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Specters of Haiti: Race, Fear, and the American Gothic, 1789-1855

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Gretchen Judith Woertendyke

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Gretchen Judith Woertendyke

We, the dissertation committee for the above candidate for the

Doctor of Philosophy degree, hereby recommend

Acceptance of this dissertation.

Susan Scheckel—Dissertation Advisor
Associate Professor of English

Eric Haralson—Chairperson of Defense
Associate Professor of English

Helen Cooper
Professor of English

Robert S. Levine
Professor of English, University of Maryland

This dissertation is accepted by the Graduate School

Lawrence Martin
Dean of the Graduate School

Abstract of the Dissertation

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This dissertation argues that the early American gothic is different from that of the British gothic and that the specter of slave violence in Saint-Domingue accounts for this difference. Unlike the British gothic, which overwrote a despotic, Catholic past onto a revolutionary, "terror"-filled present, American writers wrote a French and American Revolutionary present onto a future in which the worst fears of the early Republic were realized: French Revolutionary philosophy, itself related to the American Revolutionary experience, in the hands of Toussaint L'Ouverture and the slaves in Saint-Domingue. In an atmosphere of nascent national consciousness, the gothic tale in particular became the ideal literary form for grappling with the fear which accompanied the Haitian Revolution. A fundamentally ambivalent form, the gothic could at once highlight the contradictions implicit in the American Constitution, while also rendering the most terrifying scenes of violence practiced upon that constitution. The uprisings that resulted in the first black nation state of Haiti in 1804—and especially the reports of these events circulated in American popular media—supply the material examples on which such scenes become imagined. The frequency and flexibility of the Haitian Revolution as a symbol of widespread anxiety about possible slave

violence in the early republic make it indelible in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century American writing and constitutive of its most enduring form, the gothic tale. Aiming to contribute to the emerging field of Transatlantic Romanticism, my dissertation surveys tales and criticism on both sides of the Atlantic, from British romanticists such as Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe, Mathew Lewis, and William Godwin, to the pamphlets and journalism of William Cobbett, novels and essays of Charles Brockden Brown, trial reports and newspaper notices on the slave conspiracies of Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vesey, and Nat Turner, transatlantic writer for *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* John Howison, and finally to modern American romanticists Edgar Allan Poe and Herman Melville.

For my daughter,
Isabelle

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Introduction: New Gothic Nationalism and Transatlantic Exchange

This dissertation argues that the form of the early American Gothic is different from the British Gothic, and that the specter of slave violence in Saint-Domingue accounts for this difference. Unlike the British gothic, which overwrote a despotic, Catholic past onto a revolutionary, "terror"-filled present, American writers wrote a French and American Revolutionary present onto a future in which the worst fears of the early Republic were realized: French Revolutionary philosophy—itself related to the American Revolutionary experience—in the hands of Toussaint L'Ouverture and the slaves in Saint-Domingue. In an atmosphere of nascent national consciousness, the gothic tale in particular became the ideal literary form for grappling with the fear which accompanied the Haitian revolution. A fundamentally ambivalent form, the gothic could at once highlight the contradictions implicit in the American Constitution, while also rendering the most terrifying scenes of violence practiced upon that constitution. The uprisings that resulted in the first black nation state of Haiti in 1804—and especially reports of these events circulated in American popular media—supply the material examples on which such scenes become imagined. The frequency and flexibility of the Haitian Revolution as a symbol of widespread anxiety about possible slave violence in the early republic are indelible to late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century American writing and constitutive of its most enduring form, the gothic tale.

