a “golden picture” of the variegated scene. Like Shelley’s philosophical description of love, this river serves as “a mirror whose surface reflects only the forms of purity and brightness” (“On Love,” 504). The scene within the scene shines brighter, drawing attention to unfaithful mimesis at work in the novel at large. While it is true that azalea and rhododendron, cedar and hemlock, oak and beech, creeping plants and brier roses can all be found in (West) Virginia, as can mountains and the Monongahela, it is not the particular natural history or accuracy that vivifies the scene; rather, it is the exaggerated, burnished glow. What’s “vivid” in the scene is the language of brightness materialized. In the midst of an historically accurate route, Wylie draws attention to the artifice of her descriptions, as if both discovering a lacquered gloss in the landscape and coating the natural scene in exaggerated loveliness. She does so not to undermine the force of her narrative, but to represent a more capacious “real.” Whether or not the reader can see the scene, let alone Virginia, such descriptions suggest a relationship between the sparkling landscape and the luminous Shiloh. While Wylie suggests a stark contrast between Davy’s earthiness and Shiloh’s “luminous beauty,” she suggests a mutual dazzle-factor between the revived Shelley and the recovered “lost America.” This relationship between Wylie’s landscape descriptions and Shiloh suggest that this otherworldly poet and the aesthetic he embodies have a place in the United States.

Wylie’s insistence that such burnished descriptions might rest alongside geographically accurate routes, that the luminous poet might walk on the earth without losing his luminosity, reveals her desire to do more than acquire knowledge about Shelley. Rather, she desires a sense of involvement with him and his work. Benét notes Wylie “knew them [the details of Shelley’s life], not as one knows a lesson, but as one remembers a past. She would talk of them as casually as of a personal reminiscence” (CP 323). From Benét’s perspective, Wylie is not just

knowledgeable about Shelley: his life has impressed itself upon her memory so that she might draw on it as casually as something she herself had experienced. Benét can offer this assessment because Wylie herself encouraged it. Wylie presents her sense of involvement with Shelley as beginning through her reading of Shelley's "To a Sky-Lark" and, even more powerfully, through Trelawny's representation of Shelley. Here is her description of her own past scene of reading:

It was September in Washington and the air was warm and sweet as if all the grapes and peaches of Maryland and Virginia had flavored it to my taste. I stood before the smallest bookcase in the library, and from its shelves I drew Trelawny's "Recollections." The window was wide open; there was plenty of light and soft autumnal wind in the room. I did not move except to turn the pages. Even the black leather chair was too far away from the scene within the covers of the book. I stood quite still and turned the pages, and the curtains blew in at the window and a few golden leaves blew in between them.

So I read for the first time of Shelley's death and burial. I can remember what I felt in that moment of past time, but never what I thought. It is therefore impossible to tell of it except to draw the picture of the room full of light and softer air and of the child standing in the center of the room and turning the pages of the book, afraid to move, afraid to cry for fear the scene within the pages of the book might be hidden from her eyes, wondering and wondering why the bright creature who had lived within that scene should have died and fallen into dust no stronger than the golden leaves blowing in at the window.⁴³

In many ways Wylie's self-portrait as a reader of Shelley is instantly recognizable. It hearkens back to portraits of Gertrude reading Shakespeare in Wyoming: a representation of a reader utterly absorbed. But Wylie's self-portrait offers a Shelley-inflected variation, making explicit something that had only been suggested by Campbell and the various visual artists imagining the Wyoming reading grotto, or glimpsed in Egla's grove of acacias and "Song." Though the figure of Wylie is adamantly immobilized and isolated, transported elsewhere so that "[e]ven the black leather chair was too far away" from the scene of which she reads, the scene around her nonetheless appears to participate in her reading experience. Although Wylie describes reading "for the first time of Shelley's death and burial," her presentation of the scene enacts the repetition "first" implies: we are twice shown the light, the wind, the reader, the turning pages,

⁴³ Wylie, *Collected Prose*, 845.

and the moving leaves. Even as Wylie laments and remembers lamenting the loss of the “bright creature who had lived,” the repeated movement of the golden leaves enacts Shelley’s “Ode to the West Wind,” the golden leaves blowing in through the window as if out of and in response to the moving leaves (pages) of the book. Reading of Shelley’s death seems to bring the bright creature to life. It is not only Wylie who is presented as “involved” with her reading of Shelley’s life, but Shelley’s poems seem to come to life and involve themselves—as if they could touch the reader—in this American scene.

How and why might one conceive of the distance as undone: between actual and imagined, nineteenth century and twentieth century, scene of reading and scene read? As opposed to being asked to “think about where we are reading from, and where we go when we read” as separate places or states of being, why might someone want to see those two places and states of being as intimately connected?⁴⁴ Wylie’s novel, understood as responding to nineteenth-century US critics’ complaints about an unbridgeable distance between Shelley’s ethereal texts and even more ethereal being, and readers’ “real world” existences, thinks through the problem of ontological distance in geographical terms. Similar to the ways in which Irving and Tuckerman had invoked the US as a material afterlife for British poetry, Wylie first introduces her novel’s central preoccupation with thinking ontology in terms of geography through a description of Shiloh crossing the Atlantic Ocean. A scene that narrates the actions of covering and perceiving distance, it also insists on a sense of contact or felt connection:

The violet sky, withdrawn as it darkened, was pierced now by innumerable stars, its purity of colour holding an even intenser purity of light, so that the luminous distance trembled like water, and was no more stable than the sea; yet in the moving, wavering brightness was composure, and the clear dignity of peace. This brightness and tranquillity fell from the air like dew, and echoed in the absence of any sound, to lie cool and musical upon Shiloh’s spirit. (32)

⁴⁴ Freedgood, “Fictional Settlements,” 400.

Wylie's description of the distance between the water and the sky as a "luminous distance" shifts from illuminating distance qua distance to presenting that same distance as bridgeable. By comparing "brightness" to "dew," a distant phenomenon gets reconceptualized as touching Shiloh. A figure for aesthetic intensity, this "brightness" seems first to belong to another world and then to get materialized into Shiloh's world.⁴⁵ A further instance of the Shelley lovers' tendency "not only to describe relating to Shelley in terms of such visual phenomena [as the effect of light] but also ... to describe such visual phenomena as being like the experience of relating to Shelley"—Wylie's "luminous distance" also inverts the tendency of British Shelley lovers to see this bright visual phenomena as leading from the material to the ethereal, instead presenting it as a bridge from the ethereal to the material.⁴⁶ Like Wylie's own longing to make contact with Shelley, this "luminous distance" marks both nineteenth-century US readers' problems with reading Shelley and the desire to overcome them. Transmuting Shelley into Shiloh—a place as well as a person—and having him trek to and across the early national US—a poem or person as well as a place—allows Wylie to imagine both an American reality that might include the heightened states produced by reading Shelley, and Shelley and the aesthetic as luminously involved with her world.

The Poetics of Being Involved: Shelley's Threads of Light

Wylie's description of the stars piercing the Atlantic sky, and of star-light becoming more markedly material so that it seems to physically touch Shiloh, shows how carefully Wylie had read Shelley's poems. For Shelley, too, is prone to describing gleams and light that "pierce" a

⁴⁵ Wylie echoes Thomas Nashe, "A Litany in Time of Plague" (published 1600): "Beauty is but a flower / Which wrinkles will devour; / Brightness falls from the air; / Queens have died young and fair; / Dust hath closed Helen's eye. / I am sick, I must die. / Lord, have mercy on us" (ll.15-21). Where Nashe's use of "[b]rightness falls from the air" emphasizes the stanza's litany on the fleetingness of beauty, so that brightness disappears, Wylie's use of the phrase materializes "brightness" so that something falls physically from the air, helping Shiloh to feel alive again.

⁴⁶ Pinch, "A Shape All Light," para. 126.

vast distance. What's more, Shelley's "piercings" facilitate not just contact but close connection across ontological distances. As we saw in the first section of this chapter, moonlight, starlight, even the color of the sky are not viewed as at a distance; instead these distant qualities pierce the tracery and become grounded, "[w]orking mosaic on [the] Parian floors." Ione provides another example of such piercing when, in the final act of *Prometheus Unbound*, she describes the music of the world as ceaseless yet ever-changing, able to "pierce the sense" like stars "pierce ... [the] air":

Listen too,
How every pause is filled with under-notes,
Clear, silver, icy, keen, awakening tones
Which pierce the sense and live within the soul
As the sharp stars pierce Winter's chrystal air
And gaze upon themselves within the sea.⁴⁷

Music here pierces the sense and replicates itself within the sensate being, filling a spatialized silence, just as, Shelley suggests, we might think of stars piercing a materialized, glittering air in order to see themselves in—to see themselves as part of—the sea's reflecting surface. The tenor and vehicle seem to slide into one another, but we might also notice that both tenor and vehicle describe something distant (music, stars) as relocating *within* a different entity (the soul, the sea). Because "Winter's chrystal air" emphasizes the implicit materiality of a "sense" that is able to be "pierced," we might think of the verb "to pierce" in terms of puncturing—but this is also a scene of radical wholeness: "every pause is *filled* with under-notes," much like the Moon-light, star atoms, and sky fragments materially patched the gaps between vines and stones in *Epipsychidion*'s pleasure-dome. Shelley's images of piercing figure not punctures but alternative fullness. Potential points of disconnection—a pause, a gap—are refigured and woven into a new kind of connection.

⁴⁷ 11.188-193.

We have seen how Shelley's descriptions of landscapes—in particular descriptions of distant and exotic landscapes—stand in for absent or difficult human connections. I wish now to push this further by claiming that Shelley's descriptions of interwoven bowers, materialized light, and uninterrupted songs serve as figures for desired connection between the world on the page and the world of its readers. They represent a desire to see the aesthetic as already interfused with our existence. Scholars of romantic-era aesthetics and of poetics have demonstrated that descriptions of what might seem pejoratively aesthetic or like “mere appearance” can offer significant insight into conceptions both historical and presentist of social, anti-social, and negative-social relations. Terada illuminates how, after Kant, attending to glittering ephemera might be understood as an anti-aesthetics that registers dissatisfaction with “the given” by investing in unshareable phenomena. We can see that Shelley's use of visual splendor in his geographical descriptions, by contrast, registers a desire for the aesthetic to be recognized as itself already sharing in our existence. Other scholars have tried to rethink the kinds of sociality enabled by the aesthetic. Daniel Tiffany proposes a “negative sociability” made possible through “lyric obscurity,” while Morton argues that Shelley's poetics in particular (and poetry in general) might help us think causality and intervene in the world. Tiffany offers a way of understanding obscurity not as something to be overcome in order to make meaning or forge communities, but as the very ground on and through which communities of “the most tenuous sorts of external relations,” of linguistic social being, are formed. Expanding upon Leibniz and theorizing a “lyric monadology,” his inclusion of readers of the same text as a paradigm for this “negative sociability” suggests how this desire for interfusion between aesthetic and “real” worlds might be conceptualized. Morton, meanwhile, tries to move us *away* from materialism and towards the “weird realism” of an object-oriented ontology. Arguing in his own “Defense of

Poetry” that causality is aesthetic, he provocatively claims, “To write poetry is to perform a nonviolent political act, to coexist with other beings,” especially non-human beings. My contribution here resides in resisting the transhistorical abstraction of “Poetry” that both Tiffany and Morton employ, and in situating Shelley’s early nineteenth-century poetics of exotic landscape description as well as his nineteenth-century US reception in relation to the historical aesthetic category of the vivid. Rather than make a claim for an ontology of poetry, I am interested in how and why Shelley’s descriptions of distant places—particularly his figures of materialized light and woven vines—become sites themselves for ontological questions, and how and why this association gets taken up and revealed through Shelley’s nineteenth-century US reception. Whether or not a poem *can* intervene in the world, Shelley’s poetics of landscapes description represent *the desire* to feel the aesthetic as intertwined with a reality it also transforms, a desire we have already traced through Shelley’s US reception and which we are investigating in Shelley’s poems.⁴⁸

Shelley represents this desire through figures of involvement—a state of being in which connection occurs even with the ontologically distant, prompting a material transformation. Being involved can be synonymous with being absorbed, seemingly sealed off to everything else in the external environment, as the night in *Alastor* “[i]nvolved and swallowed up the vision.” Yet, in the context of Shelley’s penchant for “woven” spaces made by interfusing, mixing, piercing, and weaving diverse materials, being involved suggests a connection with and between different yet simultaneously present ontologies. This is perhaps nowhere better seen than in

⁴⁸ For Terada, see especially the Pretext and Chapter 1 (Coleridge Among the Spectra). For Tiffany, 2; 12; and Chapter 4 (Lyric Monadologies). Tiffany’s argument begins prior to—and extends beyond—the romantic period. For him, obscurity *is* the ontology of poetry. However, his use of Leibniz and his demonstration of German romantic poets’ interest in Leibniz’s monads (p.101) suggests that a concept like “monadology” may have been in circulation within communities of romantic-era writers, *and* creates an opening for thinking about a more historically-specific version of this concept, such as “involvement.” For Morton, see “An Object-Oriented Defense of Poetry,” 207; 222. For an argument that ornamental aesthetics, both within poems and through poems, serve as a way of bringing individual human minds into relation with the world, see Theo Davis, *Ornamental Aesthetics* (2016).

Alastor, where “The meeting boughs and implicated leaves / Wove twilight o’er the Poet’s path,” and, just a few lines later, “the woven leaves / Make net-work of the dark blue light of day, / And the night’s noontide clearness, mutable / As shapes in the weird clouds.”⁴⁹ Though both descriptions can be understood as describing leaves as interwoven and “implicated” (in what, if not existence?), and light “peep[ing]” through their gaps, both descriptions confuse what is woven with what is glimpsed through a woven medium. (Are the woven leaves dividing up the light so that we see it as if through a net, or are the woven leaves in turn making a net out of light?) Recent scholarship on nineteenth-century fictionality, focused primarily on the novel, has argued that novelists and critics of the period understood the “ontological indifference” that readers experienced as pleasurable absorption, to be possible *only* when readers “knowingly” enter into a willed *and temporary* state of belief: “[d]etaching incredulity from the guarded wariness that normally accompanies it, one could use it as a protective enclosure that would cordon off imaginary yielding from any dangerous consequences.”⁵⁰ This formulation helps show what is so intriguing about Shelley’s figures of involvement in his poems: these figures suggest that “ontological indifference” need not be a temporary escape from a world of consequences, but a state to notice and to cultivate so as to effect desired consequences in the world. Like the spheres within the Sphere in Panthea’s vision at the end of *Prometheus*, which act upon and respond to one another with mutuality, the experience of the aesthetic and the world of sensory impressions are here asserted to be “involving and involved” with one another.

Noticing this helps us see how being involved can just as easily mean being connected as being cocooned. (When Hazlitt uses “involved” as part of his critique of the “glittering obscurity” of Shelley’s language, he suggests just such a connection between being drawn in and

⁴⁹ ll.425-426; 444-447.

⁵⁰ Gallagher, “The Rise of Fictionality,” 348-49; 347.

being kept out from Shelley's verse.⁵¹) Shelley offers numerous figures for aesthetic engagement that are "involved" in the sense of connection. As the Poet in *Alastor* quests in his shallop, he passes a series of figures of involvement: first a cluster of narcissi and then a deep well or reflecting pool, both of which are curiously connected to the scene they supposedly block out.

Where the embowering trees recede, and leave
A little space of green expanse, the cove
Is closed by meeting banks, whose yellow flowers
For ever gaze on their own drooping eyes,
Reflected in the crystal calm. The wave
Of the boat's motion marred their pensive task,
Which nought but vagrant bird, or wanton wind,
Or falling spear-grass, or their own decay
Had e'er disturbed before.

What interests me in this passage is the list of things that mar and have "marred [the flowers'] pensive task." Despite the language of "nought but," which suggests a singular disruption, "nought but" initiates a list that connects the boat's motion with a vagrant bird, a wanton wind, a falling spear-grass, and the flowers' own decay. While the boat, bird, wind, and grass all appear random or accidental, and the flowers' decay is inevitable, this list suggests that there are quite a number of ways in which the flowers cannot "For ever gaze on their own drooping eyes"—or at least cannot *only* gaze, cannot be understood to perform *mere* gazing. Emblems of self-absorption, they and their gazing are nonetheless involved with the scene around them. Just a few lines after this description of the narcissi, Shelley revisits this notion of "being involved" when he describes a dark well that "Images all the woven boughs above." Despite a declaration that "Nor aught else in the liquid mirror laves / Its portraiture," the dark well also images a star, a bird, an insect. Once again we read of a thwarted impulse to seal off the well, as other parts of the scene actively "lave[/ Their] portraiture" in it, as if making contact, having the well respond

⁵¹ "We give the description of the progress of the 'Witch's' boat as a slight specimen of what we have said of Mr Shelley's involved style and imagery." *Edinburgh Review*, July 1824, rpt. in Barcus, ed., 342.

to and encompass unanticipated participants. Like cosmic light woven into vines, these gazers are closely connected to their world. These seemingly straightforward figures for absorption are better understood as complex figures for involvement.

