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Yours, Anonymous: One American's Self-Fashioning
and Exploration of the Foreign in 19th Century Latin America

The ladies lolled carelessly on their velvet cushioned seats while they sent the white curling smoke of their cigars wreathing among their tresses with all the apparent luxurious employment that can be imagined for an opium-eater of the East. The young men were showing their 'bits of blood' and equestrianism before their mistresses as they rolled along a beautiful road lined on either side with the lemon, orange and thick-leaved cherimoya trees that 'shed their fragrance on the desert air'.¹

Imbued with the exotic, this passage would be at home in many a novel of the 19th century. References to the opium dens of the East and colorful descriptions of the cherimoya-lined boulevards, though in the words of a North American, are hardly descriptive of this particular author's home. In fact, this anonymous Philadelphian writer pens these words to his friend Ned back in the United States in 1827 while employed as an officer on the *U.S.S. Brandywine* and traveling around Latin America. Later compiled into a letterbook, his letters home describe much of what he sees on his voyage: foreign women, exotic fashion, natural disasters, and other evidence of the foreignness he encounters.

But beyond entertainment, why would the anonymous traveler describe all these sites in his letters? As historian Terry Caesar asserts, "Americans travel at least as much to try to discover their own otherness in other countries as they do to use these countries in order to invent themselves."² Indeed, a bit paradoxically, our anonymous author provides us with a fairly personalized American identity: that of an upper-middle-class man voyaging abroad in Latin America. While it is impossible to say just how 'typical' his experience is, our author is not

¹ Anonymous. "Letters Written During a South American Cruise," 1826-27, 1832, Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, 169.

² Terry Caesar, *Forgiving the Boundaries* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 43-44.

alone in what he found fascinating in these foreign lands. In fact, those people and places he does write home about indicate that his audience, too, likely found these amusing, intriguing, and, ultimately, foreign.

As the recent growth of Latin American studies has demonstrated,³ transdisciplinary cultural studies can enhance our knowledge of travel writing and its status as “collectively produced discourse.”⁴ Our author’s work is both a literary and a historical source, both personal letters to a close friend and a bound manuscript intended for larger audiences to read.

Approaching the letters from only one vantage point limits our understanding of what this traveler was trying to do, and so we can gain the most by considering this work as an object, a collection of letters, a manuscript, and a book. This fascinating letterbook describes the experiences of a North American⁵ in South America soon after the tumult of revolutions and issuance of the Monroe Doctrine, a period of flourishing transnational crosscurrents that is surprisingly poorly covered by historians. While we must be careful not to read too much into our author's potential connection with the sentiments of either Manifest Destiny or the Monroe Doctrine, it is important to note that his writing fell squarely between the issuance of the latter and the first usage of the phrase “Manifest Destiny.”⁶ Throughout his four-year journey around South America, this anonymous young man continues to write home to his friend Ned from onboard the *U.S.S. Brandywine* and ashore in Rio de Janeiro, Valparaiso, Santiago, Lima, and various other cities. Collected in a letterbook and perhaps meant for publication, these letters

³ See Charles C. Mann, *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus* (New York: Knopf, 2005).

⁴ Ralph Pordzik, *The Wonder of Travel: Fiction, Tourism and the Social Construction of the Nostalgic* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2005), 12.

⁵ As Antonio Barrera-Osorio explains it, “The term ‘America’ refers to the American continents. This usage was already in place in the sixteenth century and is still current in many American countries, with the exception of the United States, where ‘America’ means only the United States.” Antonio Barrera-Osorio, *Experiencing Nature: The Spanish American Empire and the Early Scientific Revolution* (Austin: University of Austin Press, 2006), 12.

⁶ Harvey asserts that the usage of the term Manifest Destiny was commonplace by around 1800. Bruce A. Harvey, *American Geographics: U.S. National Narratives and the Representation of the Non-European World, 1830-1865* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 7.

both inadvertently act as a snapshot of bourgeois life in nineteenth-century Latin America and also quite intentionally serve to help the young man portray himself as a conscientious, curious North American traveler with a “besoin de voyager.”⁷ Though just one man out of many, one possible identity out of millions, our writer is a genuine representative of the United States abroad in the 1820s. This particular representative defines himself against the different classes, religions, and peoples that he encounters throughout his travels, and the resulting man appears well-versed in books and thoroughly intrigued by the world outside of them. The picture that emerges is a man comfortable with his notion of “American” culture but still unclear where he stands as politically representative of the United States.

This paper expands on the literature of the non-European travel narrative of this period through an examination of what the anonymous North American travel writer views as foreign and what he views as familiar on his voyage, how he interprets these sites for his relations back home, and what his narrative tells audiences about his identity. His letters offer readers a glimpse of the utterly foreign and the unexpectedly relatable in a rapidly changing Latin American world and, ultimately, of what it meant for him to be an American abroad in the 1820s.

The Journey

Our author leaves New York in August 1826 out of a “besoin de voyager,”⁸ or a need to travel. He is employed as an officer on the *U.S.S. Brandywine*, though his duties are unclear.⁹ Musings on his pre-departure activities and goodbyes take up the majority of the first letter, “The Parting.” In this nine-page letter, he writes as much for his readers’ amusement as for his own, describing his sleeping arrangements thusly:

⁷ “Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 4.

⁸ “Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 4.

⁹ The most he says of his commission is that he found his quarters onboard the ship to be “rather rough lodgings for a commissioned officer.” “Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 10.

Our place was filled with barrels and trunks...and more than once I was disposed to curse the beams that were placed too low for my altitude to move under without the hazard of meetings that I assure you were rather unpleasant...I put my foot on something which I imagined to be a dog as there was a sort of growling mutter issuing from the spot where it lay, but to my astonishment I was undeceived by an exclamation pretty nearly in the following language ‘Got damn! Sacra noms de dieu! Vat! is dis de treatment for de gentleman!’ in a tone that bespoke considerable irritation of feeling. I found him to be a fellow sufferer and after an understanding we comforted each other with the hope of being better accommodated in the morning.¹⁰

He discusses seasickness, general duties of the crew, how time is calculated onboard a ship, and various other aspects of life at sea. He acquaints his readers with the “horse latitudes,” the procedure for rescuing a man overboard, line-crossing ceremonies, and how to bury those who die at sea. His restlessness en route to Rio de Janeiro (the ship’s first major stop) results in numerous poetic quotations from other travelers, such as Conrad Malte-Brun, William Cowper, and George Gordon Byron VI—Lord Byron.

A month after his departure from Philadelphia, our traveler arrives in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The ship harbors at Rio for approximately three weeks, during which time, our writer and his fellow crewmembers go ashore, call on a few of the (European) inhabitants, observe the Emperor, visit nearby towns, and partake in local entertainment such as visiting the orchestra. The majority of his time seems to be spent on social calls, enjoying walks around the Alamedas with local gentry—though he is not particularly impressed by the city’s orchestra and found many of the ladies to be very indecently dressed.¹¹ His companions all appear to be middle or upper class citizens, so their activities generally include bourgeois entertainment and exclude the opportunity to venture into the poorer parts of town. Though he does not discuss the “rougher” people and places he visits in the town, there was no lack of industry in Rio during the 1820s. Its

¹⁰ “Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 9-10.

¹¹ As he notes, “This city affords much to interest and much to disgust the traveller.” “Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 28.

markets were essential for many agricultural and mining businesses, providing staples for locales all over the Atlantic world.¹² The gold boom in the mid-eighteenth century caused the Portuguese crown to move its South American capital from Salvador to Rio de Janeiro. Brazil quickly became a major slave importer, bringing in over 240,000 slaves from 1800-1810 alone, many of which were in the region surrounding Rio de Janeiro.¹³ Minas Gerias had the largest slave population of all the provinces in South America by 1800.¹⁴ By the 1810s, Rio's slave population was over 160,000—more than half the city's population.¹⁵ While he does make a few comments on this slave population, discussions of commerce and agriculture are almost completely absent in his letters home.

Next, the *Brandywine* sets off around Cape Horn. This notoriously dangerous voyage goes rather well for the ship, and our traveler copies the porter's journal, telling Ned that "Our passage round Cape Horn has been very short compared with those of other navigators—La Perouse...was 14 days, Com^d Porter 13, Capt. Basil Hall 14 days, Lord Anson 35, while we made it in seven! And...our time has not been as difficult as those navigators describe theirs."¹⁶ The ship arrives in Valparaiso, Chile, where our writer seems no more enamored of the land and peoples than he had been with Rio de Janeiro. In contrast to its name, the Vale of Paradise, he believes that "the dreams of Elipsium [Elysium] have faded into a collection of barren hills, and left us to mourn for our enthusiastic fancies in the cold reality of disappointment."¹⁷ He forgoes a description of the town, as he hopes to be returning home soon to tell Ned everything "*in propria*

¹² Jeremy Adelman, *Sovereignty and Revolution in the Iberian Atlantic*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 220.

¹³ Adelman, *Sovereignty and Revolution in the Iberian Atlantic*, 76.