At the conclusion of the slave revolution in Saint-Domingue in April 1804, as the last vestiges of colonial rule were eliminated, the head of state Jean Jacques Dessalines' announced that no European would ever again rule the island and its inhabitants. He then declared: "I have avenged America" (qtd. in Geggus 207).[1] Geggus refers to Dessalines'

[1] David Patrick Geggus, in the epilogue "The Naming of Haiti." *Haitian Revolutionary Studies.* Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2002. 207-220. Geggus cites the Archives de la Guerre, Vincennes, MS 597; ANOM, CC9B/23,

proclamation as "enigmatic" in light of the former colony's radical name change and its choice of an Amerindian name, Haiti.[2] He points out that by adopting a new name, which was not done by any previous Caribbean colonies; Saint-Domingue far more resembles former colonies in Africa, than those in America. But as the symbol of independence, democracy, and liberty *and* also the most pernicious and successful slave system in the Atlantic world, America seems an apt repository for Dessalines' vengeance. That Saint-Dominguan slaves would feel empathic toward black slaves in the early republic is unremarkable, but what is striking about Dessalines' announcement is its suggestion—its invitation—to connect the Haitian Revolution with American slavery. Although his statement implicitly situates American slave revolution as an event no longer required, for Saint-Dominguan slaves' already "avenged" American slaves, it simultaneously collapses the *potential* for revolution with the already past, successful one, and thus constructs a teleology of future slave revolt. For my purposes, Dessalines' provocation establishes the framework for this dissertation, first, in its illustration of the complex investments in and links across the Atlantic world; and second, in the ways in which slave revolution more generally and the Haitian Revolution in particular is narrativized in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

The Atlantic World as a field of inquiry has only recently become understood as critical for understanding any single nation on its axis. It was pioneered by institutes and programs in the mid-1990s by scholars such as Bernard Bailyn, through the *International Seminar on the History of the Atlantic World, 1500-1825* at Harvard University, the *Carolina Low*

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proclamation of April 28, 1804. He explains, "Exceptions were made for certain whites who had allied themselves with the blacks. In the constitutions of 1805, 1806, and 1816, the ban on Europeans was rephrased to exclude 'whites of whatever nation,' but it was omitted in the 1807 and 1811 constitutions of Henry Christophe, ruler of northern Haiti between 1807 and 1820. See L.-J Janvier, *Les constitutions d'Haiti* (Paris, 1886), 30-144" (295).

[2] In the Taino Arawak language, Haiti means "rugged" and "mountainous" according to Geggus, 206.

Country and Atlantic World Program at the College of Charleston, the Atlantic World workshop series out of the History Department at New York University, and individual scholars such as David Levering Lewis, Ira Berlin, and Kathleen Wilson.[3] Understanding practices of empire in an Atlantic world context has developed far more slowly in literary studies than it has in historiography, and in interdisciplinary configurations such as the recent institutional trend in "Cluster" hiring, literary scholars are not often included in those focused on the Atlantic world.[4] It is this relative dearth of literary scholarship focused in and around the Atlantic world which makes early works such as Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1994) and more recent works such as Ian Baucom's *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History* (2005) vital and influential in resituating American Studies in proper historical context.[5] The theoretical, epistemic, and geographic shift created by Atlantic World studies has helped to make clear the worldwide effects of the Haitian Revolution. Even if scholars have been slow to reach this conclusion, however, the

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[3] Bernard Bailyn established the *International Seminar* in 1995. The next workshop to be sponsored by the program will take place in April, 2008, entitled "In Haiti's Wake: Race, Citizenship and Labour in the Post-Revolutionary Atlantic"; *The Carolina Low Country and Atlantic World Program* played an important role in bringing attention to the Haitian Revolution through its 1998 conference and subsequent collection of essays, *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World*, ed. David P. Geggus. Columbia: U of S. Carolina Press, 2001; New York University's *Atlantic World Workshop* series was established in 1997; Ira Berlin's 2004 conference at University of Maryland, "Creating Identity and Empire in the Atlantic World 1492-1808," and his seminal book, *Slavery and Freedom in the Age of Revolution* (1983) have significantly changed Atlantic World studies; David Levering Lewis' *The Race to Fashoda: European Colonialism and African Resistance in the Scramble for Africa* (1987) is an early instantiation; and finally, Kathleen Wilson's *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture, and Imperialism in England, 1715-1785* (1995) is an award-winning scholarly study on the impact of the Atlantic world on imperial practices in eighteenth-century Britain.