Understanding Shelley's descriptions in this way helps us see that his quest poems dramatize more than biography or even mythopoesis: they allegorize a reader's, a gazer's, a listener's desire to merge with the work of art holding their attention, *and* to see the work of art as woven into their lives.⁵² Like the verbal self-portrait of Wylie reading as a child—in which Shelley's figurative leaves, actual and aestheticized golden leaves, and the pages (leaves) of a book swirl around and create a simultaneously permeable and sealed-off space—so too Shelley in his poems explores the interfusion of materials and beings in order to represent a desired transformation or imagined existence (what might be) as already existing (what is). Unlike Wylie, Shelley actively desires that transformation to matter socially and politically as well. In Shelley's exotic descriptions of interwoven plants and materialized light, we encounter less a representation of a "real" place than a new way of understanding ontology. Representing patently aesthetic qualities as already composing an existing place allows Shelley to bypass the binary of real and ideal, much as he wishes to undo the binary of external object and idea. The "real" world of impressions is not given ontological priority.⁵³ Shelley's descriptions represent neither "the real world" nor pure fantasy: they represent a reality composed of the bright stuff of ideality. The desire that nineteenth-century American readers claimed to feel when reading Shelley, the desire to bring the ethereal spirit down to earth, was a desire Shelley himself

⁵² See Swann, n. pag, for a reading of Shelley's figures of absorption (and the Shelley circle's representations of Shelley as an absorbed figure) as representing a desire for the aesthetic's *distance* from the human.

⁵³ Since Morton makes a similar claim for Object-Oriented Ontology, it makes sense that Shelley would be his chosen writer to argue the relevance of OOO to literary studies. See Morton, "An Object-Oriented Defense," 209.

represented through a poetics of pierced distances and woven light: the desire to see our brightest and most distant, future-oriented imaginings as already fused with our daily lives.

The Figure of Silver: Ontological Distance and the Quest for Vividness

When Bayard Taylor addressed Richard Henry Stoddard in a mid-nineteenth-century sonnet about their past dreams of becoming like Shelley and Keats, he describes their shared susceptibility to “silver words.” When Emily Dickinson wrote of “Split[ting] the Lark” (a poem Virginia Jackson reads convincingly as a parody of Shelley), she describes the “Music” inside as “Bulb after Bulb, in Silver rolled.” Recently, Morton singles out “silver music” as an example of Shelley’s “dizzying spiral of hyperreal language, in which we begin not to be able to tell which level is the ground” (“Introduction,” 9-10). Clearly a word with resonances beyond Shelley, “silver” is nonetheless a word that readers of Shelley associated and continue to associate with him. Indeed, silver is a privileged term and concept for Shelley, Shelley’s nineteenth-century readers, and Wylie. *The Orphan Angel* even personifies Silver and gives her a starring role, as observed in this critical commentary: “The pilgrimage in search of Jasper Cross’s sister across the America of the Eighteen-Twenties is the twisted silver plait that holds the book together. On this are strung the bright and diverse beads of adventure and incident.”⁵⁴ Replacing “Jasper Cross’s sister” with its co-referring proper noun, we could say that the pilgrimage in search of Silver is the twisted silver plait that holds the book together. As this phrasing indicates, it is not just the location but the ontology of silver that is deeply ambiguous. How can the search for Silver be unified by silver?

The ontological mutability of “silver” makes it integral to not only the novel’s plot, but to the novel’s investigation of ontology. Wylie’s novel may be structured by the quest for Silver,

⁵⁴ Benet in Wylie, *Collected Prose*, 323.

but we also see silver throughout the novel's local incidents and objects: Shiloh describes viewing Silver's portrait as feeling like drinking "a silver cup of cold water;" Melissa "shivered like a silver leaf;" the sun in Indiana "shone warm and yellow under the lonely silver of the sky;" Shiloh and Davy cross Silver Creek; they drink from a "blue-and-white Canton jar with a dull silver top;" Shiloh imagines his skin "green and silvery as a fish's;" Anne dresses Shiloh with "silver bracelets upon his arms;" and Shiloh's hair sprouts "a pale miraculous plume of pure silver." Silver exists in descriptive abundance even as the question of Silver's existence (and the audacity of Shelley's renewed existence) drives *The Orphan Angel*. Wittgenstein, writing about the problems of using color words in general, identifies the names of metals as a particularly extreme problem: "We speak of the 'colour of gold' and do not mean yellow. 'Gold-coloured' is the property of a surface that shines or glitters" (73). When we use a metal name as a color, he suggests, we draw attention to the fact that we're describing an effect, the property of a surface that may or may not be separable from the surface itself. An effect as well as source, an impression and a material that impresses, "silver" indicates a brightness that could be a modifier, a noun, a verb, or all of the above. The novel's silver plait shows itself, sometimes in an object (like the dull silver top), sometimes in an impression (the "silvery diluted sunlight" in Vincennes), sometimes in a figure (the silver cup in Shiloh's simile), before we encounter its personification in Silver Cross.⁵⁵

As I have argued, the novel—learning from Shelley's poetics of exotic landscape description—transposes questions of ontology into problems of geography, as if Silver's existence is only in question because Silver has gone to California. But even within the novel, we can see that the literal distance between point x and point y stands in for a more philosophical question about where, when, and how to reach this personification, this figure, that Shiloh and

⁵⁵ Silver references can be found on pages 48, 61, 197, 202, 205, 210, 269, 303, and 205, respectively.

Davy are seeking. In St. Louis, upon learning that Silver has moved to California, Shiloh has a vision: “The figure of Silver was once more remote and tiny at the end of a long road; it shone minute and brilliant as some sacred doll in a niche above a vast cathedral nave, among a multitude of candle flames” (186, pb). Later, as Shiloh reflects on his past relationships with women and anticipates his future with Silver, he returns to and revises this image: “This seventh lady was far away, but not in the tragical past; she was set in a niche of the future. Like a saintly doll she glittered in a niche of stars, and yet she was the little figure of the fairy-tale, with ashes in her silver-golden hair and tears in the moth-wing darkness of her eyes” (195). In both of these visions, Silver rests at a distance, a glittering figure surrounded by a void. As Shiloh continues to think of her, and even as he moves closer to her, she appears to zoom farther away, from the measurable distance of a road to the vastness of the cosmos, from an architectural to a temporal niche. Even the attempt to bring her back to earth results in re-figuring her as Cinderella, so that she continues glowing despite the figurative ashes. As an aesthetic ideal personified, Silver rests at a distance, glittering in the niche of the future while, at the same time, silver sparkles in the present, already close at hand in the aestheticized landscape.

These different degrees of distance and closeness to Silver—or sense of distance and closeness prompted by the figure of silver—have as their source Shelley’s own privileging of the word. And silver appeals to Shelley precisely because of this ontological instability. Morton claims that all poetry, for Shelley, “is sparkingly apparent yet strange at the same time. It is both ‘root and blossom,’ essence and appearance, withdrawn yet vivid” (216)—and it is worth looking more carefully at how the figure of silver both particularizes this claim and offers a different way of understanding Shelley’s poetics. While it might seem that “silver” is only decorative (the eloquence of the silver-tongued, the decadence of cloth of silver), its prominence

in *Prometheus Unbound* should prevent us from dismissing it. In *Prometheus Unbound*, here is what “silver” describes: shade, dew, light, waves, waves that describe singing, a lute, the shimmer of stalactites, the metals in the earth, a quality of sound. Sensorially manifold, it is a word used by Asia, Ione, Panthea, Prometheus, and Apollo, but it is primarily used by Asia and Ione to describe *both* mediated impressions (vision and sound at a distance) and states of personally-witnessed transformation. For example, Ione’s first lines narrate her attempt to block the phantasm of Jupiter from her ears and from her eyes:

My wings are folded o’er mine ears,
My wings are crossed over mine eyes,
Yet through their silver shade appears
And through their lulling plumes arise
A Shape, a throng of sounds...⁵⁶

A failure to block power as well as memory, a shield that shows, Ione’s folded wings filter vision through a “silver shade,” not unlike Asia’s description of Panthea’s eyes (themselves a form of media through which Asia sees) as being “Like stars half quenched in mists of silver dew” (II.i.29). In both cases, Ione and Asia seem to be describing a *loss* of intensity, yet their language suggests a *surge* in visual or aural splendor. Elsewhere in the lyrical drama, silver marks moments of splendid transformation: it is the figurative element in which a transformed Asia floats, it describes both the Morning Star’s lute and the Morning Star’s music which marks the dawn of new time, and it is part of the hidden “voice to be accomplished” that Ione gives the Spirit of the Hour to complete the revolution. The shell, remarks Ione, is “pale azure fading into silver / Lining it with a soft yet glowing light” (III.iii.71-2). “Fading into silver” again suggests that silver marks a loss even as silver itself glows with potential. Sensorially manifold, silver is

⁵⁶ *Prometheus Unbound*, I.224.

temporally manifold as well. A residue of something lost, a glimpse of brightness in the niche of the future, it is also a blank figure for an intensity that testifies to being *here, now*.⁵⁷

Shelley's figure of silver names an ideal of vividness. It names the hope that a poem might impress a reader so forcefully, that readers will believe the poem exists in the world. With Shelley, this kind of vividness is not about authorizing further imaginative recoveries or national literatures (as it was with the topos of Wyoming) nor about performing a privileged, daily relationship to sources of aesthetic intensity (as it was for Brooks and Cuba). It is about persuading readers that the effects they experience through this aesthetic category are not separable from but integral to their "real" lives. "[A] poem," Morton concludes, "forces us to acknowledge that we coexist with uncanny beings in a groundless yet vivid reality without a beyond" ("Object," 222). I admire this assertion, but it is not all poems that do this. In the early nineteenth-century, it is vividness that makes the groundless feel grounded; a poem gets called vivid because it feels grounded, or because readers want it to be grounded. Whether or not all poems or all of Shelley's poems "intervene[] in reality in a causal way," we can see that Shelley believes, and wants his readers to believe that they can.⁵⁸ This is neither attaching fiction to "the stuff of the real," nor the real to "the stuff of fiction."⁵⁹ Shelley's figure of silver as an ideal of vividness marks a desired ontology outside that binary: the desire that what you hoped could be not only is, but has been with you all along.

⁵⁷ For an elegant reading of how Shelley lovers "experiment[ed] with strange loops of distance and of temporality," see Pinch, paras. 128 and 152. For an argument that essence is in the future, while appearance is in the past, in Shelley's poetry and in poetry in general, see Morton, "An Object-Oriented Defense," especially 220.

⁵⁸ Morton, "An Object-Oriented Defense," 206.

⁵⁹ For fiction attached to the stuff of the real, see Gallagher, qtd. in Freedgood, "Fictional Settlements," 407. For the real re-attached to the stuff of fiction, see Freedgood, "Fictional Settlements," 407.

Chapter 4
Between Two Skies:
Vividness, Reference, and Reading Through Place
in Longfellow's *Poems of Places*

As thoroughly as they viewed Percy Shelley as being at a distance from the real, nineteenth-century U.S. readers embraced Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. While Longfellow was known to be exceptionally erudite and successful, he still seemed like someone readers could write to or visit rather than an angel with “luminous wings” belonging to another order of existence all together.¹ Yet, although Longfellow’s nineteenth-century U.S. reception looked very different from Shelley’s, Longfellow’s poetry has more in common with Shelley’s poetry than we might think. Longfellow also experimented with vividness through heightened descriptions of real places. In 1878, Longfellow published “Kéramos,” an experiment in glittery descriptions akin to those we saw on display in Shelley’s poetry and in Wylie’s Shelley-inflected novel. “Kéramos” describes an imaginative mental journey around the world to various distinctive and historically-significant sites for pottery and ceramics production. Opening with a potter singing, “Turn, turn, my wheel . . .,” Longfellow turns this song into a refrain that serves as a mechanism for the poet-observer’s reverie. The wheel’s circular motion anticipates the “I’s” virtual circumnavigation from Portland, Maine all the way to Japan by way of the “ruby-lusted” roof tiles in Majorca, Spain; the “brilliant, iridescent dyes” in Gubbio, Italy; and pottery painted

¹ For an account of Longfellow’s popularity with nineteenth-century readers, see Irmischer, especially chapter one (“Strangers as Friends: Longfellow and His Readers”).

like “a sky / Just washed by gentle April rains, / And beautiful with celadon” in King-te-ching, China. As these examples show, Longfellow’s poem emphasizes the dazzling effects of color and glaze, as well as the dazzling pleasures of imagining distant places. Throughout the poem, ceramics sparkle in ways that reflect and enhance the sparkling cities in which they are made. Vividness in “Kéramos” is simultaneously mimetic, and a transformation of dull earth and pigment into something wondrous, both part of and lovelier than the everyday. Lacking luminous wings, Longfellow nonetheless offered readers luminous pottery—and poetry.

In “Kéramos,” we see a familiar kind of vividness on the page. Longfellow’s Delft, for instance, is a place “that seems to be / A mingling of the land and sea,” a mingling Longfellow elaborates upon with terms of art and works of art. Delft is a “water-net, that tessellates / The landscape,” a maze, a place filled with “latticed gates” and sunshine filtered “as through a screen.” Domestic interiors are “bright / With glimmers of reflected light” from flagons, flasks, tankards, and decorative tiles.² Christoph Irmischer highlights the perspectival shifts on display in Longfellow’s description of Delft: one moment Delft appears below, as viewed from on high; the next, the poem describes Delft from ground level (130). In the description of Imari porcelain in Japan, Longfellow effects an even more impressive shift in perspective: the reader first seems to fly above and look down on the place, only to then look up or out from *within a representation* of the same place. In other words, Longfellow’s description of Japan and the Imari pottery workshops suggest that we have not only traveled to a place on the page (Japan) but into a representation of that place (a painted jar depicting Japan found in Japan on the page). “The stork, the heron, and the crane” appear both in the Japanese landscape and in the representation of that landscape, as Irmischer notes (203); however, the “azure drift” in which the birds first

² Irmischer’s word choice lends indirect support to my linking between Shelley and Longfellow: “Though indoors,” Irmischer writes of the objects in Delft, “all of them share in the *luminescence* of the landscape itself with the only difference that these images of nature are not subject to the changing seasons” (130, my emphasis).

appear is the sky “beneath” the magically transported “I,” while later when the birds “[f]loat through the azure overhead,” the azure has not only changed locations, it has changed mediums for it is not simply the sky but is “painted on these lovely jars.” This suggests that within the poem we have not only traveled from Maine to Japan but we have actually traveled across the distance and difference between the world and its representation. The poem consistently describes and performs stepping into a glazed representation of the real.

The descriptions in “Kéramos” are striking not only because of their verbal lustre, but also because they throw into relief the different kinds of world-making strategies at work in *Poems of Places* (c. 1876-1879), the thirty-one volume collection of poems that Longfellow compiled around the time he wrote “Kéramos.” Like “Kéramos,” *Places* includes many poems that offer heightened descriptions of actual places. Unlike “Kéramos,” *Places* includes poems such as ballads or occasional verse that feature very limited descriptions but mention place names. While “Kéramos” only features places related to pottery production, and thus associated with art, *Poems of Places* places a wide range of poems on the page according to any connection they have to places in the world. The collection’s aspiration to comprehensiveness combined with its display of place names on spine labels, title pages, and as general titles for poems, mark the collection as “world-making” in more ways than one. Each of the volumes is named for a country, group of countries, continent, or region. Within each volume, poems are further classified within an alphabetized list of relevant cities, rivers, mountains, regions, monuments, and ruins. (Wordsworth’s “Lines Composed Above Tintern Abbey,” for example, appears under “Wye, the River” in England, vol. 4.) Contemporary reviewers generally found this insistence on locality, what one reviewer called this “tuneful geography,” delightful and novel compared to

anthologies organized by chronology or author.³ Many were curious about particular classifications. “The only objection that has occurred to us on general grounds to Mr. Longfellow’s classification,” wrote *Appletons’ Journal*, “is that it would, if rigidly applied, exclude all except purely descriptive poetry; but this objection is dissipated when we find Keats’s ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ introduced under ‘Hampstead’ (which is not mentioned in the poem).”⁴ Building on this reviewer’s observation, we might ask: what does it mean to read “Hampstead” before reading “Ode to a Nightingale,” or to locate “Ode to a Nightingale” by way of Hampstead, England? How might the subordination of poem title to place name change how we understand Keats’s Ode (and thirty-one volumes of poems)?