¹⁴ Adelman, *Sovereignty and Revolution in the Iberian Atlantic*, 62.

¹⁵ Adelman, *Sovereignty and Revolution in the Iberian Atlantic*, 62.

¹⁶ "Letters Written During a South American Cruise," 57.

¹⁷ "Letters Written During a South American Cruise," 60.

persona.”¹⁸ However, he has been ordered ashore for an indeterminate amount of time. He eagerly awaits the arrival of the *U.S.S. Peacock*, and though he was originally assured a quick departure, he ends up residing in Valparaiso from late December 1826 to early August 1827. His nine-month residence in Valparaiso affords him the opportunity to visit the Chilean cities of Santiago, Quillota, and Lima, where he spends the majority of his time anxiously awaiting the ship that will take him home. After nearly nine months of waiting, he finally boards another ship to Lima, Peru, where he continues to await the *Brandywine*. As he departs from Valparaiso, his closing thought is that “When the point of Valparaiso wavered in distance I can hardly say it was with regret. I found there some friends during my stay that served to make the anxious hours pass more fleetingly.”¹⁹ In the end, he seems to have spent more of his time anxiously awaiting the ship that will bear him back to the United States. In anticipation of this, he seems reluctant to engage very much with the locals—gentry or otherwise.

During his stay in Lima, our traveller ventures to the nearby city of Callao, taking great interest in the economies of the two cities. He notes that things have changed greatly since the country’s independence, mostly that “the immense revenue derived from South America to the crown of Spain led us to look at this hemisphere as an inexhaustible source of wealth, but since the revolution investigations have shown that the mines are not so profitable as at first sight we might suppose.”²⁰ He also observes that the government is a “military despotism under a Dictor without liberty of the press.”²¹ The past decade had seen a number of bankruptcies in slave-importing businesses, and the merchants in Lima began pushing hard for free-trade rights.²² The Iberian monarchy was very reluctant to allow free trade, especially in Lima, as it threatened to

¹⁸ “Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 61.

¹⁹ “Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 149-150.

²⁰ “Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 151.

²¹ “Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 152.

²² Adelman, *Sovereignty and Revolution in the Iberian Atlantic*, 297.

cut off the Crown's main source of revenue.²³ However, refusing all the merchants' requests would leave it the royal regime vulnerable to revolt.²⁴ In the end, the viceroy convinced the monarchy to open up Callao, Lima's port, to direct trade with foreign companies, but even this measure did not stop protesters in the rest of Peru from continuing to fight for and declare independence in 1821.²⁵ No sooner had Simón Bolívar defeated royalist forces than he marched on the capital and issued his own fiscal demands of the merchants.²⁶ Bolívar's regime collapsed in early 1827, and Andrés de Santa Cruz succeeded him, though his presidency was also short-lived. Throughout these years, the newly independent colonists were caught up in a conflict over what would "fill the void of empire,"²⁷ the resulting tensions of which our author is no doubt describing in this final letter. In September 1827, the *Brandywine* finally arrives, and our traveler hurriedly departs from Lima. Unfortunately, this is where is letters (and the first volume) stop, and it was not possible to locate any further material from our author.

Travel Writing as a Genre

The final manuscript is a letterbook composed of eleven letters, all addressed to his friend Ned and all unsigned. In this form, our source is at an interesting intersection of two often-related genres: travel writing and letter writing. Conventions of both modes of expression influenced our writer's style and intentions, giving the work an intriguing duality of purpose. By using the form of a letter, he can very purposefully present stories and details in a specific order.²⁸ However, this work is not just a collection of letters. It is also a bound manuscript, complete with illustrated title page, epigrams, and later edits. There was likely a second volume,

²³ Adelman, *Sovereignty and Revolution in the Iberian Atlantic*, 297.

²⁴ Adelman, *Sovereignty and Revolution in the Iberian Atlantic*, 297.

²⁵ Adelman, *Sovereignty and Revolution in the Iberian Atlantic*, 297.

²⁶ Adelman, *Sovereignty and Revolution in the Iberian Atlantic*, 301.

²⁷ Adelman, *Sovereignty and Revolution in the Iberian Atlantic*, 307.

²⁸ Roger Chartier, Alain Boureau, and Cécile Dauphin, eds., *Correspondence: Models of Letter-Writing from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 133.

as indicated by the title page art, which depicts an eagle standing atop two bound volumes, clearly labeled “1” and “2”.²⁹ We have none of his letters past late 1827, but this evidence on the cover suggests he wrote an additional volume. The first volume ends before he completes his trip around South America and returns to Philadelphia—another indication that more letters existed at some point.

As loose letters, his work acted as intimate correspondence with a friend back home.³⁰ As a bound letterbook, however, new intentions come into play, including a desire to be published. This form often just served as a pretext for appealing to publishers.³¹ Letterwriting was particularly well suited to publication, should the letters prove interesting enough. Hence the plethora of letter-style travel accounts from the nineteenth century. Caesar points out that these texts were very popular, as they were created by people from a large variety of locations, occupations, classes, and interests and therefore addressed a broad audience. Anyone could write a travel book, and so “possibly no kind of writing ever published in America sprung from such a broad demographic base.”³² Replete with epigrams, page headers and numbers, illustrations, and a colorful title page, this particular compiled letterbook has a clear sense of presentation. The person who assembled this manuscript clearly intended it for a wider audience than just one family friend, his addressee Ned. Though his work was never published (at least as a book), our author’s intention to publish is plainly visible in the physical presentation of his work and his later edits. For instance, where he originally noted that in Rio de Janeiro, “the churches are

²⁹ See figure 2.

³⁰ Letters were a clear way for travelers to communicate intimately with those back home. For instance, “Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Sunny Memories of Foreign Lands* (1854) offers itself as nothing more than a series of family letters home, and therefore speaks to, as well as fosters, a sort of fireside intimacy that much travel writing of the century was founded on.” Caesar, *Forgiving the Boundaries*, 22.

³¹ Caesar, *Forgiving the Boundaries*, 22.

³² Caesar, *Forgiving the Boundaries*, 22. It is interesting to note that many of these were simply authored by ‘an American,’ and our writer’s anonymity is not necessarily out of place in this genre of writing.

numerous,”³³ he later inserted “no. 39” above the text. He likely looked up this number at a later point and went back to his letters to add in the number, which would seem to be motivated by his desire to expand his audience from one personal friend to a wider readership.

Whether or not he proved successful in his publishing attempts, our author clearly tailored his text to a larger audience, knowing that publishers were looking for certain themes, tones, observations, and the like. This places his text in the genre of travel writing. At present, there is little scholarship available on U.S. citizens’ early to mid-nineteenth century travels around Latin America. Microhistories tied into a larger narrative of national sentiment emerge as the norm in scholarship on travel writing.³⁴ The resultant difficulty in this is balancing literary analysis with the historical context of the original writers. This is especially difficult, as travel writing is “almost by definition...linked to fleeting, superficial accounts of foreign lands and peoples, and to the novelty, singularity, and dazzle of the traveller’s ‘first impressions’.”³⁵ This has both benefits and drawbacks for the “prestige” of letter writing, which is now often most valued as a literary genre.³⁶ However, because travel writing was eclectic in the range of information it recorded, it is fairly firmly entrenched in a variety of other genres as well,

³³ “Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 31.

³⁴ See: Amanda Gilroy, ed. *Romantic Geographies: Discourses of Travel, 1775-1844* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2000); Chloë Houston, *New Worlds Reflected: Travel and Utopia in the Early Modern Period* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2010); Nigel Leask, *Curiosity and the Aesthetics of Travel Writing, 1770-1840* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Ralph Pordzik, *The Wonder of Travel: Fiction, Tourism and the Social Construction of the Nostalgic* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2005); Frédéric Regard, ed. *British Narratives of Exploration: Case Studies of the Self and Other* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2009); Erik S. Schmeller, *Perceptions of Race and Nation in English and American Travel Writers, 1833-1914* (New York: Lang, 2004). For examples of North American-specific travel writing, see: Terry Caesar, *Forgiving the Boundaries: Home as Abroad in American Travel Writing* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995); John D. Cox, *Traveling South: Travel Narratives and the Construction of American Identity* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005); Bruce A. Harvey, *American Geographics: U.S. National Narratives and the Representation of the Non-European World, 1830-1865* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001). For examples of British-specific travel writing, see: James Buzard, *The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature, and the Ways to Culture, 1800-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Paul Fussell, *Abroad: English Literary Traveling Between the Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

³⁵ Leask, *Curiosity and the Aesthetics of Travel Writing*, 5.

³⁶ Leask, *Curiosity and the Aesthetics of Travel Writing*, 5.

scientific investigation and documentation primary among them.³⁷ Our writer is no exception to this, including many scientific observations whilst onboard the *Brandywine*.