[4] *The Atlantic Studies Journal* (Routledge) is an interdisciplinary journal with an emphasis on historiography and literary criticism—its most recent issue is on *The French Atlantic* (vol. 4, Issue 1, April 2007); In 1998, University of Wisconsin—Madison launched its innovative hiring initiative Cluster Hiring which sought to bring together top scholars across disciplines focused around a particular research interest—one of its largest clusters is called *African Diaspora and Atlantic World Research Circle* but includes no literature faculty. Similar initiatives are taking shape at other universities, such as the University of South Carolina—Columbia and the University of California—Berkeley.

[5] Two additional works that stand out in this Atlantic World rubric include Andy Doolen's *Fugitive Empire: Locating Early American Imperialism* (2005) and Sean X. Goudie's *Creole America: The West Indies and the Formation of Literature and Culture in the New Republic* (2006), which I engage more fully in Chapters 1 and 2.

black insurgents in Saint-Domingue seemed keenly aware of their position on a world stage, claiming to the governor of Saint-Domingue in the first months of insurrection that "the world has groaned at our fate." Two years later, the slave leader Georges Biassou told the governor of Spanish Santo Domingo that "All Europe and the entire world have their eyes turned toward us, watching what course of action we are going to take" (qtd. in *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World* Preface x).[6] And they were watching as is evidenced by the plethora of newspapers, political pamphlets, and stories about Saint-Dominguan slave violence and subsequent emigration into the United States. Despite its central and enduring influence in the early republic, the depth and breadth of the impact of the Haitian Revolution on its history and literature remains critically understudied.

A few important historical studies on the ramifications of the Haitian Revolution in the early republic have opened up interpretive possibilities in literary scholarship which make this dissertation possible. In particular, Ashli White's dissertation "'A Flood of Impure Lava': Saint Dominguan Refugees in the United States, 1791-1820" (Columbia University 2003) goes a long way in establishing the critical omission of the Haitian Revolution in revolutionary studies more generally and its specific and broad impact in the early republic during those volatile years. White points to the limitations of scholarship in the revolutionary period as too focused on the implications of the French Revolution and its near exclusive focus on party politics rather than, for example, the Haitian Revolution; and Atlantic World histories which most often stop at the American Revolution. An added burden, White argues, has been the tendency in historical scholarship (and, as I argue

[6] Geggus cites the slave insurrectionaries from Pamphile de Lacroix, *Memoires pour server a l'histoire de la Revolution de Saint-Domingue*, 2 vols. 1819-1820, 1:102 ; and Biassou to Garcia, 24 August 1793, in Garcia to Acuna, 23 Nov. 1793, Archivo General de Simancas, Guerra Moderna, 7157. Another copy exists in Audiencia de Santo Domingo 956, Archivo General de Indias, Seville.

throughout this project, literary scholarship) to privilege the nation at the expense of understanding the far more complex and fluid transnational boundaries in the late eighteenth century. White argues that early republican histories',

> remain unapologetically nationalist in origin…[I]nspired by Benedict Anderson among others, these works about the United States in the 1790s are largely concerned with the question of the transformation of British North America from thirteen colonies into a single nation, and they, in general, search for the mechanisms of this change within the boundaries of the United States.(3)[7]

Literary scholarship of this same period too remains largely confined to questions, answers, and genealogies situated within the nation, with only brief gestures beyond these national borders.[8] Postcolonial theory in early American literary studies has, to varying levels of success, attempted to complicate the tendency toward American exceptionalism in historiography and literary criticism.[9] My argument for the centrality of the Haitian Revolution in the development of a particular literary form, the gothic, necessarily depends upon postcolonial theorizing, in particular, the work of Partha Chatterjee, Ian Baucom, and Dipesh Chakrabarty. Chatterjee's theorization of the difference between nation and community, Baucom's understanding of the "Atlantic slave trade as a (perhaps *the*) foundational event in the history of modernity" (his emphasis 311), and his construction of "interested Atlantic cosmopolitanism," and Chakrabarty's insistence that the colonial is as bound up with Enlightenment historiography as it is with those "other" histories—each

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[7] See also Joyce Chaplin, "Expansion and Exceptionalism in Early American History." *Journal of American History* 89, no.4 (March 2003), 3.