If, as an exercise, we try to read “for” Hampstead in the way that we read for an impression of Delft in “Kéramos,” or in the way Campbell used the mockingbird to invite readers to read “for” North America, we not only fail to learn much about the place—we put our mode of reading in tension with the poem’s content. Reading “Ode to a Nightingale” by way of a place name seems almost cruelly to work against this ode’s longing to escape the limits of emplacement and embodiment. Hinging less on a representation of place than on a structure of address, Keats’s “Nightingale” treats being embodied and aware of being placed as problems. And for a poem ending “Do I wake or sleep?” it can feel almost comical insisting that the poem have a locality. If we choose to believe that Keats wrote the poem while sitting under a plum tree in Hampstead, or that the poem memorializes some such sitting—a story nineteenth-century readers might have read in Richard Monckton Milnes’s *Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of John Keats* (1848)—we can choose to read the final stanza’s “near meadows,” “still stream,” and

³ Rev. of *Poems of Places*, *The Times* (21 July 1877): 6e.

⁴ “New Books,” *Appletons’ Journal: a Monthly Miscellany of Popular Literature* 1 (Nov 1876): 477. Reviews in *Zion’s Herald*, *Harper’s*, *American Catholic Quarterly*, *The Literary World*, and *The Eclectic* also raised questions about classifications or associations between places and poems, either in general or in particular instances.

hillside as describing or at least referencing the meadows, stream, and hillside in Hampstead. This literal approach, however, gives us very little to visualize, sense, or know about either the place or the poem. Stanza two's sensory details of "the warm South" distilled in a bottle of wine are more abundant than these descriptive details at the poem's end. And the famously sensual "I cannot see what flowers are at my feet" stanza becomes, curiously, less exotic or proleptic when emphatically localized, as the white hawthorn, eglantine, and musk-rose seem to confirm the "I's" place-appropriate guesswork. Although these flowers do not bloom within the same season, the place-name as frame encourages us to prioritize evidence of the real Hampstead in the poem (even if that evidence could not exist together in real time). Rather than suggest a diffuse bower of scents, these flowers acquire the status of facts.

While we could focus very hard on trying to see or sense "Hampstead," then, it seems that such a way of reading might not be what the reviewer was celebrating about Longfellow's anthology. What was so pleasurable to this reviewer about discovering Keats's known "Ode" in a new place—"under 'Hampstead'"? What might such a printed placement suggest about reading *Poems of Places*? One possibility is that the poem's double title uses the geographical place name to ground the poem, giving the desire to "fly ... on the viewless wings of Poesy" a place in the world. Thanks to recent scholarship on nineteenth-century US poetry, we know that poems themselves moved materially across time, space, and various media, and that they could be made to perform different kinds of cultural, social, and political work in a range of places because of their displacements.⁵ To advance these studies, and to better understand the reading practices envisioned by *Poems of Places*, I wish to focus on a different but related kind of movement: an

⁵ See for example Meredith L. McGill, ed., *The Traffic in Poems* (2008); Michael C. Cohen, *The Social Lives of Poems in Nineteenth-Century America* (2015), Chapter 3: The Contraband Song, 100-135, for an argument that "songs in the [Civil] war years inculcated belonging and identification through performative dislocations from the scenes of their imagined origin" and "accrued value by moving" (104); and McGill, "Common Places" (2007).

idea or idealization of movement that is, paradoxically, based on staying in place. I mean a variant of flying on “the viewless wings of Poesy”: the trope of reading as imaginative travel in relation to poems that name or describe places.⁶ We began by considering Campbell’s creation of the figure of Gertrude to represent and mediate readers’ desires to feel as if they could experience North America by reading about Wyoming. Now at this project’s end we will turn our attention to Longfellow’s use and display of the trope of reading-as-travel itself.

To date, most scholarly references to *Poems of Places* identify travel as the series’ content before focusing on the social and geopolitical implications of Longfellow’s inclusions and exclusions. Indeed, because *Poems of Places* shrewdly caters to a market for poetry anthologies, it invites readings of the economic forces and social hierarchies driving its selections.⁷ Due to the series’ scope, however, most critical assessments rely on its Tables of Contents to establish the politics of Longfellow’s exclusions and inclusions. As Leah Price writes of anthologies in general, such an approach produces criticism that “can do little more than catalogue binary oppositions: including or excluding particular texts, over- or under-representing a given category of authors, acknowledging or ignoring new writing” (3). In the case of *Poems of Places*, Irscher notes that England and the U.S. each take up multiple volumes while the continent of Africa is confined to one volume. Kirsten Silva Gruesz perceptively highlights the colonial itinerary suggested by Longfellow’s ordering of the volumes.⁸ And, while Irscher mentions poems that include African Americans as poetic

⁶ For related observations about how the recent interest in “texts’ material journeys” (166) may leave other kinds of exchanges or relationships undertheorized, see Lauren Kimball’s and Isaac Cowell’s opening remarks in McGill et al., “Genre and Nationality in Nineteenth-Century British and American Poetry,” 165-166.

⁷ For an argument concerning how Longfellow’s own poems facilitated a shift from not only Old World to New World but also from a hierarchy of genres to a hierarchy of readers, see Jackson, “Longfellow in His Time,” especially pp. 240-41; 245.

⁸ Gruesz, 83-4. While the anthology has not been treated specifically as “travel literature,” *Poems of Places* clearly offers its American and/or British reading publics “a sense of ownership, entitlement and familiarity with respect to the distant parts of the world” represented in the text (Pratt, 3). The collection encourages a range of reading

figures, I have not yet found any poems written by African American poets. These are all important patterns of bias and exclusion to identify. As executed, they also largely fit the critical trend that Price critiques.

Some readings of the anthology's contents focus not on its blindspots but on its radical inclusiveness, emphasizing that *Poems of Places* tries to give more readers "access" not just to poems and poets but to geographical places. This can be seen as an extension of Longfellow's general and generally accepted role as mediator between high culture and mass culture, European culture and American culture, as well as between languages and world literatures.⁹ But the issue of access concerns reading *this* anthology in particular when Irmischer claims, "[t]he most powerful effect of Longfellow's anthologizing [in *Poems of Places*], with its emphasis on heterogeneity and multiplicity rather than homogenizing predictability, is a leveling of the difference between past and present and between author and reader" (211). This claim—that Longfellow's *Places* effects a leveling of difference between subjects—finds a corollary in Gillian Silverman's recent argument that nineteenth-century readers in general enjoyed a "fantasy of communion," desiring a feeling of "oneness" (especially oneness with the author or with other readers) when reading.¹⁰ Such claims collapse the very distances and differences on

experiences, however, and the kinds of reading encouraged by framing all poems as if they have a relationship to a geographical place remains an important, under-explored aspect of this collection.

⁹ For Longfellow as mediator between high and mass culture, see Jackson ("Longfellow") and McGill ("What is a Ballad?"). For Longfellow as translator serving as a "kind of national high priest of culture," see Gruesz, 80. For a thorough comparison of Longfellow's *Poets & Poetry of Europe* (1845) with *Poems of Places*, see Friedlander's unpublished essay on canonical and acanonical reading.

¹⁰ *Bodies and Books: Reading and the Fantasy of Communion in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (2012). See especially the Introduction, "The Fantasy of Communion" (1-21) and Chapter 2, "Books and the Dead" (51-82). Silverman focuses on imagined intimacy between readers and authors, and readers and other readers, especially intimacies that might be prohibited within nineteenth-century society. While we share an interest in intimacy as a desired effect of reading, and in reading experiences described in terms of touch, Silverman remains focused on interpersonal intimacy, occasionally facilitated by or including the materiality of the book, and on the psychological benefits and effects of reading. I focus instead on how descriptions of the natural world and geographical places within poems serve as vehicles for imagining intimacy with the aesthetic itself.

which Longfellow and his nineteenth-century readers wanted to linger—the distances that served as the precondition for vividness.

This chapter examines how vividness paves the way for *Poems of Places*, and how *Poems of Places* in turn gathers and expands the aesthetic category of vividness. The anthology theorizes an alternative kind of world-making, one facilitated by reference, difference, and distance. While the series was not *not* about travel, it was always just as much about desiring a particular kind of reading experience. Like Campbell, Brooks, Shelley, and Wylie, Longfellow relies on the figure of geography to explore the desire to undo the distance between readers' everyday lives and their reading. Unlike our previous writers, however, he relies on toponyms more than topoi, reference more than description, and acts of editorial framing along with acts of writing. Longfellow's meticulous insistence in *Poems of Places* that poems and places refer to one another suggests that reference itself serves as a mechanism for vividness. By submitting a variety of verse genres to the same dual-reference system—of places (geography) and letters (the alphabet)—Longfellow's *Poems of Places* represents a mutual mediation between places on the page and places in the world. The tradition of the vivid makes this series legible in new ways, while also prompting new readings of Longfellow's own poems as they appeared within the collection.

“A Voyage Round the World”: Vividness and a “Poetical Encyclopedia”

A year-and-a-half into working on *Poems of Places*, Longfellow selected James Montgomery's “A Voyage Round the World” to serve as prologue to the series.¹¹ A kind of predecessor to the reverie-structure of “Kéramos,” Montgomery's eighteenth-century poem

¹¹ Letter 3730 (Decr 14, 1875), *The Letters of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, ed. Andrew Hillen, Vol. VI (1982): 86. Hereafter “*Letters*” with appropriate letter number, date, volume number, and page number.

performs a flight of fancy around the globe, flying over oceans, continents, and colonies, before arriving back “home” in Britain. “By a single glance of thought,” proclaims the third stanza, “Thy whole realm’s before me brought, / Like the universe, from nought” (ll.7-9). With a prologue such as this, nineteenth-century readers and twenty-first century literary critics have understandably viewed and discussed the collection in terms of a travel guide. In a private letter, Longfellow himself referred to the project as “travelling in one’s easy-chair, making one’s own poetic guide-book,”¹² and, while nineteenth-century reviewers more frequently referred to *Places* as a collection, compilation, anthology, library, or encyclopedia, they did occasionally refer to it as a “poetical” or even “metrical travel-guide.”¹³ Yet, as the list of collection, compilation, etc., indicates, “travel-guide” was not the only or predominant genre through which *Places* was understood. The *Atlantic Monthly*’s review of the first eight volumes offers a representative description of *Poems of Places* as “the fit companion of every cultivated and sympathetic traveler; to home-keeping wits of the same quality it should equally approve itself; and it cannot help teaching all readers to love poets and poetry more” (376). Physical or vicarious travel, then, is part of the series’ reception. But it is only one part. As the quote from Montgomery’s poem shows, the series is interested not just in travel, but in world-making (“Like the universe, from nought”)—and in the conflation of reading and seeing (“glance of thought”). As the quotes from the *Atlantic* shows, the series was understood to have as much to offer in terms of “teaching all readers to love poets and poetry” as in terms of guiding select, upper-class, “cultivated” readers to actual places or serving as an itinerary for future or longed-for trips.

The trope of reading as imaginative travel explicitly anchors *Poems of Places*. The trope directs not only the anthology’s content but also the rhetoric surrounding its production and

¹² Letter 3462 (May 31, 1874), *Letters*, Vol. V, p. 749.

¹³ See *The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature* 25.1 (Jan 1877): f120; *American Church Review* 29 (Jan 1877): 146.

reception: Longfellow reports on his progress in terms of an itinerary, reviews circulate this familiar language of reading as travel or transport, and Longfellow's Preface models conflating a description of what one reads with the feeling of reading. The opening paragraph to the anthology's "Preface" discusses poets and poetry in relation to travel:

Madame de Stael has somewhere said, that "travelling is the saddest of all pleasures." But we all have the longing of Rasselas in our hearts. We are ready to leave the Happy Valley of home, and eager to see something of the world beyond the streets and steeples of our native town. To the young, traveling is a boundless delight; to the old, a pleasant memory and a tender regret. (i)

Explicitly introducing the anthology by way of travel discourse, Longfellow discusses actual travelers and travels alongside literary figures and literary travels. By opening with "Madame de Stael has somewhere said..." Longfellow grounds the project in confusions between places and pages: Longfellow and his readers could only have encountered this quote in print, and yet the quote about travel suggests that the "where" is a place (as if she said this at a particular place, not just in a particular text). Longfellow's letters are full of further examples of wordplay blurring the material page and the place, the place the poems will be printed and the place to which they refer.¹⁴ Thus, even when Longfellow tells us he is discussing physical travel, he is also always talking about an idea of reading as travel. He consistently blurs the distinction between places in the world and places on the page.

Acknowledging this helps us to recognize that Longfellow's series gathers poems that describe reading as well as poems that describe places. John Reade's "Devenish" opens with an encounter between a reader and a place name on the page:

'T was years since I had heard the name,
When, seen in print, before my eyes
The old Round Tower seemed to rise (ll.1-3)

¹⁴ For example, writing to a British publisher in September 1876 about a possible English edition, he puns: "I send you to-day the Appendix for England in Poems of Places. // Should you reprint, I think it would be well to insert these pieces in their proper places." See Ltr 3889 in *Letters*, Vol. VI, p. 179.

That “seen in print” not only draws special attention to the page’s role in facilitating imaginative transport and memory, but it also confuses seeing the name of the old Round Tower (a place name) with seeing the old Round Tower itself. The name prompts the vision for the reader within the poem even as the subsequent description offers a “vision” for the reader of the poem. Further, to take an example well known to us by this point, we encounter both an excerpt from “Gertrude of Wyoming” and all of Halleck’s “Wyoming” next to each other in “America. Middle States” (vol. 27). Campbell’s inaccurate description of the flamingo “[d]isporting like a meteor” over the lakes of Pennsylvania resurfaces here, as does Halleck’s poem describing the imbrication of the actual landscape with Campbell’s descriptions. In vol. 30 (“America. British America, Danish America, Mexico, Central America, South America, West Indies”) under “Grand-Pré, N.S.” Longfellow repeats a Campbell/Halleck pairing with, first, an excerpt of his description of Grand-Pré at the beginning of *Evangeline*, and second, a poem by Sara D. Clark that describes traveling to Grand-Pré because of having read *Evangeline*. In Clark’s poem, the “I” describes traveling to the real Grand-Pré only to shut her eyes and picture what she remembers from the poem. Though a poem “about” traveling to a place—seeing Grand-Pré and Blomidon rather than only reading about Grand-Pré and Blomidon—the actual place only provides an occasion to reimagine the poem:

Long-vanished forms come thronging up the strand;
I close my eyes to see the vision pass,
As one shuts out the daylight with his hand,
To view the pictures in a magic glass. (“Grand-Pré,” ll. 9-12)

Clark describes shutting out the real in order to better see the representation. This suggests more than that Clark could have stayed at home and traveled in her easy-chair; it suggests that Longfellow believed other readers would want to read Clark’s account of imagining Grand-Pré while in Grand-Pré—much as he suspected they would want to read Larcom’s “Bermoothes”

which appears in the final volume. These four examples from four different volumes testify to the series' persistent interest in treating descriptions of reading as equally pertinent to places as descriptions of the places themselves.

Longfellow and his publishers actively marketed the book as a collection of poems, not as travel literature, both in terms of classification and in terms of style. While it has been suggested that the books were designed to resemble Murray's guidebooks,¹⁵ nineteenth-century reviewers almost uniformly made the connection between *Poems of Places* and the "Little Classics" series. The "Little Classics," another series published by Houghton, Osgood & Co., were framed as anthologies of "classic" works of literature gathered under topical headings such as "Romance," "Childhood," "Lyrical Poems," and "Nature." When *Poems of Places* began appearing, reviewers immediately made the connection between the two series based on the binding, paper, and price (\$1/vol.). In May 1876, *The American Bookseller* immediately described the new series as "several volumes in form and style of the 'Little Classics'" (301); *Harper's* later praised the volumes as being "[v]ery attractive" and "in form and size resembl[ing] the popular 'Little Classics'" (304).¹⁶ Reviewers also compared *Places* to Emerson's *Parnassus* (1874) and to other "librar[ies] of song" (alluding to *A Library of Poetry and Song*, first published in 1870 and affiliated with William Cullen Bryant), far more frequently than to specific travel guides. Within ten years this would shift, and Longfellow's publishers would advertise the series as travel writing, listing the series alongside his early travelogue *Outre-Mer* (1835). But in the 1870s, as the volumes were making their first appearance, reviewers recognized them as being "about" reading poetry as much as about planning to travel.