Literary critic Ralph Pordzik asserts that travel writing is not “a linear string of causally related textual events but...an interrelated field or ‘mosaic’ in which each text or major event fits into larger units and frames of discussion.”³⁸ The people who write travel accounts and the subjects these people write about create this “mosaic” of travel writing. These various pieces often make it difficult to determine what subjects or genres are most prominent in a work, or what mattered the most to the writer. Consequently, most scholarship on non-European travel writing in the nineteenth century deals with science or natural history themes, or treats letterbooks primarily as literature that reveals aesthetics concerns of their authors.³⁹ Our own author can certainly be considered in a multitude of ways, as he has produced letters and a manuscript and covered social, political, and geographical information about the various cities he visits.

Pordzik insists that because travel writing is such a varied genre, it cannot be examined as a single form of writing. Its heterogeneity and input from a variety of viewpoints (due to the variety of its authors) are both its value and often the reason such writing is dismissed from the body of accepted literary forms.⁴⁰ Court documents, for instance, are composed by court officials and employees, who share a particular perspective and training and who therefore produce a more uniform resource. Travel writing in the nineteenth century, however, was open to anyone who could pick up a pen. While this still excluded the illiterate and most of the poor, the chances of a wider perspective—and intended audience—are much likelier when a larger portion of the

³⁷ Pordzik, *The Wonder of Travel*, 5.

³⁸ Pordzik, *The Wonder of Travel*, 12.

³⁹ Leask, *Curiosity and the Aesthetics of Travel Writing*, 1.

⁴⁰ Pordzik, *The Wonder of Travel*, 3.

population can leave behind their thoughts and opinions for posterity. These various writers traveled across the globe, giving us a wealth of commentary on peoples from almost all times and places after the “discovery” of the New World.⁴¹

The nature and purpose of travel writing began to change in the mid-eighteenth century. As Pordzik explains, “new ideas and arguments emerged, some of them devoted to promoting the ideal of travel in the service of self-improvement and education—mentally preparing young men to assume the leadership positions preordained for them at home— others to exploring the general *value* of traveling, rather than that of writing and publishing travel accounts.”⁴² The genre also expanded to include discussions of taste, manners, and morality, indicating its role in the refinement of a “trans-European class-consciousness.”⁴³ Thus, the Grand Tour was born, “usher[ing] young Englishmen into that domain of good manners and educated tastes which transcended single nations.”⁴⁴ Though our author did not travel to Europe, the purpose of his trip was akin to that of the Grand Tour. He assures Ned that “If you ever leave home for three years as I have done, to be exposed to the influence of different climates and enticing pleasures, you will think with me that the first setting-out is a critical moment and one of the greatest importance to a person of my (our) age and pursuits.”⁴⁵

Historians have long been suspicious of travel writing. Encompassing science, anthropology, fiction, and dozens of other possible subjects, it is unclear just what travel writing *is* and therefore how we should study it. Because these texts touch on so many subjects, travel

⁴¹ See Leask, *Curiosity and the Aesthetics of Travel Writing*, 1-14.

⁴² Pordzik, *The Wonder of Travel*, 6.

⁴³ Pordzik, *The Wonder of Travel*, 6.

⁴⁴ Pordzik, *The Wonder of Travel*, 6-7.

⁴⁵ “Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 1-2. Scholarship on cosmopolitanism explores sentiments such as this. See: Margaret C. Jacob, *Strangers Nowhere in the World: The Rise of Cosmopolitanism in Early Modern Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), Michael Henry Scrivener, *The Cosmopolitan Ideal in the Age of Revolution and Reaction, 1776-1832* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2007), Lee Trepanier and Khalil M. Habib, *Cosmopolitanism in the Age of Globalization: Citizens Without States* (Baltimore: University of Kentucky Press, 2011).

texts are notoriously difficult to categorize in both a literary and an historical sense.⁴⁶ Historians are also wary of how representative or individualized these accounts can be, as those who create them generally have starkly different agendas and interests—hence the plethora of subjects often included in a single piece of travel writing.

The “accuracy” of travel texts is also a constant concern for many historians. Mary Baine Campbell asserts that setting the stage for a critical evaluation of a given travel text is difficult because “since travel writing raises important questions regarding the irreducible fictionality of all representation, the true value of individual expression and the genre’s relations with (post)colonial history and geography.”⁴⁷ The field is very concerned with assessing the accuracy of individual perception. Paul Fussell notes that in travel writing, “the autobiographical narrative arises from the speaker’s encounter with distant or unfamiliar data, and...the narrative—unlike that in a novel or romance—claims literal validity by constant reference to actuality.”⁴⁸ Some scholars, especially those from a literary background accept this “factual and fictional aspect of travel writing and approach this dichotomy as an essential part of the process of national and self imagination. Others look at travel writing as more of a historical artifact, reflecting how travel writing changes to meet the needs of the culture from which it originates.”⁴⁹ Nineteenth-century U.S. American travel writing is “the product of a whole series of responses to prior or concurrent representations of how it should be written and what it should be written about, as well as who should write it.”⁵⁰ Our author is no exception to this, as his text is teeming with allusions to, quotations from, and descriptions of other well-known travel pieces of the decades just prior to

⁴⁶ Caesar, *Forgiving the Boundaries*, 24.

⁴⁷ Mary Baine Campbell, “Travel Writing and Its Theory,” in Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 267.

⁴⁸ Fussell, *Abroad: English Literary Traveling Between the Wars*, 203.

⁴⁹ Schmeller, *Perceptions of Race and Nation in English and American Travel Writers*, 3.

⁵⁰ Caesar, *Forgiving the Boundaries*, 30.

his own. Not surprisingly, most of his inspiration comes from British and other European authors such as William Shakespeare, John Dryden, and Conrad Malte-Brun. However, Caesar contends that “since its very inception, no American writing more than that of travel has been so saturated in the fact that being an American is already the creation of prior textuality. Very simply put, the British had already defined national identity.”⁵¹ Knowingly or not, many United States citizens were actively attempting to separate their identity (both individual and national) from pre-established British ones. Not only did travelers from the United States also struggled to explain their identities in contrast to those of the people they visited in the rest of the Americas, but they also wrestled with how to relate to past writers while also proclaiming their independence from them.⁵²

Famous writers inspired others’ imitation, but individual people were not the only influence on travel writers of this period. Our writer set out three years after the United States declared the rest of the Americas off-limits to the Old World, and his journey cannot have been unaffected by this pronouncement.⁵³ The first few decades of the nineteenth century also saw the independence of almost a dozen countries in the Americas.⁵⁴ By the time our author departed New York, most of European colonial holdings in the Americas had revolted against their colonial masters and gained their independence, though many of them were soon grouped into the Mexican Empire or the United Provinces of Central America. In light of these revolutions, the United States issued the Monroe Doctrine, aimed specifically at Russia, Great Britain, and Spain. The doctrine warned other countries, especially those with former colonial ties in the area, not to meddle in economic or political affairs in the Western Hemisphere. The United States

⁵¹ Caesar, *Forgiving the Boundaries*, 30.

⁵² It should be noted, however, that until recently, most scholars have approached travel writing as a literary genre, and its use in exploring “national identities” is much debated.

⁵³ See Harvey, *American Geographics*, 1-26.

⁵⁴ See Adelman, *Sovereignty and Revolution in the Iberian Atlantic*, 1-12.

lacked the naval power to back up the Monroe Doctrine, but the statement was clear: the new nations of the West had earned their independence, and that independence would be maintained at all costs.⁵⁵ These ideals were promulgated by clergy, politicians, writers, scientists, and many others, and, with the exception of the disenfranchised, were generally accepted by the U.S. population.⁵⁶

Recently, numerous works have emerged on travel writing in areas where the United States held a more formal imperial sway or almost direct hegemony; however, despite the obvious intention of the Monroe Doctrine to proclaim the United States' influence over the rest of the Americas,⁵⁷ surprisingly little has been done to explore how this proclamation played out for the majority of North Americans traveling south.⁵⁸ Official political agents have their share of lines in the history books, but few historians thus far have taken the time step outside the narrative of Anglo-Americans discussing Europeans or their relationship to elite European culture.⁵⁹ Perhaps an explanation for this gap lies in the cultural relationships between these countries. Caesar argues that U.S. travel texts often convey a desire to fit in with writers'

⁵⁵ Harvey, *American Geographics*, writes extensively on this relationship in his introduction. See also: T. Ray Shurbutt, ed., *United States-Latin American Relations, 1800-1850: The Formative Generations* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1991).

⁵⁶ Harvey, *American Geographics*, 7.

⁵⁷ Harvey puts forth that "foreign land was to be assimilated, not subordinated and administered at a distance.... This aspect of nineteenth-century imperialism, especially in its nascent years, had a crucial consequence: a reluctance to absorb regions, even if part of the continent, that would entail mixing the mostly Anglo-Saxon or Caucasian body politic with racially different populations who, unlike the Indians, could not be resettled so readily." Expansion into Mexico is one example rife with this hesitancy to mix "races." Harvey, *American Geographics*, 13.