[8] An early exception to this is Eric Sundquist's *To Wake The Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993. But Sundquist's analysis begins in the nineteenth century.

[9] For a good synopsis of postcolonial theory in early American literary criticism, see *Messy Beginnings: Postcoloniality and Early American Studies*. Eds Malini Johar Schueller and Edward Watts. "Introduction,: Theorizing Early American Studies and Postcoloniality" 1-25.

informs my understanding of how the gothic tale develops in the early republic through the combined force of British Romanticism and the specter of Haitian Revolution.[10]

C.L.R. James' classic account of the Haitian Revolution in *The Black Jacobins* (1963) powerfully established the unfathomable impact of the Saint-Domingue slave revolution throughout the Atlantic world by situating it in the context of both the local forces at play and the French and American Revolutions. In so doing, James' paved the way for scholars to understand the slaves' struggle for independence and claim for human rights as a crucial link in the chain of the Atlantic slave trade and democratic movements. In the same tradition, Laurent Dubois' *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (2004) argues that:

> a unique example of successful black revolution, [the Haitian Revolution] became a crucial part of the political, philosophical, and cultural currents of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries….it was a central part of the destruction of slavery in the Americas, and therefore a crucial moment in the history of democracy, one that laid the foundation for the continuing struggles for human rights everywhere. (6-7)[11]

As the leading paradigm of the possibility for emancipation, their fight for racial equality and freedom from slavery without any doubt influenced other slave insurrections throughout the Caribbean and America. Ashli White's focus on Saint-Dominguan refugees in the early republic locates the most direct link between the slave violence in Saint-Domingue and developing terror of its replication in the southern states in the émigrés themselves and the stories they brought with them. She writes, "[In] the most basic way, their impact is undeniable: by migrating to American cities, they changed the lives of inhabitants, and they

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[10] Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993; Ian Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance, Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History*. Durham: Duke UP, 2005; Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000.

[11] Laurent Dubois. *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2004.

also did so throughout [the] country and across wide segments of the population. American residents then *connected* these changes to the revolution in Saint- Domingue" (my emphasis 7).

This "connection" made between Saint-Dominguan slave violence and the profound changes taking place in the 1790s turns the Haitian Revolution into a specter haunting public and private discourse in the early republic. Its power to animate fear of local slave violence in the near future, then, gives rise to the burgeoning American gothic, already taking shape through British influences in the work of Charles Brockden Brown.

My understanding of the specter draws upon Jacques Derrida's *Specters of Marx,* as an historical but "not dated" receptacle. For Derrida, the specter is "a paradoxical incorporation, the becoming-body, a certain phenomenal and carnal form of the spirit. It becomes, rather some 'thing' that remains difficult to name: neither soul nor body, and both one and the other."[12] On the one hand, the specter of Haiti becomes for white slaveholders a way of deferring the violence of slave insurrection by disassociating it from its actual origin in the early republic and southern plantation states. By using a past and geographically distant revolution the fear of black violence and its local origins could be displaced, which worked to reinforce the rapidly growing perception of the exceptional status of the new nation. This reflexive ideological move is reflected formally in the gothic literature of the early republic. The gothic as a supple form of literature is ideally suited to grapple with the horror of slavery and its direct violation of a national identity built upon the conception of freedom and human rights. To achieve this, however, meant removing the stain of such a violent institution from its own mythology over independence, nation, and republicanism. A genre utterly bound up with the nation, as I argue more fully in Chapter 1, the gothic retains