¹⁵Irmscher, 201.

¹⁶For additional reviews linking *Poems of Places* to the "Little Classics" series, see *The Literary World* (Oct. 1, 1876): 69; 8.3 (Aug. 1, 1877): 42; *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Oct. 9, 1876): 1; *The American Bookseller* vol. 28, no. 1455 (Oct. 19, 1876): 10; *The Eclectic* 25.1 (Jan. 1877): f120; and *The American Bookseller* 7.5 (March 1, 1879): 182. As you can see, the connection persists from the beginning of the series through its final volumes.

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Figure 5. Advertisement facing cover page for "Greece, and Turkey in Europe," *Poems of Places*, vol. 19, ed. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (James R. Osgood & Co. 1878). Web. *HathiTrust*. 31 May 2016.

POEMS OF PLACES.

EDITED BY
HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW.

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Figure 6. Advertisement facing cover page for "Russia," *Poems of Places*, vol. 20, ed. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (Houghton, Osgood & Co., 1878). Web. *HathiTrust*. 31 May 2016.

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Figure 7. Advertisement for *Little Classics* series in "Lyrical Poems," *Little Classics*, vol. 14, ed. Rossiter Johnson (Houghton, Osgood & Co., 1875). Web. *HathiTrust*. 27 June 2016.

For reviewers, readers, and Longfellow alike, the “how” of the series (how it was organized) was as central to its appeal as the “what” (its contents).¹⁷ Virginia Jackson has argued that Longfellow’s own transatlantic success as a poet reveals “that nineteenth-century readers were becoming more interested in the ways to read poems than they were in the poems themselves” (245). While Jackson focuses on how Longfellow’s poems abstract verse genres from particular social relations, Longfellow’s choice to frame all the poems in *Poems of Places* according to geographical place names both confirms this claim and extends it to Longfellow’s work as an editor.¹⁸ Longfellow’s *Places*, when compared to other post-bellum collections or anthologies of poetry, organizes its contents in a strikingly different way. “Obviously authorship—or, for that matter, the chronology of literary history—had *not* been the guiding principle” of the series, observes Irmischer (202). While Irmischer references his own expectations as a reader, nineteenth-century reviewers noted this departure from the anthology’s genre conventions as well. For example, *The Literary World* complained about the series’s lack of an author index (a prominent feature of *Parnassus*, Bryant’s *Library of Poetry & Song*, Whittier’s *Songs of Three Centuries* (1876), and Charles Dana’s *Household Book of Poetry*

¹⁷ I owe the clarity of this articulation of “how” in relation to “what” to Christie Allen’s lucid dissertation chapter, “Mudie’s Catalogues and the (Re)Writing of Victorian Literary History.” Allen focuses on Mudie’s circulating library and library catalogue from 1842 through 1937, offering a superb field-level analysis of shifts in library catalogues’ classification systems, and of what these shifts reveal about the status of fiction and about historical readers’ modes of accessing and interpreting fiction. Her chapter provides a sense of the longer, larger, transatlantic, commercial field in which Longfellow’s series appeared.

¹⁸ According to Jackson, Longfellow’s poetry often now stands in for an idea of the kinds of social relations and reading practices that some readers feel literary criticism and/or American readers have forgotten. Yet, Jackson argues, Longfellow himself taught Americans to read in such ways, making the disappearance of cultures his content, helping to blur old genre hierarchies while creating new reading hierarchies, the legacies of which we’re still living with. For the ways in which Longfellow’s poems contributed to the lyricization of poetry, see Jackson, “Longfellow,” 246. For the full lyricization argument, see Jackson, *Dickinson’s Misery* (2005).

(1857-1872).¹⁹ But overall the response was overwhelmingly positive to Longfellow's "original" organization and "entirely novel plan."²⁰ His chosen "how" was deemed a critical success.

Longfellow appears to have wanted to maximize this appeal, and perhaps further encourage readers to participate in the reading as travel trope, through his intervention in how the series was advertised. Rather than advertise the entire series as one of his many works, as his publishers had for volumes 1-19, he requested that Osgood frame each volume as part of and contributing to the series alone: "I wish that in "Poems of Places" you would give a list of previous volumes, instead of the advertisement of my poems in general," he wrote to Osgood in February 1878.²¹ The new ads, appearing in volumes 20-31, still include Longfellow's name at the top as editor; however, they shift the focus from Longfellow to the names of places and number of volumes (see figs. 5 and 6). They also clearly resemble the advertisements for the "Little Classics" (see fig. 7), and explicitly invoke the "Little Classics" to describe the series' style. Introduced by a familiar poet's and series' names, *Poems of Places* foregrounded how readers would approach poems more so than who or what they would be reading.

This increased display of how the series was organized meant Longfellow was also promoting a different kind of reading experience. As opposed to presenting *Poems of Places* as volumes that join a single author's oeuvre, these new ads invite readers to anticipate volumes based on how they will complete the geographical and poetical encyclopedia. This change lends additional support to Gruesz's reading of the series' ordering as a colonial itinerary and imperialist perspective, since Asia, Africa, and America appear only as "In Press," but are not

¹⁹ "It is to be regretted that there is no index of the authors, who represent all periods, from Homer to W. D. Howells" (*The Literary World* 8:3 (Aug. 1, 1877): 42). See also Allen for an account of nineteenth-century debates concerning shifting practices in and social implications of cataloguing fiction by author, title, and/or subject.

²⁰ "Literature: Recent Poetry," *The Independent* 28.147 (Nov. 2, 1876): 8; "Poems of Places," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (14 Oct 1876): 9.

²¹ Ltr 4164 (Feb 5, 1878), *Letters*, Vol. VI, p. 336.

yet ordered or accounted for in the way that Europe is. For the purposes of our investigation of vividness, we might also consider the way this advertisement pairs world geography and (for US readers) mostly foreign countries with the promise of readerly familiarity. Both the *Boston Courier* and the *Southern Quarterly* blurbs reinforce the idea that one would read *Poems of Places* primarily for a curated aesthetic experience. Like the Little Classics' ads, both promise that readers will find tasteful selections of poems within the volumes' pages. But the *Southern Quarterly* also names what are conspicuously absent from the new ads—poets: “It is surprising to find how very rich the selections are from the best poets of all lands. Each volume is a choice repertory of the finest poems in the language.” The phrase “best poets of all lands” is curious here, since Longfellow was praised by nineteenth-century readers as well as by twenty-first century literary critics for including amateur or unheard of poets alongside the crème de la crème of the poetry scene.²² Since the majority of the poems are Anglo-American, “best poets of all lands” likewise seems misleading, or suggests cynically that Anglo-American poets are the best poets for every place. As Christie Allen notes regarding Mudie's Edwardian catalogues' use of geographical categories, such an organization of literature written in English “downplays England's place in the array of nations ... even as it subtly Anglicizes the entire world” (44), an interpretation that could apply to Longfellow's earlier, predominantly Anglo-American collection as well. Writing, for example, to Richard Henry Stoddard about which of Stoddard's poems would be included under China and the Nile, Longfellow writes, “Those regions will be the richer for it,” a troubling conflation of page and place that suggests China and Africa themselves will be enriched or improved through Stoddard's poems.²³ But just the fact that this

²² For scholarship emphasizing Longfellow's democratic inclusion of both well-known poems/poets and never-heard-of poems/poets in *Poems of Places*, see Imscher, 202, and Friedlander. Friedlander in particular focuses on this distinction between “the canon” and a reader's own canon.

²³ Ltr #4202 (April 28, 1878), *Letters*, Vol. VI, p. 355.

ad mentions “poets” might surprise, since “Vols. 11-13. Italy” shares nothing about the poets or poems included in those volumes. The difference not only between Longfellow’s organization and other poetry anthologies’ but also between the place names shared and the poets’ names and poems’ titles withheld by the ads seems to have contributed to nineteenth-century readers’ interests in the series. The *Southern Quarterly* is surprised not by new poets or poems but by how many of “the best poets” and “the finest poems” appear within these volumes. These seemingly familiar luminaries appear within a new system, and it is the system itself that is striking. Drawn to the series for its novel geographical arrangement, nineteenth-century readers understood the series in terms of travel, but also in terms of reading—and the trope of reading as travel.

Pages and Places: Reference and Mutual Mediation

An exchange between Longfellow and one of his readers confirms that the anthology raised larger questions than its potential suitability as a literal and/or literary travel guide. It also confirms that readers were curious about “where” they would find familiar poems in Longfellow’s new collection. In 1877, A.T. from Concord, Mass., queried *The Literary World* regarding Longfellow’s classification of a single poem: “Can you explain why Mr. Longfellow includes Hood’s “Bridge of Sighs” in his *Poems of Places*, and under the head of ‘The River Thames?’ I cannot find that the poem was founded on any actual occurrence, or belonged to any locality. Is it not a plea for fallen humanity everywhere?”²⁴ The editor forwarded the query to Longfellow, who responded anonymously:

No one who has seen the Thames at night, the quivering of the lamps in the water, the many lights “from window and casement,” and, above all,
“the dark arch,

²⁴ “Notes and Queries,” *The Literary World; a Monthly Review of Current Literature* 8:4 (Sept. 1, 1877), pg. 68.

O'er the black-flowing river,"
and remembers the frequency of such tragedies as Hood describes, can doubt for a moment that the Thames is the locality of "the Bridge of Sighs." When to this is added the fact that Hood lived in London, and generally wrote upon familiar themes, the probability becomes a certainty; as much as in "The Song of the Shirt," though the word London does not appear in that poem."²⁵

This exchange between A.T. and Longfellow about the geographical and printed locality of a poem involves conflicting ideas about what it is that establishes a poem's reference to a particular place. A.T. has tried to track down an "actual occurrence" to confirm the connection named by the anthology, yet Longfellow seems to find this a too narrow standard. Instead, he first offers the poem's description as evidence that the poem's locality is the Thames: in addition to the lines quoted, the prose description of lamplight "quivering" on water comes from Hood's poem, suggesting that poem and place are indistinguishable in ways reminiscent of Halleck's "Wyoming." By this standard, if you have seen the Thames, you will recognize it in the poem, and if you have read the poem, you will recognize it in the Thames. Yet, the blur between page and place is not solely dependent on description. Ultimately a reader's ability to believe that the poem refers to a real place appears to depend upon that reader's various familiarities: Longfellow patronizes A.T.'s lack of familiarity with the Thames, Hood's historical context, and Hood's biography. This reveals a significant contradiction: though this anthology was and is often described as a way of making more people familiar with more places, poems, and poets, Longfellow suggests here that one needs to be already familiar with London, Hood's London generally, and/or Hood in order to locate the poem "under 'The River Thames'" and in order to recognize the locality within the poem (the Thames). Knowing the Thames *and* knowing something about Hood's context, but not necessarily an "actual occurrence," confirms that the poem refers to the place. This exchange underscores how Longfellow's collection works

²⁵ Ibid. See also Longfellow's letter to the editor in *Letters*, Vol. VI, p. 292.

differently than “leveling...difference” between past and present, author and reader: Longfellow won’t bypass Hood or Hood’s London as relevant references for this poem. Instead, Longfellow suggests that any of these many possible references will confirm that “the dark arch” refers to both Hood’s poem and the actual Thames. Description counts equally alongside author’s biography and history as a point of connection between the page and the place.

Behind such questions regarding kinds of reference, there is the larger issue of reference itself. Because A.T. believes the poem describes and addresses “humanity everywhere,” s/he doubts its being a poem of any particular place before doubting its connection to the Thames. The exchange is not only about whether “The Bridge of Sighs” represents the river Thames, or commemorates a London-specific incident, but also about whether it matters. Must every bridge on the page be a bridge to the world as well?²⁶ While this question emerges from one particular reader’s query, neither A.T. nor the reviewer who singled out “Ode to a Nightingale” were anomalous readers: many readers noted and pondered the relationship between a given place name and a given poem. Larcom wrote in to *The New York Times*, defending Longfellow’s classification of her popular poem “Hannah Binding Shoes” under Beverly, Massachusetts, and not (as a reader had suggested) “Marblehead.”²⁷ *Harper’s* observed that “[s]ometimes the connection with the locality is but a single thread” (305), while the *Eclectic* acknowledged that “very many pieces are included which can hardly be said to have any local habitation at all” (507). The poems may not all appear to have a “local habitation,” but each one seems to acquire such a habitation *because* of their framing place name. By focusing on place names, Longfellow makes central a practice that Brooks, perhaps learning from Milton, had explored. Place names

²⁶ My thanks to Adam Mazel for part of this formulation. For an exploration of nineteenth-century philosophy of reference in relation to Wordsworth’s Lucy poems, see Marjorie Levinson, “Notes and Queries on Names and Numbers” (2013).

²⁷ Larcom, “Hannah Binding Shoes,” *The New York Times* (9 Feb 1879): 10.

matter more here than poetic genres or descriptive styles when it comes to exploring how to relate not reading and meaning but reading and real life. Even as the anthology abstracts its poems from other genres, social conventions, and historical contexts, it also insistently grounds the poems by way of geographical place names.

Establishing reference to real or believable places played a significant role in the five-year labor to make *Poems of Places*. Longfellow expended a great deal of energy tracking down references for each poem: he asked James Fields to ask Celia Thaxter to identify the scene in “The Spanish Graves;” apologized to Tennyson for getting a street name wrong for one of Tennyson’s poems; and asked Paul Hamilton Hayne to help him determine whether or not a group of poems referred to Hampton, Virginia, to name just a few examples.²⁸ As we have seen, even poems such as “The Song of the Shirt,” in which “the word London does not appear,” are subjected to rigorous cross-referencing with geography. To the extent that the series is framed as a reference work like a library or encyclopedia, this method makes some poems easy to locate. If one had read Felicia Hemans’s “The Landing of the Pilgrim Fathers in New England,” one might reasonably guess that the poem would appear in one of the two “New England” volumes, and that it would likely appear (as it does) under “Plymouth, Mass.” Yet, like “Ode to a Nightingale” being located in Hampstead, England, there are other poems and poets it is more difficult to anticipate where to find. Who would think to look for “The Lady of Shalott” under “Camelot,” a place listed right after “Cambridge” and treated as its ontological equal? Or, who could predict that Tennyson’s “The Lotos Eaters” would be listed under the somewhat specific “Seas of the Tropics,” while Coleridge’s “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” would be listed under the catch-all category “The Ocean”? Longfellow’s selected poems have all been made to refer to places, most of them real, but readers must rely on the Table of Contents to refer them to the poems (see

²⁸ See Letter 3739, *Letters*, vol. VI, pg. 91; 3900, vol. VI, p. 185; and 4293, vol. VI, p. 405, respectively.

fig. 8). Like Longfellow's tangled response to A.T., and like the ambiguous "of" in the series' title, we seem to need the poems to show us the places and the places to show us the poems.

This doubly-directed reference (from place to poem and from poem to place) reveals that *Poems of Places* troubles rigid notions of ontological priority. Nature "out there," physical geography, traveling to Rome are not treated as more real than nature on the page, imagined geography, reading about Rome. I do not mean that Longfellow turns "places into *texts*[:]"²⁹ rather, his collection's structure suggests that the experiences we have with and through pages are as much a part of our world as geographical places themselves.³⁰ Thirty years before *Places*, in 1845, Margaret Fuller had complained, "Nature with [Longfellow], whether human or external, is always seen through the windows of literature" (154). As if responding to this critique, Longfellow's anthology represents the idea that printed poems and the phenomenal world exist in a relationship of mutual mediation. Yes, he seems to suggest, we see nature through the windows of literature, but we also see literature through the windows of nature. Traveling in one's easy-chair, then, is neither the same as traveling *to* the place nor a lesser (because mediated) experience of the place. Seeing such varied poems framed as related to places, including the place from which the reader reads, suggests a more capacious understanding of what it means to experience a place in the world. Rather than treat the physical world in a present moment as somehow more real than hopes, fantasies, past realities, and Camelots, and rather than treat the world as something unknowable beyond our own minds,

²⁹Irmscher: "The lack of illustrations or maps left his audience with nothing but the written word: in Longfellow's collection, places are *texts* and can be accessed by anyone who is capable of turning the page" (202).