⁵⁸ As this was clearly a tumultuous time, why has so little been done on North American travel in nineteenth-century Latin America? Historian Bruce Harvey maintains that most Americanist scholars have so far limited themselves to pre-Civil War texts that depict European peoples and places. Indeed, searching the library shelves, it is uncommon to find anything other than American travelers in Great Britain, Europe or within the United States itself. These works naturally deal with issues of the new nation's interaction with its mother country or of the different cultural zones within the United States itself. These works are clearly important, but the value of analyzing non-European travel writing is still being comprehended. What work that has been done about South American travel often discusses the United States' political relationships with these countries, but very rarely delves into the cultural aspects of such relationships before the 20th century. Many historians have noted the gap in the cultural narrative of post-Monroe Doctrine Latin America, and as Harvey asserts, "we cannot know what to make of the cultural archive if we do not know what it contains in the first place." Harvey, *American Geographics*, 3-4.

⁵⁹ Alfred Benedixen and Judith's *The Cambridge Companion to American Travel Writing*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), for instance, _____

European cultural heritage.⁶⁰ Few North Americans wealthy enough to travel abroad in the 1820s would have come from the rest of the Americas originally, and so many accounts are from those with European ancestors or even close European family. Clearly, though, not every traveler remained within his ancestors' territories. Numerous first-hand accounts of foreigners in the southern Americas—a place where U.S. Americans and Europeans were equally foreign—exist.

While similarities between travel texts about Europe and the Americas certainly exist, established ways of investigating the former are not always applicable to the latter. The United States did not claim formal power over these countries and its cultural connections were indirect. The relationship between the United States and any given Latin American country was thus often unclear and certainly varied greatly from one country to the next. Looking at individual U.S. travelers gives us a unique viewpoint: that of the U.S. citizen interacting with non-European peoples in non-European places but with an eye to material rather than the geographical concerns. While the records of these interactions are certainly not unbiased, they are not as swollen with concern for first-world/third-world power structures.⁶¹ If not investigating a metropole-colony relationship (or countries with a former such relationship), scholars tend to read nineteenth-century authors' silence on the rest of the world as disinterest.⁶² Other times, scholars bypass pertinent commentary on geography and travel if it does not prove useful in discussing Manifest Destiny in North America or the United States' insistence on exceptionalism in the face of European power.⁶³ Any study of sources that depict North Americans in the non-European world hopes to reveal numerous ways in which nineteenth century U.S. citizens

⁶⁰ Caesar, *Forgiving the Boundaries*, 29.

⁶¹ Harvey, *American Geographics*, 247.

⁶² Harvey, *American Geographics*, 3.

⁶³ However, these texts are especially important, as Harvey argues, because they showcase the United States at a pivotal moment in which it struggled between two identities: that of the “anxiously postcolonial [nation]...fretting over its claim of cultural independence from the Old World” and the emerging “imperialist entity, consumed by the task of New World expansion.” Harvey, *American Geographics*, 3.

thought of themselves, their country, and those foreign countries to which they traveled.⁶⁴ The author of these letters, while not consciously promoting an imperialist mindset, does occasionally reveal anxieties about his place as a citizen of the United States and what that place means in relationship to the South Americans he encounters. Understanding these anxieties requires us to examine his identity and process of self-fashioning in juxtaposition to the foreign.

Self-Fashioning

Nowhere in the manuscript does our author sign his name. Does he assume Ned will know who has written the letters and that no one else will read the letters or letterbook? Are we, the readers, meant to infer that is the case? Is it out of negligence? The design of the manuscript, the numbering of pages, the page titles, and the rest of the letterbook's presentation all suggest that others are, indeed, meant to read these letters. Most likely, the book was meant as a production for the general public. Furthermore, the obvious care taken to transcribe the letters into a publishable format point to extensive effort and awareness of purpose, and it is reasonable to assume an author willing to go to such lengths to present his thoughts would not then just forget to credit himself. We therefore look to a superior explanation. As Caesar discusses, many U.S. travel texts were published anonymously or by "an American."⁶⁵ This served to expand the potential audience through comfortable anonymity and genericism,⁶⁶ but it is important to note that "those individuals who published texts authored by 'an American' need to be understood to have been flaunting the fact."⁶⁷ As our text was never published, it is difficult to be certain that the author would have been listed as 'an American,' but throughout the text, it is clear that he conceived of himself as such. The lack of traceable names certainly poses its problems for this

⁶⁴ Harvey, *American Geographics*, 4.

⁶⁵ Caesar, *Forgiving the Boundaries*, 22.

⁶⁶ Caesar, *Forgiving the Boundaries*, 22.

⁶⁷ Caesar, *Forgiving the Boundaries*, 31.

investigation, but it also gives us some freedoms, and we are certainly not without our share of clues as to who this writer was. Because we do not have to delve into his personal history, we are freer to explore who he was by what he sees and says rather than just by what we would expect from a wealthy young man from a business-oriented family in Philadelphia.

Historians must be careful to avoid supposing a blanket ‘American’ identity when exploring these sources. Often, this means attempting to locate travelers’ specific social and cultural position based on class, gender, and nationality.⁶⁸ Though our author remains anonymous, he does reveal important information that we can use to create a general picture of who he was.⁶⁹ We know he was from Philadelphia and that he joined the crew of the *Brandywine* without having the strenuous duties of a sailor, indicating that he was wealthy enough to purchase a commission as an officer. Upon leaving home, he writes the following to Ned:

If you ever leave home for three years as I have done, to be exposed to the influence of different climates and enticing pleasures, you will think with me that the first setting-out is a critical moment and one of the greatest importance to a person of my (our) age and pursuits. Indeed it is the most interesting period of existence and particularly of me that has been nurtured as the future trunk of his family—as their pride and boast—and to whom they must look for support when the evening breeze shall fan the white locks on their temples.⁷⁰

It appears likely that he and Ned came from families with enough wealth to have the time and opportunity for a “cruise in the Pacific.”⁷¹ His trip, like the Grand Tour, was a rite of passage, a necessary step before he returned home to take over the family business and care for his

⁶⁸ Leask, *Curiosity and the Aesthetics of Travel Writing*, 4.

⁶⁹ Alas, without knowing his name or rank, it is difficult to trace his story before his departure or determine how this journey affected him later in life. The National Archives in Washington, D.C. do have a muster roll and payroll for the years that our writer was on board. However, with only a date and location of departure, I was not able to identify him among the dozens of passengers boarding and departing from the ship.

⁷⁰ “Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 1-2.

⁷¹ His letterbook is titled “Letters written during a cruise in the Pacific in the years 182-6-7-8 and 9.” Interestingly, the first volume of the manuscript mostly covers his time in Rio de Janeiro and around Cape Horn, with only about one-third of the text describing his stay in Lima. If his trip really was “in the Pacific,” it is likely that the second (or third) volume of letters documented a longer journey in the rest of the Pacific.

parents.⁷² In a few short lines, he reveals himself to be a middle or upper class son from a business-oriented family in Philadelphia.

Many scholars seek to clarify the distinction between tourists and travelers by noting that the latter are more observant and serious.⁷³ Because they often have an agenda, whether acknowledged or not, scholars must be careful to assess these before making conclusions about the population as a whole.⁷⁴ Our writer most assuredly does make detailed observations about certain people and places he encounters. His duties on the *Brandywine* do not appear particularly strenuous or demanding, so he has plenty of time to read books, write letters, and go onshore to enjoy some local entertainment, suggesting that his trip was more for pleasure. Regardless of his classification in either category, readers must carefully consider the weight of his commentary. This primarily concerns being wary of his main topic: people he interacts with. Most of his companions and hosts—at least the ones he describes—are French or British. Passages in which travelers compare or contrast themselves with the people they encounter reveal the travelers' own theories about their nationality and identity.⁷⁵ In fact, because the traveler constantly compares abroad with home, “travel writing lends itself well to studies of national identity...[and] by studying how people identify themselves with a specific nation, we gain an understanding of individuals as well as the social and cultural forces acting on them during a specific period in history.”⁷⁶

⁷² Interestingly, our writer spends almost two pages (“Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 31-32) describing catacombs in Rio de Janeiro to Ned. His writing suggests that Ned is unfamiliar with catacombs, indicating that he likely has not visited Europe, where numerous catacombs have drawn tourists for hundreds of years. This is important to note, as the Grand Tour to Europe was a major mark of middle- and upper-class status for many years, and this particular young man chose to visit South America rather than “returning” to Europe.

⁷³ Erik Schmeller writes that travelers are active observers of the people they meet and places they pass through. Schmeller, *Perceptions of Race and Nation*, 2.

⁷⁴ Schmeller, *Perceptions of Race and Nation*, 2.

⁷⁵ Schmeller, *Perceptions of Race and Nation*, 2.