³⁰This notion resonates with Davis's claim that "both Thoreau's and Dickinson's ornamental aesthetics are based in a sense that mental phenomena are part of reality" (*Ornamental Aesthetics* 112). Davis goes on to say that "the differences between material and mental phenomena, or between inner and outer phenomena, do not greatly concern either [Thoreau or Dickinson]. The relationships among such phenomena, and the way that they affect one another, are much more important to them" (112). Davis argues that these writers are intrigued by how the world and the mind affect each other. (For Davis, "the world" refers both to sensory experience and to Being (3).) Where Davis understands ornamentation as bringing humans into relationship with what is present in the world, I am arguing that Longfellow sees vividness in the form of reference as mediating between one's reading and the world.

Longfellow entertains the idea that they are equally real. This does not make all poems (let alone all places) equally accessible to all readers, nor does it actually allow readers to travel over time or space, nor does it facilitate readers feeling as if they have become the “I” or the author. If there is a leveling of difference here it is the leveling of ontological difference between the world in which you read and the world of which you read, but this imaginative leveling is only possible because all other differences and distances remain intact and on display. A leveling of the status of kinds of experience is not the same as the leveling of difference between you and me, or here and there.

Longfellow flags his interest in a more capacious notion of the “real” world when, in the Preface, he invokes literary precedents to justify turning to poets as “guides.” Each of these literary precedents feature scenarios of profound disconnection yet enduring attachment between poems and the geographical places to which they refer. He includes poems whose names are “pseudonyms,” such as the previously mentioned “Camelot,” since he believes their poets must have had a real place in mind when writing the poem.³¹ This suggests that if a place on the page is rendered forcefully enough, it belongs to the world in which readers live. “Even places which are the mere coinage of his fancy, or which we can never hope to see, please and delight us,” commends one review.³² Longfellow also cites Shakespeare’s Orlando, who decorates the Forest of Arden with poems written about his love for Rosalind, not the Forest itself. As a framing figure for Longfellow’s collection, Orlando allows for poems to belong to places—to make contact with places—simply because they were written or found there, whether or not they offer accurate, insightful, or affecting descriptions of the place.

³¹ See “Preface” in *Poems of Places*, vol. 1, p. iii.

³² Rev. of *Poems of Places*, *American Catholic Quarterly Review* 2: 5 (Jan. 1877): 190.



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Figure 8. Table of Contents for “Italy, vol. II,” *Poems of Places*, vol. 12, ed. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (James R. Osgood & Co., 1877). Web. *HathiTrust*. 31 May 2016.

Most importantly, Longfellow quotes from Wordsworth's "Elegiac Stanzas Suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle in a Storm, Painted by Sir George Beaumont" to authorize this capacious model of reality proposed through the collection. In Wordsworth's poem, the poet's encounter with Beaumont's sublime painting shocks the poet into registering how he has changed since his memories of the Peele Castle are so much sunnier than the painting to which he now responds. Early in the poem the poet shares that, had he created a representation of Peele Castle at that earlier stage of his life, he would have represented it as tranquil, lovely, calm. This representation would both "express what then [he] saw" and "add the gleam, / The light that never was, on sea or land, / The consecration and the Poet's dream" (ll.14-16). The imagined painting his past self never made would have both represented the calm that self perceived, and enhanced or elevated it. Longfellow repurposes this quote, using it as evidence that poets make the best traveling guides. Poets "see many things that are invisible to common eyes" and "invest the landscape with a human feeling, and cast upon it / 'The light that never was on sea or land, / The consecration and the poet's dream'" (ii). These lines seem to promise not seeing a place but seeing what that place has prompted others to imagine; to promise guides not to "the real" but to the various investments, projections, and dreams that others have remembered, perceived, created, or entertained in or in relation to real places.

Such a promise includes the possibility of imagining at a distance as a way to shield readers from physical, intellectual, and ethical discomforts. The series participates in but is not reducible to this tradition of using distance as a protection from unwanted or inconvenient realities.³³ Multiple reviewers quoted Longfellow's quoting of the Wordsworth quote, suggesting

³³ In Longfellow's "Introduction" to the overall collection, his use of Cowper's "The World at a Distance" and his own "Travels by the Fireside" signal the presence of this tradition. "'Tis pleasant," Cowper's excerpt begins, to encounter the world "[a]t a safe distance," or, as Longfellow remarks, "I fear no more the dust and heat, / No more I fear fatigue..." Both poems explicitly narrate being one place (at home) yet feeling as if they are somewhere else

that the idea of being guided by “these dreamers and seers of invisible things” to a shared affective and aesthetic experience—the idea of having an experience through the page that you actually could not have in person—was part of the appeal of the project.³⁴ To present “[t]he light that never was” as if it exists, and as if it has a relationship to a recognizable place name, is to expand what counts as part of the world. As the final volumes came to press, reviewers joked about whether Longfellow would also offer a volume on Heaven, Hell, or “poetry on ‘other Worlds than Ours’.” This detail seems to confirm that nineteenth-century readers were aware that Longfellow was offering not just a comprehensive but a capacious approach to what counts as a “poem of place.”³⁵

Poems of Places encourages reading poems for what they reveal about places, and also for using places as a way to read poems. It represents poems and places in a relationship of mutual mediation. And it relies on reference not only to establish a point of connection between two different places—the page and the world—but to foreground a distance that must be (even though it cannot be) imaginatively overcome. Approaching a poem like Shelley’s “Ode to the West Wind” by way of “Florence, Italy,” and by way of a headnote linking the poem’s production to a specific climate, invites us to think of the wind in the poem as particular to Florence, not a meditation on inspiration in the abstract but a product of the weather systems of

without having to feel *entirely* that they are somewhere else. These poems use distance both to initiate a sense of imaginative transport, and as a position of power from which to pick and choose which aspects of physical travel they imaginatively experience. While vividness can further such uses of distance as a form of power, it need not be synonymous with them. For Cowper’s distance from London, and use of this distance to cultivate a form of engaged citizenship as mediated through both newspapers and poetry, see Ellison, “News, Blues, and Cowper’s Busy World.” For an argument that all acts of imagining at a distance allow for not only protection from unwanted realities but acts of mental and then actual imperialism, see Freedgood. For a more general consideration of *Poems of Places* in relation to the shifting demographics of late nineteenth-century travel, see Irmscher, 201-202.

³⁴ *National Repository*, 2 (Aug. 1877): 186. Other reviews that explicitly quote the Wordsworth lines from Peele’s Castle include *The Independent* 28.1440 (Jul. 6, 1876): 10; *Chicago Daily Tribune* (14 Oct. 1876): 9; *The Eclectic* 25.1 (Jan. 1877): f120; and *The Youth’s Companion*, 50.26 (June 28, 1877): 206. See also *The American Catholic Quarterly Review* 2.5 (Jan. 1877): 190, for an explicit celebration of Longfellow including “places which are the mere coinage of his fancy.”

³⁵ “Poetry,” *The American Bookseller* 7.11 (June 2, 1879): 421; “Literary Notes,” *Christian Union* 19.23 (Jun 4, 1879): 514; 20.5 (Jul 30, 1879): 92; and “Minor Notices,” *The Literary World* 10.15 (July 19, 1879): 231.

the place.³⁶ Meanwhile, reading Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" as introductory material for "Greece" invites us to believe that a British poet's address to an amphora from Greece has something to tell us about Greece itself. In the case of Shelley's Ode by way of Florence, we are asked to treat a figure ("O wild west wind") as geographically specific while in the case of Greece by way of Keats's Ode we are asked to treat an ekphrastic ode as telling us about a geographical place, not the arts. Both of these reading directions—to poem by way of place name and to an idea of place by way of poem—are honored, collected, and encouraged throughout *Poems of Places*. In the final two sections, I'll explore in more detail how mutual mediation, rooted in reference, expands our understanding of vividness.

Vividness and the Distance Between Familiar and Unfamiliar

Vividness, as an historical aesthetic category that relies on the distance between sensory and mental objects in order to explore the pleasures of imaginatively overcoming such distance, helps us to read Longfellow's poetical encyclopedia. The series makes visible that it was not only Campbell, Brooks, Shelley, and their most devoted readers who were interested in vividness; rather, there was a persistent and general nineteenth-century fascination with using poems associated with geographical distance as a way to theorize pleasurable ontological confusions for readers—to use geographical distance to explore the distance between the reader and the page. The collection makes visible this persistent pairing of geographical distance with the desire for readerly transport in three key ways. First, it collects most of the poems and poets we have previously examined. In addition to Campbell's and Halleck's Wyoming poems, the

³⁶ See Vol. 11 ("Italy. I."), p.165, for headnote. Longfellow did not create this headnote—a longer version appeared in Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound: A Lyrical Drama in Four Acts; With Other Poems* (London: C. and J. Ollier, 1820). However, Longfellow's decision to include only this portion of the note suggests that he wanted efficiently to establish a connection between Florence and the wind, and lends support to thinking of Florence as illuminating the poem while also asking what the poem might tell us about Florence.

series includes Brooks's poems that are explicitly addressed to Cuba, extracts from Southey's *Madoc*, and, among others, Shelley's "Euganean Hills." Second, in addition to gathering the poems we have already considered, *Places* introduces us to a wide number of poems that were written in the tradition of vividness, poems such as Larcom's "Bermoothes" and Hayne's "Aspects of the Pines." As we saw in the introduction, when Larcom, a writer from New England, describes the Bermudas as a place where "[t]remulous color and outline seem / Lucent as glassed in a life-like dream" (ll.11-12), she describes a distant, exotic place in clearly vivid terms. When Hayne, a Southerner, describes sunset as turning "every lock [of figurative hair] luminous" on the Georgia pines, he, too, relied on a language of vividness, even though he was describing a place well known to him and less distant and exotic than Bermuda (l. 17).³⁷ With poems such as Larcom's and Hayne's, and extracts from Longfellow's "Kéramos," *Poems of Places* provides evidence for late-nineteenth-century writers' and readers' enduring interest in the vivid. Finally, by insisting on reference as a formal feature for poems lacking exotic, glittery, luminous, or luxurious descriptions of place, *Poems of Places* links poems using descriptive strategies we've come to associate with vividness, with poems referring to places. As a result of this pairing, we might extend our expectations for forceful impressions from a descriptive style to reference itself.

Thinking of reference as a formal mechanism for vividness reminds us that distance is the necessary structural condition of vivid reading experiences. When poems describe geographically distant and different places, their geographical discourse makes this structure visible, but the descriptive patterns themselves are not required for this sense of an impression

³⁷ See Jennifer Rae Greeson, *Our South: Geographic Fantasy and the Rise of National Literature* (2010), for an argument about the South's consistent role as "an *internal other* for the nation" (1). Greeson's argument helps account for how Larcom's Bermuda and Hayne's Georgia could be othered in distinct yet related ways within Longfellow's anthology. Hayne's poem is listed under "Georgia," an introductory poem to vol. 28 "America. Southern States." and is made up of three sections. "Aspects of the Pines" is the second section.

from the page. Because reference promises a relationship between the world in which we live and the world we experience through the page, it suggests the world has left its mark on and in the poem, and that the poem becomes an object capable of making its own vivid impression. By naming a place, reference invokes both physical distance and physical existence and so becomes another method for producing vividness. It is thus possible for poems to be read as vivid without being descriptively luminous or amplified or fantastic, but by insisting on a felt connection between the world and the page.

Longfellow's chosen motto for the series frames the reading of *Poems of Places* in terms of distance, the distance between two kinds of seeing. The motto was printed on the title page for each of the thirty-one volumes (see fig. 9):

“It is the Soul that sees; the outward eyes
Present the object, but the Mind describes.”

This motto, from George Crabbe's "The Lover's Journey," has been interpreted as proof that, for Longfellow, "[t]he world is ... a product of our own, individual imaginations."³⁸ But Longfellow's use of Crabbe not only suggests that we as subjects produce the world in our minds; it also suggests that even when we are "in" the world we experience it at a distance.³⁹ Crabbe's poem humorously dramatizes the disconnect between an objective external reality and an individual subject's perceptions of that reality based on mood. When Longfellow frames each volume of *Poems of Places* with this motto, however, it signifies differently. Instead, the motto insists that seeing is only possible at a distance, mediated through a description that becomes

³⁸ Irmscher, 203.

³⁹ For an account of the meaning of the word and category "experience" in the antebellum U.S., see Davis, *Formalism* (2007). Davis's reading of how Kames and Alison believed that people could view their responses to art in the same way that they viewed art itself—like spectators, at a distance—relates to this discussion of Longfellow's collection. I am deeply indebted to Davis's argument, but where Davis focuses on analysis of this abstract, emerging experience (how the spectator responds to the form of response more so than to the form of the text), I focus on desire for proximity, closeness, and contact between readers and the experiences they describe having while reading.

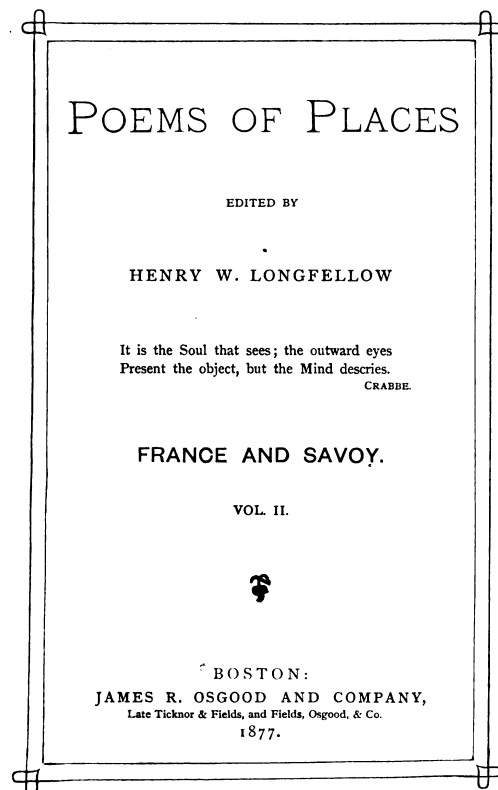


Figure 9. Title page for “France and Savoy, vol. II,” *Poems of Places*, vol. 10, ed. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (James R. Osgood and Company, 1877). Web. *HathiTrust*. 31 May 2016.

sight itself. Rather than the poetic “mind’s eye” that replays impressions gathered from the world, we read about the strange “outward eyes” that do not see but “present” objects to an impersonal Mind. The verb that sounds closest (“present”) remains distanced from “see[ing],” while the verb that involves distance (“descries”) becomes our source of seeing. Descries, a verb meaning “to catch sight of, especially from a distance,” “to discover or perceive,” and “to give a description of, to describe,” sits at a juncture where seeing at a distance, seeing up close, and communicating to someone else might blur into each other.⁴⁰ The motto, like the series’ display of mutual mediation, does not recognize the physical world as possessing ontological priority over the imagined, remembered, or otherwise represented world. On the one hand, this means that the distance between being in the place and reading about the place can be imaginatively undone; on the other hand, it suggests that if you are reading, you are always reading about somewhere else, even if the place on the page shares a name with the place in which you’re reading. Vivid reference might invite claims of transport to distant places, but it also potentially magnifies the distance between readers and their immediate or familiar surroundings.

Charles Warren Stoddard’s “Tamalpais,” in “America. Western States,” beautifully illustrates this idea. A poem about California — a distant place for many east coast and non-US readers — by a California poet, it describes standing on one side of the Golden Gate Strait, looking across the bay to Mt. Tamalpais, and attending to the California landscape while also modeling an imaginative flight of fancy not from one side of the globe to the other, but from one side of a bay to the other. Even in California, we might say, he longs for California.⁴¹ Stoddard marks the physical distance between one part of California and another, turning that geographical feature into an opportunity to imaginatively describe what he cannot see or touch. He adapts the

⁴⁰ “descrie, v.1.” *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, September 2016. Web. 18 November 2016.

⁴¹ “Even in Kyoto— / hearing the cuckoo’s cry— / I long for Kyoto.” Matsuo Basho, transl. Robert Hass, in *The Essential Haiku: Versions of Basho, Buson, and Issa* (New York: Ecco Press, 1994).

strategies of poems like *Zophiël* and *Alastor*, which focused on extremely distant geographies and even the fantastic, to imagining at a distance on a more local scale. Even though Stoddard describes a place relatively near, he highlights distance as a fact that prompts a desired yet inaccessible sensory and aesthetic experience.

Nineteenth-century readers recognized that distance helped produce not only sensory experiences in general but tactile, intimate impressions through the page. We can see this in the series of eight sonnets titled, “Italy. Written after Reading ‘Poems of Places—Italy,’ edited by H. W. Longfellow,” a series published in the periodical *Catholic World* as *Places* was still coming to press.⁴² Written by an anonymous reader, these sonnets develop an extended metaphor of the reader having been blinded and, with “bandaged eyes,” being led by a “loving guide,” the poet, through Italy. The poet’s words “make[] blinded vision see / The very lines that make tall towers fair,” blurring the distinction between lines on the page and the lines of architecture (ll.4-5).

VII.

So, poet-led, I trod Italian ways,
Seeing the glimmer of pale olive-trees,
Drifting, entranced, o’er warm Sicilian seas,
Harkening Siena’s perfect speech of praise,
Drinking of Trevi’s fountain, o’er and o’er,
Yet craving ever something still more rare,
Some gift of grace that Italy must wear
To make her so the heart’s-best evermore;
Some crown above her hills, than her blue seas
More luminous, beyond her painters’ fame,
Or passionate poets’ soaring words of fame,
More than all proudest earthly destinies.

In this penultimate sonnet, the “I” describes being “poet-led” in such a way that the clear markers of distance—the physical distance between the imagined guide and follower, the disability necessitating the poet’s mediating descriptions—allow one to entertain the possibility

⁴² *Catholic World* 25: 150 (Sept. 1877), pg. 745. This periodical also printed a single “reader response” sonnet in its August issue of the same year: “‘To Aubrey De Vere. After Reading ‘Poems of Places—Italy,’ Edited by H. W. Longfellow,’” *Catholic World* 25: 149 (Aug. 1877): 676.

of “Seeing the glimmer,” hearing Siena, feeling the waters of the Trevi fountain. Like Silverman’s account of nineteenth-century readers’ “fantasy of communion,” this seems to draw a parallel between the religious language of communion, the author-reader relationship, and the somatic experience of reading.⁴³ Yet, here the merger is not so much between subjects (who remain at arm’s-length, at a distance, as one guides the other) as between a reader and a place. The “I” is grateful for the guide because the guide does not interfere with their experience of Italy. Even as the “I” describes this intimacy with Italy and entertains the possibility of having overcome distance and difference, the poem marks a sense of renewed and renewable desire: “Yet craving ever something still more rare...” In the context of this Catholic periodical, and in the context of the full sequence of sonnets, this partially articulates a desire for a religious experience (“some gift of grace”). And the final poem compares *Poems of Places* to a shrine awaiting full presence of the divine. Yet as their title indicates, even if the sonnets explore a religious desire for metaphysical “presence,” they nonetheless also comment on a reading experience whereby reading about distant places creates the conditions for imagining an aesthetic intimacy. This intimacy is not a fantasy of communion with other people but a feeling produced by both geographical and ontological distance.⁴⁴ The more familiar Italy comes to feel through reading *Poems of Places*, the more aware the poet-reader seems to become of how that familiarity is predicated on distance—the distance between reader and page. The reader doesn’t long to touch or be in communion with a person; no, the poet and poem serve as mediums that allow the reader to feel they have sensed something of Italy and something above or beyond

⁴³ Silverman’s interest lies in how nineteenth-century readers “likened the experience of engaging a common text to Holy Communion, involving both shared consciousness and bodily merger” (x). She uses this interest to argue that “reading and authorship can be acts of intimacy, ways of establishing a therapeutic experience of merger or union with an inaccessible other” (xiii). Her emphasis is on merger between human subjects, even if mediated by books.

⁴⁴ Longfellow’s “Preface” to *Poems of Places*, vol. 1, does show a fleeting interest in *framing* the series in terms of sociality and the potential connections between different travelers/readers. I see this as more of a rhetorical move on Longfellow’s part, however, than the primary goal or effect of the series.

Italy—something that is both part of and seems “[m]ore luminous” than the geographically real place.

Vividness, then, and the striking yet familiar impressions it produces depends upon distance and a certain *inaccessibility*. The series’ reception reflects this in its persistent and persistently inconsistent uses of “familiar” and “unfamiliar.” Reviewers used familiar and unfamiliar to describe readers’ familiarities with places, readers’ familiarities with poems, and Longfellow’s familiarities with poems and poets. You could encounter unfamiliar poems/poets in familiar places, familiar poems/poets in unfamiliar places, and you could come to feel familiar with previously unfamiliar poems, poets, and places. As the Boston newspaper *Zion’s Herald* remarked on the three volumes for “Asia”: “Many fine old favorites will be found, and much that has not become so familiar by often quotation.”⁴⁵ This sentence simultaneously promises that readers will encounter familiar poems (“fine old favorites,” such as passages from “Gertrude”) and unfamiliar or new poems (“much that has not become so familiar”). Other reviewers, meanwhile, focused on the places themselves. Describing these same three volumes, another reviewer acknowledged that because “the scenes [are] less familiar the poet’s words do not touch so many responsive chords in our hearts. For that reason,” s/he insists, “the volumes are the more valuable as carrying us into regions with which we may not otherwise become acquainted.” Here, while the poems might be less immediately moving to the reviewer due to a lack of familiarity with the places to which they are connected (a lack of familiarity that clearly reflects a Western perspective), this makes the volumes “more valuable” for their chance to make the unfamiliar more familiar. Finally, like the Keats example with “Ode to a Nightingale” under “Hampstead,” the series surprised readers with familiar poets and poems classified under less familiar or surprising place names. *The American Bookseller*, for instance, expressed an Anglo-

⁴⁵ *Zion’s Herald* 55:34 (August 22, 1878): 266.

centric worry that the volume devoted to Africa would not have enough poems. Upon reading the volume “Africa,” however, the reviewer was delighted both by poems “treating of wild, free, unfamiliar scenes” and by discovering “many old and well-known friends” related to “African topics or localities” (474).⁴⁶ Here, Africa remains “wild” and distinctly othered for Anglo-American readers through “well-known” poems and poets; the wildness is itself both unfamiliar and familiar. Vividness, generated by reference as much as by description of distant places, mediates the distance between these categories.

This language of familiar and unfamiliar shares many features with the intimate entanglements between “domestic” and “foreign” that Amy Kaplan has shown exist in US imperial contexts.⁴⁷ It is also worth noticing that below this language of the familiar and unfamiliar runs the language of intimacy with and through reading. The first Scotland volume, writes *The New York Times*, features numerous “poetic effusions written by men and women whose names are familiar alone to those most intimately acquainted with the obscure literature of Scotland.”⁴⁸ When it comes not to Scotland but to the “obscure literature of Scotland,” Longfellow is not only knowledgeable, he is “intimately acquainted” with it. To share not just knowledge or reading but intimacy involves inviting readers into both visible and obscure,

⁴⁶ “Poetry,” *The American Bookseller* Vol. VI, No. 9 (Nov. 1, 1878): 474.

⁴⁷ Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (2002), 1; 4. Kaplan finds that the desire to clearly distinguish “domestic” from “foreign” leads to an instability of those terms. Even as the nation thinks of itself as safely distanced from territorial or colonial chaos, it is “intimately intertwined with renderings of the foreign and the alien,” so much so that the notion of the nation is unsettled as a result of its imperial interests (4; 12). Readers of *Poems of Places*, however, seem to enjoy the ways in which the series destabilizes the boundaries of “here” and “there.” See also Nance, *How the Arabian Nights Inspired the American Dream, 1790-1935* (2009), chapters 4 and 5, which explore how Arab immigrants to the US (1870-1920) use Eastern or Orientalized roles to make themselves “familiar” or comprehensible to American audiences, and how various ethnic groups within the US used Eastern roles to make the familiar seem strange (1893-1929), respectively. Even as Nance acknowledges “the exotic functioned in two directions” (138), her chapters treat only one direction at a time.

⁴⁸ *The New York Times*, 7 Dec 1876: 7.

familiar and unfamiliar places and poems.⁴⁹ In responding to *Poems of Places*, nineteenth-century readers and reviewers seem to have wanted the poems to offer them a feeling for places, and a feeling through places, including the places in which they lived and the poems with which they lived.

Reading for Place, Reading through Place: Longfellow's *Evangeline* in *Poems of Places*

An important subset of familiar texts nineteenth-century readers might have enjoyed re-encountering in *Poems of Places* were Longfellow's own poems. When the *Literary World* reviewed *Kéramos; and Other Poems* in 1878, just one month after having reviewed the most recent volume in *Places* ("Russia"), the reviewer linked "Kéramos" with vividness and with the project of *Places*:

Taking the collection as a whole, we have been struck with the proportion of what may be called "poems of place," as if Mr. Longfellow's well-known avocation the last year or two, in gathering the *Poems of Places*, has exercised a silent influence upon his own thought and expression. Nearly one half of the poems are landscapes with souls in them.⁵⁰

In fact, nearly one half of the poems in *Kéramos* had actually been or would be printed in *Poems of Places*. Some, such as the translation of Ovid's "Tristia" and the sonnet "Castles in Spain," had even been written specifically for the series. Longfellow eventually included over 120 of his own poems or extracts from his poems in *Poems of Places*, and his reviewers repeatedly complain that he has been too modest. The interwovenness of Longfellow's work as an editor, writer, and translator were apparent to many of his readers. Given that Longfellow wrote "Kéramos" while compiling *Poems of Places* himself, it is not surprising that the poem lent itself to being excerpted for the collection. Longfellow doesn't seem to have any ambivalence about

⁴⁹ Allen similarly writes that Mudie's Edwardian shift to geographical subject headings for works of fiction suggests that subscribers wished both "to read about exotic places and ... about places already familiar" (45).

⁵⁰ "Recent Poetry," *The Literary World; a Monthly Review of Current Literature* 9.2 (Jul 1, 1878): 23.

excerpting his own work. In the case of Longfellow and *Poems of Places*, the anthology's "silent influence upon his own thought and expression" surprises less in the case of "Kéramos" than in the case of *Evangeline*.

Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie (1847) exists at a greater historical distance from *Poems of Places*; it is also far more proximate to Campbell's and Brooks's well-known long poems and to the first phase of Shelley's posthumous reception. We should therefore not be surprised that the poem resonates strongly with other experiments in vividness, nor that it might have extract-worthy descriptions. A poem of "some length" composed in dactylic hexameters, *Evangeline* featured a historically specific tale and "sundry descriptions of American scenery" in which Longfellow claimed to "have endeavored to give the true and peculiar coloring of Nature."⁵¹ The poem clearly emerged from the poems we have previously read. Its heroine recalls both Brooks's Eglá and Campbell's Gertrude in her faithfulness, isolation, and coexistence with simultaneously pastoral and exotic scenery. Further, Longfellow's descriptions throughout *Evangeline*, particularly in Nova Scotia and Louisiana, of sounds of human voices, animals, and instruments of human labor all intermingling, his descriptions of the moon "illuming the landscape with silver" (p.54; Part II, iii, l.92) and his description of Evangeline "[b]leeding, barefooted, over the shards and thorns of existence" echo Shelley (p.41; Part II, i, l.67). While nineteenth-century readers enjoyed the poem's plot, and admired Evangeline as an ideal of womanhood and of endurance, they also took great pleasure in Longfellow's descriptions of North American places. One month after the poem's publication, *The Harbinger* suggested that Longfellow had finally produced a poem that would make lasting impressions: "These pictures [of Grand-Pré] are exquisitely graphic, caught from nature at first hand; not bookish as too many of Longfellow's beauties have been charged with being, but smacking of reality, and often revealing in a line, a

⁵¹ Ltr 949 (1847), *Letters*, Vol. III.

word, as with one Homeric lightning flash, a scene which scars itself forever on your imagination.”⁵² Calling back to Fuller’s 1845 critique of Longfellow as viewing nature at a distance, through the windows of literature, *The Harbinger’s* review of *Evangeline* emphasizes the poem’s effects in physical terms: it “smack[s] of reality,” it sears itself into the mind. The poem’s popularity persisted so that in 1876, Longfellow received letters from at least three different readers about having looked for, visited, drawn, or photographed what they took to be *Evangeline’s* cottage in Philadelphia. Larcom and a Southern woman reader, meanwhile, marvelled at how accurately Longfellow had depicted Southern landscapes he had never personally visited. Quoting Longfellow’s descriptions of Louisiana, Larcom comments, “It is to be remembered that this vivid description is from a Northern pen,” emphasizing the distance Longfellow has had to imaginatively overcome in order to impress the reader so forcefully.⁵³ The resonances between *Evangeline* and Campbell’s, Brooks’s, and Shelley’s poems; the language of vividness surfacing in the poem’s reception; and readers’ investments in locating or visiting the real places they had experienced on the page all suggest that we could comfortably read *Evangeline* alongside other instances of vividness. We do not necessarily need *Poems of Places* to consider *Evangeline* here.

Our understanding of the poem and its relationship to vividness nonetheless changes when Longfellow selects and reframes parts of *Evangeline* across four volumes in *Poems of Places*. Twenty years earlier, Longfellow had resisted an editor’s attempt to anthologize extracts

⁵² [John Sullivan Dwight], Rev. of *Evangeline*, *The Harbinger*, *Devoted to Social and Political Progress* 6.2 (Nov. 13, 1847): 14.

⁵³ Larcom, *Landscape in American Poetry* (1879): 109. Larcom goes on to suggest the “Northern pen” is more productive and, implicitly, industrious than the poets (or lack thereof) from the “most luxuriant climates,” meaning especially the south and the West. She not only reinforces the idea of Northern superiority, she also draws on imperialist language, such as Makdisi’s reading of Shelley’s vacancies in the East, suggesting that it took a Northern pen to make these “luxuriant” scenes productive.

from this poem,⁵⁴ but in his own collection six excerpts appear: “Philadelphia,” “Atchafalaya,” “Bayou of Plaquemine,” “The River Têche,” “The Far West,” and “Grand-Pré.” The passages appearing under these place names would have been recognizable to many nineteenth-century readers: besides the poem’s infamous use of hexameters, these passages highlight many descriptions of place that had been singled out in reviews in the 1840s, in particular the opening description of Grand-Pré, the scene in which Evangeline and Gabriel just miss each other in Louisiana (“Bayou”), and the description of evening light and the mockingbird’s song (“River Têche”), to which I will turn in a moment. As one review put it, in “America. Southern States” (vol. 28) readers would find not only war poems but “many beautiful poetic descriptions of scenery and simple life, and [...], as in the passages from ‘Evangeline,’ numerous long established favorites in English verse” (319).⁵⁵ Further, since Longfellow’s edits to the extracts were minimal, the characters’ names often remain in the extracts, making them even more recognizable as having come from *Evangeline*.⁵⁶ Yet despite how recognizable the extracts would have been, their appearance as distinct “poems of places” framed by different general titles invites us to approach these familiar passages in a defamiliarized way.

One way to understand the extracts is to think of them as invitations to read “for” place. This is, presumably, how Longfellow approached *Evangeline* when seeking material for *Poems of Places*: he privileges and formally extracts passages that describe distinct places. Such a mode of reading results in far more of Part II of *Evangeline* (which narrates the Acadian diaspora) appearing in *Places* than Part I (which focuses on life in Grand-Pré). Grand-Pré becomes just one

⁵⁴ See Ltr 1586 (March 13, 1857), *Letters*, Vol. III, p. 20. Longfellow requested of Evert Augustus Duyckinck that Duyckinck use one of Longfellow’s short lyrics rather than an extract from *Evangeline* for *The Poets of the Nineteenth-Century*.

⁵⁵ “Poetry,” *American Bookseller*, Vol. VII, No. 8 (April 15, 1879): 319.

⁵⁶ Of these cuts, “Grand-Pré” and “Bayou” feature cuts of around 12-lines each. Other extracts occasionally drop an opening line that used transition words such as “Thus.” In “Grand-Pré,” Longfellow cuts an extended description of Evangeline, while in “Bayou” he cuts lines that more actively comment on or interpret the landscape rather than describe the Acadians passing through in their boat.

of six places extracted from the poem, its pastoral loveliness treated with equal weight as the scenes of tropical, prairie, and rugged loveliness encountered beyond its borders. It is no longer the lost ideal but one idyllic place among many. While speculative, this reading of the parts of *Evangeline* as they appear after the poem has been read “for place” changes how these places appear on their own and how they might seem to relate to one another. “Grand-Pré” appears beautiful and existent without ever being invaded or destroyed; Philadelphia is a city of brotherly love and equality, not a city infected by plague nor the scene of *Evangeline* and Gabriel’s death-bed reunion. Using place names as a way to frame selections from *Evangeline* might invite readers to look at each place on its own rather than see these places as respites from or within a diaspora narrative.⁵⁷ As Allen suggests regarding the classification of fiction by geographical place, such framing suggests that readers approached literary texts as an alternative source of information (47-48).⁵⁸ Certainly reading “for” place would lend support to the undoing of ontological distinctions between the physical world and the world on and through the page. If one wanted to learn about Louisiana, or at least how Louisiana had been represented, one could read Longfellow’s three Louisiana poems extracted from *Evangeline*. Each poem potentially mediates a reader’s sense of the place it describes.