⁷⁶ Schmeller, *Perceptions of Race and Nation*, 2. Caesar also asserts that “An American traveller experiences anything at all only as a culturally mediated being, caught up in the dualism of home and abroad.” Caesar, *Forgiving*

One of the forces acting on our traveler and the rest of the Americas at this period in history was the Monroe Doctrine. He experienced and wrote about Latin America during the transition from the somewhat-less-than-subtle insistence of a hands-off policy toward the New World and an outright declaration of the United States' right to expand westward (and perhaps southward as well). While Manifest Destiny came to primarily describe the United States' westward expansion through the North American continent, sentiments of Anglo-American superiority certainly did not stop at the Tropic of Cancer.

The Monroe Doctrine's attitudes of protection and guardianship are present in the letters, but do not always originate from our writer himself. The clearest manifestation of such attitudes comes in the form of Valparaiso's Fourth of July celebration, which he describes thusly:

Dined with Comandante Tosta of the Mexican ship Congress....During the afternoon Tosta told me that he had been in Philada [sic] was much pleased with and was very fond of oysters and Beer! He gave the following toast addressing himself to me. 'El dia de mañana, la nacencia de su independecia, to morrow, the birth day of your Independence.' July 4th 1827. It is remarkable that there is not a single American vessel in the harbour. However the Mexican Congreso at 8 a.m hoisted the American ensign at the fore and at one p.m. fired a salute of 21 guns. The Chile Brig Achilles Commd Wooster was dressed with flags and at one o'clock also fired a salute of 21 guns and a brig with two guns added her voice in complimenting the birth day of liberty....The English Mercht. Cpts. dined with Major Maffet and kept up the day like men friendly to our cause. Even the boatmen rejoiced in the day and carried the American ensign through the streets shouting & singing—races were run and in appearance had it been holy day of their own greater attention in its observance could not have been shown.⁷⁷

The fact that an 'American' holiday was celebrated, not just in the United States but also in countries who had had little or nothing to do with the country's revolution is quite noteworthy.

That Americans within the United States saw July 4th as a day particular to their own cause is

the Boundaries, 6. Part of the reason for these comparisons is that "a 'culture' can materialize only in counter distinction to another culture," as argued in James A. Boon, *Other Tribes, Other Scribes: Symbolic Anthropology in the Comparative Study of Cultures, Histories, Religions, and Texts* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), ix.

⁷⁷ "Letters Written During a South American Cruise," 145-146.

understandable, but for a country over 5,000 miles south to acknowledge the importance of the day independent of substantial U.S. presence indicates a strong sense of the United States as a distinct American nation with a clear identity as a revolutionary state. More than acknowledge the day, these men fired salutes, sang in the streets, and ran races. Comandante Tosta understood that our writer would appreciate his mention of the oysters and beer of Philadelphia. Clearly, even as the citizens of the United States struggled (often unconsciously) to determine what being a U.S. American ‘meant’, other peoples lost little time in helping develop a sense of the United States’ identity as a new type of entity—one that they may have wanted to emulate in their own struggles for independence.

Our author was not completely at ease with his position as a celebrated U.S. citizen. In particular, one remark to Ned reveals his equivocating feelings: “But have you ever been left in a strange land and seen your ship cheered as she departed? ‘Tis a queer sensation.”⁷⁸ He does not specify what the implications of locals cheering on a United States ship are, but he is evidently unsure how to handle the foreign peoples celebrating for a ship from his country so far from home. Is this discomfort partly because he himself does not know what being a United States citizen means? In one of his letters from Brazil, he assures Ned: “I confine my visiting generally to my own countrymen not wishing to form an acquaintance with the natives with the prospect of its being but a short one.”⁷⁹ His “own countrymen,” however, appears to include British and French men as well. When an acquaintance of his dies, the funeral attendees include: a guard of honor, the attending physicians, a clergyman, the corpse, officers of the Vincennes, one-hundred sailors, the Governor of Valparaiso with his Chilian army and navy officers, the English consul and vice-consul, U.S. American merchants and captains, and other foreign merchants, captains,

⁷⁸ “Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 63.

⁷⁹ “Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 86.

and citizens. As “the whole moved to solemn music up the steep and winding path to the graveyard...the scene was truly romantic. A crowd of the rabble rushed forward to see the customs of strangers and the deep tone of the muffled drum with the troops with arms reversed was calculated to inspire admiration.”⁸⁰ The list of funeral attendees clearly indicates that though they might retain their (in their own opinion) quite separate customs and identities in relation to each other, Europeans and North Americans identified *together* when contrasted with native inhabitants of South America.

In fact, the distinctions between the two groups were difficult even for members themselves. At one point, an Englishman mistakes him for a fellow countryman:

Mistaking me for an Englishman he extolled [*sic*] his country men to the skies while with desperate oaths he sank us poor Americans to the lowest regions as a set of d__mnd Yankees. But on my declaring myself to be an American he very soon changed sides and we were elevated tho’ not to the abasement of the English. He argued then that we were all scions from the same parent trunk and that all jealous feelings out to be extinguished among us.”⁸¹

After the Englishman discovers that his new acquaintance is from the United States, he attempts to make up for his insult about the “damned Yankees,” understanding that the populations of the two countries are, after all, mostly of the same stock.

This sense of an Anglo-American “family” is also evident in our writer’s own sentiments. When he visits Lima, he immediately searches for the familiar site of an English hotel. He writes: “It was a little after dark and all presented the bustle of a town and dashing over the pebble pavement we alighted at an English Hotel. Here I took up my lodgings. After tea we walked in at the French Caffè...the soda water house lately established here by an American and probably will take—the plaza was dimly lighted and but few people walking.”⁸² No sooner does

⁸⁰ “Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 63-64.

⁸¹ “Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 107.

⁸² “Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 160.

he arrive in the place where he hopes to indulge his curiosity, then he heads to the most familiar sites he can find: an English hotel and a French café run by a North American. Anyone who has travelled can understand his inclination towards the familiar comforts of home. However, there is an intriguing disconnect between his claim to be curious about strange new sites on his “excursion for pleasure and to gratify curiosity”⁸³ and his tendency to seek out familiar sounds, smells, and peoples.

This is not to say that all his interactions with Europeans ended well. Though the Englishman above may have backtracked and attempted to praise the United States, Captain Every, an English friend of our writer’s acquaintance, Captain Ross, refused to admit the two into his house for a visit. Then, “with the door thus shut in our faces we were obliged to take up with another *casuelo*...and a large basket of grapes, brought from the former captain’s vinyard [*sic*] in lieu of a better breakfast at the house of a native also an acquaintance of Capt. Ross.”⁸⁴ This suggests that sailors or middle-ranking men were more likely to take up acquaintance with “natives”—though just whom the term encompassed is unclear. A further passage suggests that even those Europeans who took up permanent residence in the Americas were not considered “naturalized” just because of their extended habitation of the area. Captain Every, for instance, “is one of those old codgers that, after seeing the greater part of the world, becoming disgusted with it, has retired with ample sufficiency and a pretty young wife into one of the prettiest corners of the globe where ‘neither matters of state can addle his pate.’”⁸⁵ Every remained a foreigner and quite identifiably British.

Both “foreigner” and “native” have the potential to take on different meanings, and our author is vague as to just whom he means when he says “natives.” He does not use terms like

⁸³ “Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 118.

⁸⁴ “Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 124.

⁸⁵ “Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 124.

indios or *mestizos*, and this causes confusion when he notes that the Brazilian “natives are jealous of foreigners who, by their activity monopolize every thing in the way of trade. However they are a set of savages to make the best of them.”⁸⁶ Was he merely unaware of the different ethnic classifications of the region? Is he purposefully vague? Does he, in fact, just mean any inhabitant of Brazil who was born there, or is he talking specifically about peoples who were native to the area before the Europeans? At least in the above comment, he appears to mean people whom most scholars would term *indios*. Europeans and their descendants living in Brazil would have access to European and other far-off markets, whereas *indios* would be hard-pressed to find the means to expand beyond Latin America without significant luck and concerted effort to ally with a European or North American company. The “natives” are also aware of this distinction, as “In the afternoon every person takes an afternoon nap called the ‘siesta’ and the streets are desolate, no body in them as the natives say but Englishmen & dogs.”⁸⁷

Ultimately, this makes us wonder just who was a native and who was a foreigner. Moreover, his hints at sympathy towards the “natives” could be seen to fulfill the attitudes of the Monroe Doctrine. Though without further comment on our writer’s part, it is impossible to say to what extent he consciously supported these attitudes. He seems to acknowledge that the European control of trade in the area makes it difficult for the nascent nations to build their economies—one of the foremost reasons the Monroe Doctrine claimed to want to protect these countries’ rights. This brings us to his interaction with these *indios*, Europeans, and other peoples. Harvey asserts that the historian’s task is to navigate the boundaries of the specific or biographical and the national, and antebellum representations of non-European peoples provide

⁸⁶ “Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 41.

⁸⁷ “Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 73.

particularly effective ways to trace certain ideologies on both levels.⁸⁸ The trouble is, not all texts have much to say about these locals, and when they do, it becomes difficult to assess the accuracy of ethnographic assertions.⁸⁹ As Harvey avers, “the lack of a concerted, state-authorized imperial agenda beyond the West and Southwest does not mean that U.S. texts about tropical America, Polynesia, Africa, or the Orient are free of ethnocentrism.”⁹⁰ Because of this, and in light of our source, we can take a different approach to understanding what our author thought of the locals or natives that he encountered.