Mutual mediation, however, raises the possibility that readers not only read the poem for a sense of place, but also understood the place names as an invitation to a particular kind of aesthetic experience. As we saw with “Ode to a Nightingale” by way of Hampstead, the poem offers little in the way of local description, yet framing the Ode under “Hampstead” insists that

⁵⁷ For a project illuminating the differences in narrative rhythm in nineteenth-century novels and nineteenth-century long poems, see Julie Ellison, “Best-selling Poems in the Age of the Novel.” This project will zero in on the tensions in verse tales narrating transatlantic exile, such as *Gertrude of Wyoming* and *Evangeline*, between narrative action and “sustained episodes of emotional expressiveness,” advancing an argument that verse tales provide a genre for “fus[ing] individual character” with national character and national fantasy. My own project has been enriched by Ellison’s shared interest in attending to modes of intensification in specifically transatlantic poems.

⁵⁸ For example, Allen highlights how interpretations of Conan Doyle’s *A Study in Scarlet* (1887) might change if read by way of its setting (Utah) (44).

the imaginative flights of the Ode also belong to the world. Davis, describing a Dickinson poem, writes, “The poem seems to pertain to its topic rather than to speak to it or convey it” (*Ornamental* 130). This idea of “pertaining to” tells us something about how reference works in *Places*, but Longfellow’s reference works differently than Dickinson’s ornamentation for reference makes it possible to believe both that the poem conveys the force of something that exists in the world and that the poem conveys the reader elsewhere.⁵⁹ This is an extension of what we have seen Campbell and Shelley experiment with, inviting readers to use Wyoming or an exoticized East as a vehicle for imagining a new world or even a new reality. And this might illuminate differences between Brooks’s desires and her readers’ desires regarding *Zóphiël*: while Brooks wanted to use various exotic places and conventions of intensity to cultivate an amplified reading experience, many nineteenth-century readers read *Zóphiël* “for” place alone, meaning for the place in which it was written. Reading “The River Têche” under “Têche, River, LA.” in *Poems of Places*, then, not only suggests reading “for” place—reading for a sense of a distant or actual place—but also invites reading “through” place—using real places as an occasion to authorize giving yourself over to aesthetic experiences when you read. As opposed to the recognizable topoi of Wyoming, the tropics, the East, *Poems of Places* insists that any place can serve this role, including “The River Têche”:

Softly the evening came. The sun from the western horizon
 Like a magician extended his golden wand o’er the landscape;
 Twinkling vapor arose; and sky and water and forest
 Seemed all on fire at the touch, and melted and mingled together.
 Hanging between two skies, a cloud with edges of silver,
 Floated the boat, with its dripping oars, on the motionless water.
 Filled was Evangeline’s heart with inexpressible sweetness.
 Touched by the magic spell, the sacred fountains of feeling

⁵⁹ In Davis’s account, Dickinson’s poetry “does not house or embody meaning, then, but is set in a dislocated relation to the Open, toward which it draws our attention” (60). Longfellow’s reference does not draw the reader into the Open; it allows the reader to believe that the poem and world are in relation with each other.

Glowed with the light of love, as the skies and waters around her. (p.48; II, ii, 124-132)⁶⁰

When read in the context of *Evangeline*, these lines invite readers to further imagine Louisiana as the sun is setting as a glowing, otherworldly place. When printed under “The River Têche,” the place becomes not just what we read for but the occasion of our reading.

In these lines from “The River Têche,” *Evangeline* appears not only as a displaced heroine but, like Gertrude, as a reader or spectator who feels “touched” by the scene to which she devotes herself. Like figures in a painting by George Caleb Bingham, or perhaps like one of Shelley’s figures, *Evangeline* sits in a boat and seems suspended in loveliness. The distinctions between parts of the scene dissolve and are “melted and mingled together.” This happens not only as sky and water and forest all glow and so grow together in the setting sun’s golden light, but also as sky and water reflect each other so that the boat appears to float not in water or in a reflection of sky but as if it were “[h]anging between two skies.” This might remind us of “Kéramos” when the reader moves between azure sky and azure glaze. So total is the sunset’s magic that the boat appears first to the reader as a cloud, then seems a cloud compared to a boat. Water drips down from the oars even as water rises up to the sky, catching the light as it rises even as light shines down and catches the boat (“edges of silver”) and the water. Like Shelley’s woven leaves and woven light, it’s briefly unclear whether we’re viewing the water as if it were a sunlit sky with a silver-edged cloud, or whether we’re viewing the sky as if it were water with a silver-edged boat. “Hanging between two skies,” *Evangeline*, like those dripping oars, stays in place yet begins to melt and mingle herself with the “skies and waters around her.” With skies made of waters and waters made of skies, the stock phrase “fountains of feeling / Glowd with the light of love” gains significance as one more source of water so that *Evangeline*’s figurative,

⁶⁰ The line numbers would obviously be different in “The River Têche” as a standalone poem. Because Longfellow did not make changes to these lines, however, and because *Evangeline* seems more generally accessible today than *Poems of Places*, I quote the lines from the full poem.

interior “fountains of feeling / Glowed” as brightly “as the skies and waters around her.” Similarly, the dead metaphor of feeling “Touched” regains its tactility. Initially “hanging between two skies,” at a distance from both, Evangeline eventually responds as if touched by the scenery, her body seeming to dissolve and enter the scene.

This image—of a boat “[h]anging between two skies” with a human figure dissolving into the scene—is a figure for the mutual mediation I’ve proposed Longfellow explores through reference in *Poems of Places*. Having water reflect the sky is hardly a new figure: we’ve seen Shelley rely on it, and Wylie used it for her description of the Monongahela.⁶¹ But in this poem of place, “The River Tête,” there is a motionless boat marking the distance and the traffic between these two elements and locations. The water and the sky are not the same, yet are both called “skies.” This might seem like the water imitates the sky, or the sky projects its image across the water—but Longfellow complicates the sky’s priority. He does not focus on the water’s mimesis of the sky, but on how we see the scene in the water when viewed through the lens of “sky” (the boat becomes a cloud, e.g.). Similarly, as water drops from the oars and rises from the river into the atmosphere, water presumably fills the air so that the boat could be said to be floating between two waters as well. In watching water move through the air, we see the air and the sky as if through the lens of water. Water is a medium through which we view the sky, even as sky becomes a medium through which we sense (if not view) the water. All of it, not just the reflection in the water, is glowing. And the observer rests, poised at a distance from both, yet then able to imagine herself becoming like the “skies and waters around her.” Those plural skies and waters (so that both mediate the other) which surround Evangeline allow for an aesthetic experience that feels both otherworldly and of the world.

⁶¹ See also Davis’s elegant readings of Thoreau’s ungrammatical “Sky water” and Dickinson’s “Two Butterflies went out at Noon” (F571B). The former appears in “‘Just apply a weight’: Thoreau and the Aesthetics of Ornament,” *ELH* 77.3 (Fall 2010): 561-587; 577-578. The latter appears in *Ornamental Aesthetics*, 92.

The scene further comments on mutual mediation within *Poems of Places* with its famous description of a mockingbird's song. In Campbell's endnotes, we encountered the mockingbird as an invitation for Campbell's readers to imagine themselves hearing and responding to the aesthetic effects of a North American bird's song through the page. When reading *Evangeline* from start to finish, the mockingbird seems again to be a marker of place. But in the context of "The River Têche" in "America. Southern States" of *Poems of Places*, we can see that the mockingbird is not only a figure for the American poet but for the collection of poems.

Then from a neighboring thicket the mocking-bird, wildest of singers,
Swinging aloft on a willowy spray that hung o'er the water,
Shook from his little throat such floods of delirious music,
That the whole air and the woods and the waves seemed silent to listen.
Plaintive at first were the tones and sad; then soaring to madness
Seemed they to follow or guide the revel of frenzied Bacchantes.
Single notes were then heard, in sorrowful, low lamentation;
Till, having gathered them all, he flung them abroad in derision,
As when, after a storm, a gust of wind through the tree-tops
Shakes down the rattling rain in a crystal shower on the branches.
With such a prelude as this, and hearts that throbbed with emotion,
Slowly they entered the Têche, where it flows through the green Opelousas,
And, through the amber air, above the crest of the woodland,
Saw the column of smoke that rose from a neighboring dwelling;—
Sounds of a horn they heard, and the distant lowing of cattle. (p.49-50; II, ii, 133-147)

The mockingbird is singled out for its range: it performs tones of plaintiveness, rhapsody, madness, lament. In order for us to imagine its calls, the poem frames them first in terms of literary modes: our knowledge of the Bakkhai mediates how we imagine the mockingbird's call. However, at the end of the mockingbird's performance, the mockingbird's song(s) are labeled a "prelude" for their arrival in a new place, the Têche, also the name of the poem we have been reading: "Slowly they entered the Têche..." The place name affects how we approach the mockingbird, literature affects how we imagine the mockingbird's song, and the mockingbird

affects how we approach the place which, in *Poems of Places*, becomes the poem itself. Within “The River Têche” we “enter[] the Têche” by way of song.

We have a sense of what it might mean to enter the poem because we have already read of Evangeline’s response to the scene. Sitting in the boat, she seems to radiate outward, upward, and all around like light. When “The River Têche” is featured as a stand-alone extract rather than as a disruption to narrative action, the descriptions of the natural world both here and earlier in the poem represent a sense of “movement in place,” of the physical transport, touch, and transformation we have come to associate with vivid reading.⁶² As early as Part I, sea-fogs and mists from the Atlantic ocean surround Grand-Pré from above, while “[c]olumns of pale blue smoke...ascend[]” from the homes of Grand-Pré, presumably joining with those mists and fogs (p.6; I, i, 31). In Louisiana, grape-vines and Spanish moss reach down from trees while the lotus “[l]ift[s] her golden crown above the heads of the boatmen” (p.45; II, ii, 70). While these examples emphasize that the vertical movements are often movements of smoke, sound, and light, in “Atchafalaya” they extend importantly to hummingbirds traversing the grape-vines:

Swinging from its [the cedar’s] great arms, the trumpet-flower and the grapevine
Hung their ladder of ropes aloft like the ladder of Jacob,
On whose pendulous stairs the angels ascending, descending,
Were the swift humming-birds, that flitted from blossom to blossom. (p.46; II, ii, 80-83)

In the context of *Evangeline*, this allusion to Jacob’s ladder reinforces the diaspora narrative: the simile of hummingbirds to angels is revealed to be Evangeline’s dream, a dream that fills her with love and invites her and us to believe that Evangeline and Gabriel as well as the Acadians will be gathered together again as god’s chosen people. In *Poems of Places*, however, the

⁶² Ellison, “Best-selling Poems in the Age of the Novel,” identifies two distinct rhythms — narrative and scene — in nineteenth-century long poems such as *Evangeline*. See also “News, Blues, and Cowper’s Busy World,” in which Ellison writes: “Fancy, then, is the faculty that runs around while staying put” (254). The “movement in place” that I discuss clearly relates to fancy, and indeed Montgomery’s poem with which Longfellow opens his collection is a perfect example of what Ellison theorizes. I focus more here on readers’ rhetoric of feeling as if they are somewhere else than on the kinds of national, international, and global networks that fancy allows its practitioners to construct.

political significance of the Biblical allusion takes a backseat to the relationship between place and page. In Longfellow's description of humming-birds ascending and descending the grapevines, we find a commentary on reading *Poems of Places*: the winged creatures of this world seem as wonderful as the winged creatures of another world; the hummingbirds flit so quickly that we seem to see and yet barely see them; like reference, they establish brief points of contact between their angel-like bodies and the thickly material grapevines; they move up and down, ushering us from one place to another. It "smack[s] of reality" even as it seems ethereal and threatens to dissolve.⁶³ In response to this image of real yet almost otherworldly creatures (hummingbirds that appear first as real, then in a vision) moving swiftly up and down along the grapevine, Evangeline's soul feels "Lighted . . . with the glory of regions celestial" (p.46; II, ii, 85). Like the glow from the fountains of feeling in the "Têche" passage, witnessing nearly invisible birds trafficking like angels produces a glowing effect on and in Evangeline. Because she is at a distance from "regions celestial," she is able to experience an exquisite intimacy with them as the humming-birds move up and down the grape-vines in both the scene and in her vision. These grapevines as links between proximate and distant—real and surreal worlds—appear again at the end of "The River Têche":

Silence reigned o'er the place. The line of shadow and sunshine
Ran near the tops of the trees; but the house itself was in shadow,
And from its chimney-top, ascending and slowly expanding
Into the evening air, a thin blue column of smoke rose.

⁶³ In an essay on Alexander Pope, reprinted by Ticknor and Fields in the 1850s, Thomas De Quincey had used Jacob's dream as a way to describe a kind of reading experience—a sublime reading of Milton in which you read for power as opposed to information. Longfellow admired the De Quincey he read through Ticknor and Fields, as mentioned in Ltr 1206 (Jan. 17, 1852), *Letters*, vol. III: "We have just been reading De Quincey's *Reminiscences of the Lakes and the Lakers*, as he calls them: Wordsworth, Southey, Coleridge, and Lloyd. A very interesting book, just published here in Boston, but not yet in England,—except in old magazines" (327). As Hillen's footnote mentions, "This was Vol. VII of the first collected edition of Thomas De Quincey's works, published by Ticknor, Reed, & Fields" (327). The reference to Jacob's dream appears in Vol. IX (just two volumes later). While I cannot prove that Longfellow read this passage, or that he would have consciously connected De Quincey's use of Jacob's dream to stand for reading with his own use of Jacob's dream in *Evangeline*, I cannot help but draw attention to the suggestive possibility. Silverman, p. 50, alerted me to this De Quincey essay.

In the rear of the house, from the garden gate, ran a pathway
Through the great groves of oak to the skirts of the limitless prairie,
Into whose sea of flowers the sun was slowly descending.
Full in his track of light, like ships with shadowy canvas
Hanging loose from their spars in a motionless calm in the tropics,
Stood a cluster of trees, with tangled cordage of grape-vines. (p.50; II, iii, 14-23)⁶⁴

This description of place feels kinetic: smoke ascends, grape-vines hang down. And instead of a boat “hanging between two skies,” or trees firmly rooted in place, the trees appear as a ship “in a motionless calm,” as if the trees could sail away into the prairie’s “sea of flowers.” This sense of being in motion while motionless, or sensing potential motion while motionless, calls back to Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale” by way of Hampstead and to the idea of traveling in one’s easy-chair. Framed as a way to read for the river itself, “The River Tête” becomes an occasion for readers to discover the feeling of reading represented as part of the world.

The distances between shared referent, place, and page create the opportunity for vividness—and the opportunity to locate an otherwise diffuse intimacy. Rather than seeking a particular object for her love, Evangeline is touched by and in turn glows with the light of love for no one in particular. Elaine Freedgood calls the potential differences between places in the world and their realist representations on the page an “open circuit of referentiality” (“Fictional Settlements” 409). She argues further that any gap, any distance between the place and the page becomes a seedling for imperialism, even colonization.⁶⁵ There are many poems in *Poems of Places* to which Freedgood’s critique could be applied, whether or not they aspire to a realist aesthetic. I have been arguing, however, that Longfellow offers a more capacious view of what it means to be in a place, and of what belongs to a place in the world. Understanding this idea of a more expansive reality helps us to see gaps, marks of difference, or distance between real places and their representations in a potentially different light. We might also view such distance in

⁶⁴ In *Poems of Places*, Longfellow does not observe the section break between sections ii and iii.

⁶⁵ See Freedgood. The quote “open circuit of referentiality” can be found in “Fictional Settlements,” 409.

terms of what Karen Swann describes as an “intimate strangeness” (“Strange Time” 279). Swann details the “remote, intimate beauty” that both calls Keats into his power as a poet, and anticipates the ways in which readers ever since feel called to mourn (and read) Keats. With *Poems of Places*, readers seem to experience a “remote, intimate beauty” of and through places; they buy the books with the hopes of feeling transported somewhere else while knowing they will be wherever it is they read. At times readers seem to long for intimacy with the poet: to know how Hemans described Massachusetts, or what Byron thought of in Italy; to feel led as if by the hands of a remote yet loving guide. But, like *Evangeline*’s transfer of desire from a particular object (Gabriel) to everything she encounters (all people, the landscape), *Poems of Places* focuses not on poets but on intimacy with the aesthetic itself. Distance like the bay between San Francisco and Tamalpais and like the arm’s length between a blind traveler and their guide invites readers into an idea of their own strange intimacy with printed literature. It is not the distance here between the living and the dead, but the distance between your life when you are reading and your life when you are not. In Swann’s gorgeous reading the coupling of a proper name (“John Milton”) with something “at once more foreign and more intimate” (hair from the deceased Milton) mobilizes the effects of the “strange time of reading” (278). In *Poems of Places* the frequent coupling of a proper name (“Têche, the River”) with something both more foreign and more intimate (two skies, hummingbirds like angels, Louisiana, the poem *Evangeline*) mobilizes the effects of vividness, the strange time and place of a kind of reading that feels exquisite because of the distance that makes it feel close.

Epilogue: Reading Backwards and Forwards

Larcom's engagement with Longfellow's *Poems of Places* provides a fitting conclusion to the dissertation that her own poem of place helped introduce. In *Places*, we see Longfellow imagining a theory of reading that his nineteenth-century readers eagerly put into practice. Larcom's uptake of Longfellow's project extended beyond her defense of Longfellow's classifications: in 1879, the year the final volumes of *Places* appeared, Larcom published *Landscape in American Poetry*, an "illustrated Christmas book" perhaps better considered as one reader's digest of Longfellow's five "America" volumes.¹ A single volume of about 120 pages, *Landscape* incorporates excerpts of poems, illustrations of American landscapes, and prose by Larcom reflecting on particular geographical features, seasons, times of day, places, lines of poetry, and poets. While Larcom cites a few poems that do not appear in Longfellow's anthology, and limits her selections to mostly American poets, the vast majority of quotations, paraphrases, and titles can be found in *Places* vols. 25-29. Even as quotes from other poets' poems are separated spatially from Larcom's prose, they are integrated semantically into her sentences, as seen in this excerpt from the book's first section, which focuses on references to and descriptions of the River Charles:

The house in which a great poet has lived always interests us, but it can not hold so much of his life as the trees through which his thoughts have made Aeolian melodies, or the roadsides along which his imaginations have blossomed into song.

And the magic of poetry transfigures any landscape, making it beautiful beyond itself as immeasurably as the ideal transcends the real.

[...]

¹ *The Literary World; a Monthly Review of Current Literature* 11.9 (Apr 24, 1880): 140.

The poetry of Lowell is luminous with the ever-returning gleam of this same quiet river. It is the mirror of his most delicate fancies, and he has given us its scenery in exquisite word-painting. In the “Indian-Summer Reverie”—

.... A stripe of nether sky,
It—
Slips seaward silently through marshes purple and green.

And the lover of the river is also the lover of the sea-marshes through which it flows:

Dear marshes! vain to him the gift of sight,
Who can not in their various incomes share,
From every season drawn, of shade and light;
Who sees in them but levels brown and bare.

All round, upon the river’s slippery edge,
Witching to deeper calm the drowsy tide,
Whispers and leans the breeze-entangling sedge.

And there are—

The wide-ranked mowers, wading to the knee,
Their sharp scythes panting through the thick-set grass. (pp.7-8; 9)

Larcom relies primarily on the two poems Longfellow classified under “Charles, the River”: Longfellow’s “To the River Charles” and Lowell’s “Indian-Summer Reverie,” which Longfellow had already excerpted and retitled “Charles River Marshes.” Rather than ask us to read both poems, Larcom asks us to read her reading of poems and poets affiliated with the river. Though Lowell’s poem focuses on how the river and the marshes change over the course of four seasons, Larcom turns the poem into a series of present-tense descriptions so that there *are* mowers, regardless of season, and there is sedge, and so that the reader seems able to behold the river as a whole even as it is represented in fragmented fashion. This is her take on mutual mediation. Her opening paragraph seems to privilege the local landscape as the physical site and even medium for poetic productions. Yet in the next paragraph, she states that any poetic representation of a landscape is a transfiguration. She suggests that we are interested in the real

places that shape writers even as we know that poetic descriptions refigure real places. Larcom writes as if she is showing her readers a place when she is really showing them how vividly she has read works such as *Places*. The text, as we can see, is seamless yet has all its seams showing.

The play between visible seams and seamlessness testifies to Larcom's savvy understanding of distance as a means to produce a feeling of nearly physical closeness, what I have been describing as the mechanics of vividness. Foregrounding the differences between landscapes pressed against but unaligned with each other enables Larcom to perform an unbroken reverie. Because the book's list of illustrations doubles as its Table of Contents, reading the book is like drifting from poems to places to descriptions of reading, from the River Charles to brooks in general to Bryant's poetry to Larcom's assessments of Bryant. The cover is representative of this experience. Set apart in what looks like a piece of paper pinned to the cover, the words "Landscape in American Poetry" appear in one landscape near one kind of tree, even as another landscape with other trees, water lilies, and a heron appear behind the title "page." Many of the illustrations within the book replicate this composite effect (see fig. 10). They present two or three natural scenes as if one scene is papered over the other, its bottom right corner peeling up to remind us that we are reading pages. *Landscape in American Poetry* becomes the landscape of American poetry and of American print culture as mapped by or mediated through one particular nineteenth-century reader. Though Larcom presents the work as a way of experiencing places known intimately to American poets, the book doubles as a public performance of her own intimacy with printed literature, mediated by Longfellow's *Poems of Places* and circulating within a transatlantic print culture.

When we read back over *Transatlantic Vividness*, we can see that each chapter relies on "transatlantic" to do a different kind of work. In chapter one, we began with a poem whose



*" 'Tis a woodland enchanted !
By no sadder spirit
Than blackbirds and thrushes
That whistle to cheer it."*

Figure 10. J. Appleton Brown, "'Tis a woodland enchanted!" in *Landscape in American Poetry* by Lucy Larcom (D. Appleton & C. 1879) , 81. Web. *HathiTrust*. January 2017.

narrative revolves around and comments upon “Transatlantic Liberty.” Yet we also saw that the Atlantic and the transatlantic served to conceptualize distance as an aesthetic problem in this poem and its reception. Campbell imagines a historically and geographically distant North America through the figure of Gertrude, a figure who relocates her desire for a distant geographical place to her emotionally forceful encounter with print. This expansion of the transatlantic from a geopolitical relation into a figure for the distance between reader and page unfurls in subsequent chapters. Where chapter one moves from exploring transatlanticism as narrative content to transatlantic as generative concept, chapter two raises questions about how transatlantic economies, of publishing and reading along with slave labor and coffee, shape the aesthetic strategies and reception of a poem that treats its writer’s experiences of Cuba as always already literary.

The dissertation thus explores transatlantic reception history and print culture even as it expands its spatialized figures beyond the Atlantic world. Chapter three follows the American reception of Percy Shelley’s poetry and poetic figures in order to demonstrate how ideals of reading are figured spatially via transatlantic as well as transcontinental and cosmic treks. And even as Longfellow’s *Poems of Places* seeks to realize a global vision, the anthology remains the product of a specifically transatlantic print culture: the vast majority of Longfellow’s contributors were American and British poets. Taken together, these manifold transatlantics—as geographical location, as geopolitical relationship, as narrative and descriptive setting, as print culture, as reception study, as figure for distance—show that for nineteenth-century Anglo-American readers, the transatlantic served as a flexible and privileged example for a certain idea of geography that could in turn be used to explore aesthetic distance and intimacy.

Clearly there is no need to restrict a theory of vividness to the transatlantic, and future work might open up this aesthetic category even further beyond the Anglo-American dyad. I have retained the term “transatlantic,” however, because the writers under consideration addressed specifically Anglo-American audiences, and because “transatlantic” was a geographical example privileged by nineteenth-century writers and readers. We have seen this throughout the dissertation. When Walter Scott praises the “transatlantic vegetation” on display in “Gertrude,” or when the *North American Review* complains that within English periodicals “Transatlantic verse is rarely mentioned without ridicule or affected contempt,” both authors use “Transatlantic” as a stand in for North America from the perspective of Great Britain. The term names a specific geography and geographical relationship even as it also stands in for a general there-ness, or their-ness. Similarly, when Gertrude stares across the Atlantic ocean and Shiloh must “allow for the two voyages across the Atlantic,” these plot points do more than reference a geopolitical or aesthetico-political allegory. They morph into meditations on distance: when the “luminous distance trembled like water, and was no more stable than the sea” in Wylie’s novel, that sea is importantly the Atlantic. Further, they morph into claims about intimate reading experiences: “we make our imaginary voyage across the Atlantic, and are landed in England at the Inn of which Shenstone wrote,” the *Atlantic Monthly* murmurs approvingly regarding the experience of reading *Poems of Places*.² While it would be a mistake to restrict vividness to transatlantic literary exchange or to poems set in the Atlantic world, it is important to point out the transatlantic’s privileged role in representing distance as the very grounds for vividness in nineteenth-century Anglo-American verse culture.

² “Gertrude of Wyoming,” *Quarterly Review*, 1 (May 1809): 248; Rev. of *The Poets and Poetry of America; with a Historical Introduction*. By Rufus W. Griswold. *North American Review*, c. 1 vol. 58, 1844: 1-39; 5. Web. HathiTrust. 30 July 2014; *The Orphan Angel* (1954), 157; 32; “Longfellow’s Poems of Places (Book Review),” *Atlantic Monthly* 39 (Jan 1, 1877): 375.

Taken together, the chapters of this dissertation also raise questions about the gender dynamics of vividness. Along with the figure of Silver standing in for vividness itself, all of our figures for vivid readers have been women. The fictional Gertrude, Eglá, Asia, Ione, Panthea, and Evangeline, accompany the historical Brooks's and Wylie's descriptions of themselves as child readers and Larcom's self-portrait as a Shakespeare-lover in Bermoothes. Regardless of each poet's gender, they have all chosen to represent their ideal readers as women. This pattern confirms what Wylie's poetic novel suggested: that vividness in and through nineteenth-century poems might be productively placed in conversation with histories of the novel. Why, for example, did these poems, their scenes of aesthetic transport, and readers' readings of them *not* occasion more concern about possible moral corruption? Vividness in relation to authors' and readers' gender identities invites further investigation as well. Descriptions of Shelley's slight and slightly feminized body combined with Brooks's ambiguously gendered persona and Longfellow's role as a "male poetess" suggest that even as these poets represented women as especially susceptible readers, their own performances called gender binaries into question.³ What for example does it mean to have men such as Halleck or Haynes perform their vivid readings of Campbell, Shelley, and Longfellow? Finally, in the relationships between Brooks and Southey, Wylie and Shelley, and Longfellow and numerous women readers, including Clarke and Larcom, we have seen how women writers cited vivid reading experiences both to initiate relationships with powerful literary men and to sell poetry.⁴ These examples reveal that there is further work to be done regarding who is represented by whom as experiencing vividness, and how different writers and readers claim vivid reading and to what ends.

³ See Gruesz, "Cafetal," 53, for mention of Brooks's ambiguous gendering in print. For Longfellow as a male poetess, see Eric L. Haralson, "Mars in Petticoats: Longfellow and Sentimental Masculinity," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 51.3 (Dec. 1996): 327-355; and Jackson and Richards, "'The Poetess' and Nineteenth-Century American Women Poets."

⁴ See Richards, *Gender*, for a book-length study of poetic exchanges between Poe and nineteenth-century poetesses.

The same question pertains to my own claim to vivid reading, to what end? Having read backwards to historicize vividness as a mobile aesthetic category in the nineteenth century, we might now conclude by reading forwards with this category as well, asking *where did the vivid go?* Early on I presented Gertrude as a figure for reading backwards, not only for nineteenth-century readers but also for our own reading of “Gertrude of Wyoming”: Gertrude’s back to the viewer, the background scenery standing in for the represented page, projecting a colony back into existence, reading from the back of the book, the idea that vivid writing can be traced back to a sensory impression. What has our method of reading backwards discovered, and how might it move us forward toward future discoveries? I offer a brief answer to this question by way of a landmark twentieth-century poem.

Robert Hass’s “Meditation at Lagunitas” in many ways seems the exact opposite of the poems I have been discussing. Stanley Kunitz praised Hass’s *Field Guide* for being “committed to making ‘felt connection’ between words and body, between body and world” (“Foreword,” xvii). For Kunitz and for the Hass who wrote *Field Guide*, this involves emphasizing a naturalist’s precision, a commitment to geographical accuracy, and what Hass describes as “get[ting] hold of the immediate world around [him]” (“Preface,” x). Hass’s second collection, *Praise*, did not abandon these principles. “Meditation at Lagunitas” is located through its title and its naturalistic descriptions of Northern California. A standard reading of the poem might emphasize how despite the claim that “a word is elegy to what it signifies,” *blackberry* actually names a rich and textured set of associations. These associations are entirely particular to Hass’s experiences at Lagunitas, with his friend, with the woman, and with his own memories. It would seem that “each particular [does not] erase[] / The luminous clarity of a general idea,” but that particulars are themselves luminous—a striking contrast to the glittery idealizations driving

Shelley's and Wiley's luminosity in chapter three. In this reading, it is the fullness, not the failure, of language on which the poem meditates. It seems to be a celebration of embodied and emplaced experience, of the unforgettable impressions left on us by real places and real persons and described with striking language. But when read by way of this study of vividness, we can see that Hass's poem is also taken with how distance creates the desire for those impressions. In lines I overlooked for far too long, Hass writes:

There was a woman
I made love to and I remember how, holding
her small shoulders in my hands sometimes,
I felt a violent wonder at her presence
like a thirst for salt, for my childhood river
with its island willows, silly music from the pleasure boat,
muddy places where we caught the little orange-silver fish
called *pumpkinseed*. It hardly had to do with her.
Longing, we say, because desire is full
of endless distances. I must have been the same to her. (ll.16-25)

Spatializing desire by emphasizing the *long* in *longing*, Hass does not resolve the question of how language does or does not affix to or account for reality. But he suggests that distance enables the experience of presence, that desire for a place to which he can never travel (his childhood river, which is to say his childhood) not only emerges from but facilitates "violent wonder." Tellingly, presence is compared to a thirst. We ought not settle too quickly, then, on the interpretation that this poem is all about the powerful force of experience, whether in or out of language.

When as an undergraduate I first read this poem on the East Coast, never having been to Northern California, I felt or imagined I felt the effects of *blackberry, blackberry, blackberry*. It did not make me think of the poem as a "California poem," even as everyone told me that it was a poem about language and place. For me it was a poem about how I wanted poems to make me feel, and I see now that this reading was not wrong. Rather than a poem celebrating the richness

of particular language, bodies, and place, we might also read the poem as celebrating how the distance between description and the reader actually generates the desire to believe that reading a word might produce what Hass calls “tenderness,” and what I have been calling intimacy. After all, this poem is about intimacy: how it arises in the distance between an idea and an impression, one’s past and one’s present, two people, the reader and the page. The poem then becomes less an argument with linguistic philosophy and more a reminder that the desire for “felt connection”—with a lover, with muddy places, with Lagunitas, with printed words—emerges from and depends upon distance. Typically read as a poem of precise naturalistic description and of how language communicates the force of experience while being itself a forceful experience, “Meditation at Lagunitas” is perhaps better understood as a twentieth-century afterlife of the nineteenth-century aesthetic category we have been studying. The only reason *blackberry* can be a source of tenderness *for readers* and not just for Hass is because of Hass’s acknowledgement and harnessing of the distance between written description and sensory world.

We can read “Meditation at Lagunitas” as an example of twentieth-century vividness, then, not because of its precise description of place but because of its meditations on distance. While Hass’s aesthetic style is a long way from Campbell’s “Gertrude,” accurate and placed in ways that Campbell’s Wyoming could never be, both poems use distance to generate aesthetic force, which is to say a kind of aesthetic presence. This suggests that histories of poetry emphasizing the image as precise, direct, or even deep might not so much break from as emerge from and call back to more generic, overtly aestheticized geographical descriptions such as those highlighted in many nineteenth-century Anglo-American poems. Rather than fall back on the practice of reading descriptions of everyday life or the natural world as invitations to

transcendence, *Transatlantic Vividness* recovers and opens up a long history of reading in which the transcendent, markedly distant, might be imagined as being already present in our lives.

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