Identifying the Foreign and Other

Instead of analyzing his meager comments on bizarre locals and their offensive or absurd habits to determine what was accurate and what was not, we can interpret his comments as indicative of what he found normal or expected in *his own* culture in light of what he finds unfamiliar or strange abroad. Part of this is the way our author introduces new concepts to his audience. The general way to identify a foreign place, custom, or cultural object for an audience back home is to describe it in relation to a similar place, custom, or object from a mutually familiar place. Caesar writes that the familiar, factual concept of home provides a basis for representing the foreign, unknown abroad.⁹¹ While this type of description has an obvious practical reason behind it—to help the armchair traveler understand this foreign concept—the manner of the comparison itself generally reveals the author’s comfort level and opinion of the foreign object, person, or event with which he is interacting.

⁸⁸ Harvey, *American Geographics*, 5.

⁸⁹ Harvey continues: “To the extent that the ideological itinerary of the U.S. traveler remains on American soil, the act of depicting non-European lands and their inhabitants becomes an asymmetrical one. In this situation, we are left with an awkward choice. Either we impugn *what* is represented, proffering some supposedly more authentic version of foreign peoples as they see themselves, and thus likely lose the focus on the *why* of the representing in the first place; or we attend seriously to that *why*, and leave ourselves open, potentially, to the charge of being complicity silent about the cultures behind the representations.” *American Geographics*, 15.

⁹⁰ Harvey, *American Geographics*, 15.

⁹¹ Caesar, *Forgiving the Boundaries*, 5.

No matter the object or subject, by basing a concept in his own “home” terms, the author is also setting a standard by which to evaluate his object or subject. For example, in describing a building in Rio de Janeiro, he tells Ned that “the red tile roofs with their eaves terminating in projecting points resemble the eastern sketches we are accustomed to see at home on the crockery.”⁹² Ned has seen drawings of this architecture on plates at home, though he has not observed it himself. When the travel writer describes an encounter in this manner, he introduces both the foreign and the familiar aspects of what he has observed in one fell swoop. However, when Ned is unfamiliar with a site, our author sometimes does not bother to truly describe it, as he does here:

This may give you an idea of the place, but were I to tell you the bearing & distance of every ‘adobe’ that enters into the formation of a house wall you would not have a correct idea of it in the end. The liveliest descriptions do not leave correct impressions of the object described—who, that has never seen the architectural orders can fancy to himself an Ionic or Doric column or the appearance of Solomon’s temple—‘tis vanity & vexation’ to attempt it.”⁹³

Not only does he tell Ned that these adobe buildings would be too foreign to comprehend their aesthetics through a written description, but he also discloses that both he and Ned are familiar with Classical columns of Europe.

Our author’s definition of the foreign certainly changed throughout his journey. His first night onboard the *Brandywine*, he slept next to a Frenchman and took great pains to indicate this in his first letter by transcribing the man’s thick French accent. Later, when he encounters other Englishmen or Frenchmen, he completely neglects to remark on their accents at all, and instead discusses even more exotic and foreign things, like tapadas. While in Lima, he:

Enjoyed the sight of a great variety of the dress almost peculiar to the ladies of Lima....This dress consists of two parts—one called the ‘soya’; the other the ‘manto’. The first is a petticoat made to fit the body so tightly, that, being at the

⁹² “Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 28.

⁹³ “Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 88.

same time quite elastic, the form of the limbs is rendered distinctly visible. The manto or cloak is also a petticoat but instead of hanging about the heels as all honest petticoats ought to do, it is drawn over the head, breast and face, and is kept so closely by the hands...that no part of the body, except one eye is perceptible. The effect of the whole is exceedingly striking; but whether its gracefulness [*sic*]*—*for, with the fine figure of the Lima women and their very beautiful style of walking, it is eminently graceful*—*be sufficient to compensate for its undeniable indelicacy to a European eye, will depend much upon the stranger's taste and his habits of judging of what he sees in foreign countries."⁹⁴

Here, he finds the style of dress “peculiar”, the petticoats different than “honest” ones back home, and the women of Lima graceful but with an air of “undeniable indelicacy.

It is no surprise that his perception of the strange or foreign changed the more he saw of the world. In fact, the majority of his pages are not taken up with commentary on the politics of the age, but rather with the women, weather, amusements, and fashions of these foreign lands. Our traveller quotes extensively from other travel writers and observers of the foreign, substituting their words for his own when he finds them to better express his sentiments on the people and place that he encounters. He offers amusing anecdotes of social interactions—primarily with Europeans or fellow Anglo-Americans. Weather and geography feature predominantly, and the author seems genuinely interested in describing the land to his audience back home. Women and class seem to be the most accessible vehicles with which to compare life in Brazil and Chile to life in Philadelphia.

There is no easy checklist of “Familiar or Foreign?” for our author; tapadas are foreign, slavery is familiar, cigars are foreign. But it is possible to see some common threads in what unique or exotic events he feels compelled to describe for his audience back home, especially with regard for class and religion. The foreignness he describes results as much from unfamiliarity with other class and religious habits as from ignorance of other ethnocultural habits. The foreign, then, is whatever an individual finds remarkable, something to write home

⁹⁴ “Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 173-174.

about. For our anonymous author, that included other classes, other religions, and other peoples.⁹⁵ It is against this backdrop that our author self-fashions, portraying himself as a well-educated, culturally curious citizen of the United States abroad.

Much as his comments on buildings reveal what styles he and Ned find familiar. His comments on local inhabitants and their customs help us glean information about his own identity. One of his earliest letters describes life on the ship, including an account of how to clean the deck:

The holy-stone (which is a large stone having a smooth surface with a rope attached to either side by which it is pulled back and forwards) is set to work...over the deck to the great annoyance of all sleepy persons, the squillgee is then put in motion. This is a wooden instrument precisely like a garden hoe with the edge leathered. By its being pushed along, the water is cleaned off and prepares it for the swab which completely dries up all the remainder.⁹⁶

Beyond providing a bit of humor for his audience, this description also serves to acquaint his friend Ned with life aboard a ship. Had Ned himself at some point been an officer or extended passenger on a ship, no description would be necessary, but neither of these men seems to have prior experience with the holy-stone and squillgee⁹⁷ so routine to maritime life.

While in Lima, our author notes the local women's peculiar style of horseback riding. He remarks that:

Sometimes the ladies ride with two stirrups à la mode des homes....It certainly appears singular for us to see a delicate female mounted in this way on a delicate prancing palfrey displaying a consummate skill in horsemanship and at the same time rather more of the leg than is consistent with our ideas of modesty. The lower classes of females all ride in this way.⁹⁸

These lower class ladies ride in an indelicate manner, and the people he knows back home recognize that the women they interact with would not ride "*à la mode des hommes*".

⁹⁵ See Caesar, *Forgiving the Boundaries*, 16; Leask, *Curiosity and the Aesthetics of Travel Writing*, 5; and Harvey, *American Geographic*.

⁹⁶ "Letters Written During a South American Cruise," 13.

⁹⁷ A squeegee.

⁹⁸ "Letters Written During a South American Cruise," 168-169.

The classes are again distinct when he visits the theatre, where “the company is composed of very indifferent performers both as regards their acting and personal appearance and ‘are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb show’ and even that with a bad grace.”⁹⁹ The actor possesses neither “the accent of Christians, pagan, nor man, [and they] have so strutted and bellowed, [and]...imitated humanity so abominably.”¹⁰⁰ By the end of the night, he is thoroughly unimpressed with the actors and the “indifferent” orchestra, and the performance is not the only point of dissatisfaction. As a foreigner, he must purchase admission for the pit, until such a time as he “learn[s] the fashions or receive[s] invitations to the boxes.”¹⁰¹ The pit is poorly paved, overrun with fleas, and not worth the price of admission (two reals and an extra four for the seat). In the end, he concludes that the entertainment is “so far inferior to what [foreigners] are accustomed to enjoy.”¹⁰² However, the theatre is a favorite local entertainment, so he decides to attend again on Sunday anyway. He acknowledges that “it is not, *comme il faut*, for one from ‘the Friends’ City’ to visit play houses on a Sabbath evening, nevertheless it is the practice here of every body, & not one of them but thinks himself a better Christian than any of us—so you see there is fashion in religion as well as everything else.”¹⁰³

In his description of a Chilean church, the writer remarks on the depiction of “our Saviour,”¹⁰⁴ indicating that he is Christian, though it soon becomes clear that he is not Catholic and likely Protestant. Shortly after the *Brandywine* arrives in Santiago, Chile, he wanders through the city with a fellow officer. Here, he is

So unlucky as to meet the Host which to say the least, is very disagreeable to

⁹⁹ “Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 101-102.

¹⁰⁰ “Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 101-102.

¹⁰¹ “Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 101-102.

¹⁰² “Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 101-102.

¹⁰³ “Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 101-102. His reference to the “Friends’ City” is unclear. It may be that he is referencing Philadelphia as a Quakers entity, as the Quakers commonly name cities, institutions, and groups with similar monikers.

¹⁰⁴ “Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 81.

foreigners who are not of the Catholic faith. This is a procession of priests generally on a visit to some sick or dying person....The whole was preceded by an ugly looking little fellow ringing a bell at the sound of which every person pulled off his hat and fell on his marrowbones & remained till the cavalcade passed. Foreigners are obliged to follow the fashion or submit to insult, upbraidings or even blows from the mob that consider the Host as the representative of our Saviour & of course treated with disrespect. Although very unpleasant I always accede to these forms & accordingly might have been seen resting on my shin bones, not with as much devotion but with the appearance at any rate of respect.¹⁰⁵

As at the theatre, and again not completely of his own volition, our writer is revealed as a stranger through contrast with those around him. This time, he is defined as a foreigner *against* the habits observed in the locals. Should he fail to comply with gestures of respect towards the Host, he will be immediately branded as a foreigner, something he would not have encountered in Philadelphia. Later in his visit, our traveler notes that there is a “burying ground...located immediately in front of that erected by and for the use of foreigners; whom the Chilians do not allow to be put in consecrated ground. And it is not long since that foreign dead were carried out to sea & buried! if they could not succeed in obtaining permission to enter them in the Fort.”¹⁰⁶ Rather than supposing that Chileans were particularly sensitive to foreign visitors, we can see here our author’s growing awareness of his own otherness. In Philadelphia, he very likely interacted with Catholics, but local custom would not have required him to kneel before a Catholic procession or face blows.

Though he sought to separate himself from Catholic customs, he eagerly sought to align himself with notable writers. He very consciously created an image of himself by quoting other famous travelers and noting the ways that people of different professions and classes observe and comment on foreign lands. Each letter opens with a few lines from Shakespeare, Lord Byron, or other well-known writers that our wealthy young man would have been schooled in from an

¹⁰⁵ “Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 80-81.

¹⁰⁶ “Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 100-101.

early age. By quoting these notables, he hopes to link his sentiments and writing with the acclaim of these famous writers. In a similar vein, he inserts numerous French phrases into his writing—aiming to show how well read and educated and his audience are. Towards the end of his stay in Lima, he admits to Ned that armchair travelers back home might occasionally doubt the veracity of travelers writing of foreign lands. There is an explanation for their inconsistencies, however:

Let us not be too hasty in condemning authors as falsifiers but first consider the circumstances that surround him and influence his feelings. If he has mixed in the higher ranks of society and gone the rounds of giddy fashion in balls and routs he will speak of gayities and delight—belles and beaux—music and pleasures whiles one in a humbler sphere would think more of the solid enjoyments and perhaps give a better picture. A scientific man would talk of shells & stones and the politician of statistics, constitution police and laws leaving the epicure to delight you with the prints and viands of the market. So diverse are the subjects thought important by different classes of men.¹⁰⁷

His observations on women’s behaviors in public and local orchestras or other forms of entertainment indicate his having “mixed in the higher ranks of society”. His own social rank explains why he finds it appropriate to remark on such “gayities and delight.”

At other points, he includes scientific observations. On the ship, they pass a stretch of water that is crimson. He finds out from Commodore Porter that the color is caused by young crayfish, though “the specimens we got were too small for us to determine their character although we had tolerable glasses. They shot with great rapidity through the water, and when in a glass, the water resembles that which contains dust and on standing deposits a sediment of a very fine vermillion tint.”¹⁰⁸ Once in Rio, he tells Ned that the mountains surrounding the city are “granite and sienite” with an overlying superstructure of sandstone.¹⁰⁹ Previously unacquainted with the albatross, he describes the bird to his friend: “The albatross is known to ornithologists under the title *Diadomia*. It is about the size of a goose having long narrow wings—some of

¹⁰⁷ “Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 157-158.

¹⁰⁸ “Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 59.

¹⁰⁹ “Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 44.

them measuring fifteen feet from tip to tip.”¹¹⁰ The diversity of his observations shows the diversity of his interests, and he is both a socialite and a scientist.

The boldest evidence of his self-fashioning comes in the form of later edits to the content of the letters. By 1832 he had gone back and edited the letters by adding in information and crossing out certain passages.¹¹¹ The most intriguing edits are those that cross out potentially offensive passages from his original letters. The first major stop for the *Brandywine* was Rio de Janeiro. Here, our author encountered the familiar site of a slave market. Of this, he says:

Slavery may be here seen in its most glowing colours nor does it need a hand to point out the figures of that picture. I visited the slave market. In one room were some thirty or forty completely naked save only a scanty piece of blue cotton bound around their loins....most of them were convalescent from the small pox and the others still labouring under that horrible disease....While we were here we saw a lady that came to make purchases attended by her servants she went from door to door examining the poor wretches with the same sorry poid and with as little feeling as if she had been about to buy a pair *of* gloves. I have seen slaves, several times, driven almost naked in large droves through the streets with a driver behind them, lash in hand....During the very short time I have been here I have twice seen a negro beaten on the back, by a soldier, with a bundle of rods till the blood seemed to start through the skins—and it is not uncommon to see a number of them ironed together with heavy chains and padlocks.¹¹²

Later edits to the letterbook crossed out this entire passage. To what purpose? Our author, once again, is defining who he is by what he sees and reports, though this time it seems much more self-consciously done. While he may have felt pity for the pox-ridden slaves in front of him, he eventually proved reluctant to make his final audience aware of his feelings on the matter of slavery, or at least these slaves in particular. Possibly, later attempts at publishing his work demanded a more temperate narrator, one that found the disturbing images of slavery familiar

¹¹⁰ “Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 54.

¹¹¹ On the back of page 151 (facing the page upon which he discusses the dictator and laws of Peru) He notes that in 1832, proposals were issued to publish the laws of Peru.

¹¹² “Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 30-31.

enough to omit commentary on them.¹¹³ While simultaneously attempting to include armchair travelers back home in the delights of foreign lands and distance himself from his peers through his unique experiences, the writer endeavors to entertain without offending. While speculation on the reasoning behind these edits may seem futile in the face of the author's anonymity, this hesitancy to comment on the Latin American slave trade provides valuable insight into how the author wished to present himself to his proclaimed audience. The eliminated passages are of great import for our understanding of just what this man meant by writing these letters and what he found appropriate for his audience to know about the foreign places he visited.

In addition to crossing out negative comments on slavery, he eliminates the following political commentary from his later letterbook:

The Don is an active man, ruling with a strict hand and by this plan, has without doubt done much for the advancement of the Country—this by stirring up the indolent Brazilians he has not much increased his popularity. He...has in his service 3000 German troops, who...are extremely dissatisfied—their pay is but 6 cents a day! The treasury is low. The war that is still going on against Buenos Ayres, gives an excuse for the seizure and detention of neutral vessels and tho' our squadron is pretty large, the orders it is under prevent it from giving necessary protection to our merchantmen.¹¹⁴

This is one of the few times he discusses local politics in his own words. More often, the author discusses politics in the form of a quote from a more “authoritative” figure, such as Malte-Brun. Nigel Leask maintains that travel writing had to fulfill certain generic moral expectations to be credible,¹¹⁵ and our writer certainly seems aware of this. By quoting Malte-Brun, our writer not only avoids negative comments made from his perspective as an inexperienced foreigner, but he also gains credibility through collaborating with a recognized authority.

Our traveler also avoids portraying foreign peoples in too negative a manner, suggesting

¹¹³ As Harvey argues, much antebellum writing aimed to “elide for national conscience the discomfiting facts of slavery.” Harvey, *American Geographics*, 243.

¹¹⁴ “Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 41.

¹¹⁵ Leask, *Curiosity and the Aesthetics of Travel Writing*, 13.

his deliberate effort to be, or appear to be, sympathetic to other cultures and races. Setting the tone for many of his future observations, he notes that Rio de Janeiro “affords much to interest and much to disgust the traveller.”¹¹⁶ At first, he is unimpressed with the local architecture, remarking that the emperor’s palace is “quite a large building but in no way imposing, nor has architecture in the least attempted to embellish it.”¹¹⁷ Though “the cries of the town are indescribable,”¹¹⁸ our author attempts to describe them anyway, stating that his “ears are constantly astounded with the shrill voices of women vending fruit which they carry on their heads.”¹¹⁹ He describes Rio as a “military town,”¹²⁰ full of soldiers, police, and barracks. Despite all of this, our author warns Ned not to judge Brazil too harshly, as customs differ from place to place. He closes his description of Rio, and his first real experience in a foreign land, with the following thought:

Altho’ I have given you all as it appeared to me, yet I may have committed errors—therefore do not let what I have said prejudice you against Brazil, not let us compare it with the U. States for ‘the customs of every nation are the criterion of their own morals, which ought not to be judged by customs that differ from them, and are seldom more or less moral one than an other’... Tho’ it is hard I assure you for us to avoid forming prejudices.¹²¹

Indeed, our writer seems sensitive to the fact that foreign places and foreign customs should be evaluated on their own terms.

Though our author claims neutrality, his bias towards the United States is undeniable. One need only look to his comments about the local entertainment or behavior of women to see his disdain of these aspects of foreign peoples. When describing a Brazilian orchestra, he tells Ned that “the Orchestre [*sic*] was not good, although the dancing was certainly as fine as I have

¹¹⁶ “Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 28.

¹¹⁷ “Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 25-26.

¹¹⁸ “Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 30.

¹¹⁹ “Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 30.

¹²⁰ “Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 35.

¹²¹ “Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 47.

ever seen, but before an english or an american audience they would be obliged to diminish the extent of their genuflections while they increased the thickness and longitude of their dress, since the female display of ancles is so great as to outtop decency almost to obscenity.”¹²² When speaking of an acquaintance’s abused wife, he declares that, “she is beyond redress for this country has not the blessing of ours where every injury has its redress in wise & justly administered laws.”¹²³ In his mind, the United States—and he, himself, as an extension of the country from which he hails—is just, while others are cruel and naïve.

However, our writer is not necessarily typical. We may, in fact, see him as a travel writer embodying certain national ideologies but interacting actively with foreign lands.¹²⁴ After all, if the citizen of a country is only a “vessel” of national ideologies, foreign people and places merely act as “a sort of vast parade ground for national ideologies to strut.”¹²⁵ As such, it is important to recognize that certain aspects of these “vessels” may be directly representative of the larger population, while many other aspects are not. Each U.S. traveler—every traveler, in fact—carries both national and individual beliefs, intents, and habits. Historians must be careful to navigate the thin line between national and biographical traits, never claiming that trait A, being present in traveler B, is shared by all of country C.

Past scholarship has allowed these individual stories to represent all of the United States at a given period in history. In order to avoid “plotting endless lines of interconnectedness, [and] locating positions that can have no position because they exist only in the eerie, content less dimension of positionality,”¹²⁶ we can look at individual authors interacting with the non-European world and develop individualized narratives about different aspects of national

¹²² “Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 27.

¹²³ “Letters Written During a South American Cruise,” 125-126.

¹²⁴ Harvey, *American Geographics*, 21.

¹²⁵ Harvey, *American Geographics*, 246.

¹²⁶ Harvey, *American Geographics*, 263.

ideology. These aspects are sometimes particular to a specific community and others are endorsed by a wide group and therefore may represent the “average” citizen.¹²⁷ Though it is impossible to prove just how and in what ways our author is typical of North American consciousness, he is likely reflective of younger generations of middle class merchant and professional families in the Philadelphian area. We can also understand his edits as efforts to reach a larger audience at a comfortable distance from cultural judgment.

Conclusion: “An Excursion for Pleasure and to Gratify Curiosity”

This letterbook gives us an intriguing and complicated—look into the way other peoples acknowledged the United States’ presence, and how certain North Americans perceived cultures abroad. These travels took place during an important time in the formation of Latin American nations, and so this writer is also well poised to give us a look at the Monroe Doctrine’s political ramifications throughout the rest of the Americas. Despite his timely position and location, however, he says surprisingly little about the political events of the day. While it is dangerous to read his silences, it is also necessary to note where they lie, especially in relation to what he *does* record. His interactions with the European inhabitants of these countries do not appear to be marked by any particular hostility. Should we then conclude that the Monroe Doctrine was significantly less weighty during the first decade of its existence than we might otherwise suspect? Or, was our young North American merely more concerned with social and cultural observations than with significant political occurrences? As seen by the struck passages concerning slavery, our author was initially unafraid to discuss potentially dangerous issues, but he was also willing to censor himself. When he felt he could not offer an authoritative comment

¹²⁷ Harvey, *American Geographics*, 263.

on a foreign subject, he quoted other writers or remained silent.¹²⁸

The writer's letters are notable for their silences as well; they are limited to exploring things he finds fascinating and about which he is unafraid to comment. The fascination with which he describes the squillgee, the lengthy discussion of Catholic ceremonies, and numerous other passages reveal foreign activities much closer to home than the cock-fighting dens and Alamedas of Chile. Our author barely had to step out of his door before he would have encountered a sailor or a Catholic, perhaps even a Catholic sailor, thus fueling how his journey around the Americas put him in constant touch with the foreign. Though our writer would certainly have found different classes, religions, and cultures much closer to home than Santiago de Chile, he believed that in order to truly know the foreign, and therefore one's relationship to it, one must travel abroad. Even early on in his voyage, he writes to Ned that: "I fear that by spinning out my letters to such length I fatigue your patience and I will continue to be minute and like all travellers fancy their readers perfectly ignorant of every thing that differs from the home fire side."¹²⁹ His declaration that his trip is "an excursion for pleasure and to gratify curiosity"¹³⁰ indicates that he goes abroad to experience culture.

It gradually becomes clear that the culture he reveals the most about is his own. In addition to its use in exploring the boundaries of truthful representation of the exotic and the all-too-familiar, this censorship makes this particular work especially useful in exploring the genre of travel narrative and the construction of the self in (the sometimes unconscious) reaction

¹²⁸ One of the only passages in which he discusses politics in his own words is when he remarks on trade in Peru: "Since the war of Independence a great change has taken place in the commerce of these countries. Formerly all vessels not wearing Spanish flags were prohibited from trading with these countries and of course our information respecting them was drawn from the exaggerated accounts given for the most part by interested travellers. The immense revenue derived from South America to the crown of Spain led us to look at this hemisphere as an inexhaustible source of wealth, but since the revolution investigations have shown that the mines are not so profitable as at first sight we might suppose." (pg. 151) This passage is also one of the only points where he remarks on how the wars of independence have affected these nascent countries.

¹²⁹ "Letters Written During a South American Cruise," 47.

¹³⁰ "Letters Written During a South American Cruise," 118.

to the foreign. His later self-censorship only reinforces the sense that the author-traveler consciously processed what he saw in a certain way so that his writing both reflected his true experience and presented the audience with a palatable version of South America that was just exotic enough to entertain but not become incomprehensible.

Comparing home and abroad was the leitmotif—inadvertent or otherwise—of almost every travel writer in the nineteenth century. Our writer ends up defining himself against a backdrop of other classes, religions, and peoples. In the first few letters, the multiple languages and quotations show his audience that he is well educated. The very fact that he had time to go abroad indicates his wealth. Later, we discover that he is Christian but not Catholic, uncomfortable with slavery, and other more personal information. Ultimately, we see him trying to come to terms with what the United States meant as a political entity, even though its cultural identity seemed fairly firm to him. He constantly compares cultural aspects of foreign countries with their counterparts back home, but his surprise at the Fourth of July celebrations in Chile indicates that he is unsure just what it means to represent the United States in a political way. At this point, whether or not the majority of United States citizens had a grasp on the matter, other nations were busy constructing their view of the United States' political identity. Caesar certainly holds this to be true, when he argues that travel writing tends to change perceived external divisions into internal unity.¹³¹

Harvey also posits that in order to conceive of itself as a nation, a country requires an idea of an “other” nation.¹³² These countries celebrating the “revolution” of a nation not their own constructed an identity for the United States so that they could model their own path to independence along similar—though not identical—lines. Meanwhile, United States citizens had

¹³¹ Caesar, *Forgiving the Boundaries*, 16.

¹³² Caesar, *Forgiving the Boundaries*, 16.

a range of reactions to their position as independence exemplar. Though our source may not speak to the larger population, our particular author certainly spent many years navigating the murky waters of so-called national identity. He successfully defined for himself what cultural aspects of the United States were unique and indicative of his society, but he struggled (or perhaps purposefully neglected to define) just what the political ramifications of being a citizen of the United States meant when going abroad. Indeed, if U.S. Americans wanted to conceive of themselves in relation to any other peoples, such peoples were not in the Western Hemisphere, but in the Old World. Caesar's book argues for the importance of travel writing about abroad for the United State's self-imagination. The creation of American travel narratives was in many ways a political program, seeking to separate the nascent nation by separating themselves from British travel literature. It did not see itself as the perpetuation of the British genre, but rather acted as its own revolutionary body of literature. In fact, studying U.S. travel writing in this period reveals one way in which U.S. citizens gradually produced their own history, sometimes quite consciously.¹³³ That is exactly what this letterbook does. Our author is aware of famous European travelers voyaging around Europe and observing foreign peoples. As a North American, he chooses a new venue in which to make his observations. By voyaging south, he is able to explore the truly exotic, both for himself and on behalf of Ned. In doing so, he shows his North American audience foreign peoples and places. However, he also discovers unexpectedly familiar sites in the swiftly changing Western Hemisphere. His letters home tell us what it meant for him to be an American abroad in the 1820s.

¹³³ Caesar, *Forgiving the Boundaries*, 8.

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