[12] Jacques Derrida's *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International.* Translated by Peggy Kamuf. New York and London: Routledge, 1994. 6-7.

many of the formal features inherited from its British predecessor while it also works to articulate the new national anxieties in the early republic. And from its inception, American mythology was marred by institutional slavery. The Haitian Revolution subsequently became a convenient vehicle for untangling the morass of pro-slavery and abolitionist discourse while also perpetuating this mythological conception of the early republic as a land of freedom, opportunity, and manifest destiny. The Haitian Revolution, then, becomes crucial for this discursive balancing act: it places black slave violence at the forefront of the nation's imagination while maintaining its separation from the local and very real problems rapidly engulfing the period. The gothic is neither exclusively dependent upon secular reasoning of politicians and activists on both sides of the debate, nor divine discourse which prophesied slave liberation in apocalyptic terms; the genre suspends the two discursive modes and in so doing underscores both imaginary and real threats to the new nation. Thus, the gothic could at once use slave violence to horrify readers while repressing its implications. The specter of Haitian revolutionary slave violence achieved this tension, one which ultimately depended upon a certain idea of history the gothic was poised to articulate.

There was, perhaps, no greater challenge to America's self-conception as a nation built upon republicanism than slave violence especially after violent revolt swept the globe in Ireland, France, Saint-Domingue, and throughout the West Indies and South America. Under the pressure of abolitionist rhetoric from Britain and northern cities like Philadelphia, Boston, and New York, Southern pro-slavery states were continuously forced to re-articulate the rationale for maintaining institutional slavery. For pro-slavery radicals, the spectacle of slave insurrection provided such a rationale, one through which conspiracy theories and white supremacist ideology became commonplace. Conspiracy narratives and sentimental constructions of the black slave vied for readers' attention from 1790s through the Civil War,

and both are constitutive of slave insurrection narratives and their implicit contradiction: how could the black slave be docile and lazy but also possess the intellect to plan and the capacity to execute the violent overthrow of slavery –and all in secrecy? This contradiction helped to produce different ways of rationalizing slavery and its effects. On the one hand, slaves were considered tricksters—duplicitous and naturally prone to violence; on the other, abolition and slave insurrection became coterminous. Widespread concerns about American slavery became grafted onto the most successful slave rebellion in history, the Haitian Revolution. The Haitian Revolution, raging from 1791 in the French colony of Saint- Domingue and ending with independence in 1804, terrified Americans from its earliest moments through emancipation in the States. The Revolution loomed large over a century rife with debates about the efficacy of the peculiar institution. But the slave violence in the French colony produced shock waves throughout the Atlantic world, in all races, nations, and ethnicities and included those sympathetic to the revolutionary slaves in Saint-Domingue, of which abolitionists and black slaves were but a portion.[13] In the early republic, each of these groups mobilized the specter of Haiti, some in support of a vision of black sovereignty, equality, and freedom, and others as the most terrifying specter of black violence, one which, at all costs, must be suppressed in the new republic.

Conspiracies and their circulation were the product of more than slave violence. As Robert S. Levine has detailed in *Conspiracy in Romance*, suspicion of another Jacobin plot circulated at the end of the eighteenth century. A "conspiratorial group of Enlightenment-spawned atheists" who called themselves the Illuminati were proliferating in America, spreading their anti-Congregationalist message. There is little more than rumor to suggest that the Illuminati were actually converting citizens into subversive anti-Federalists,

[13] In Robert S. Levine's *Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass And the Politics of Representative Identity* (1997), Haiti figures significantly both of their abolitionist writing, as Levine is careful to emphasize.

nevertheless, the fear of foreign contamination—by ideas as well as people—had far reaching effects. The overwhelming fear of revolutionary violence, one of the by-products of "alien" emigration, so occupied the American imagination that evidence of conspiracy, subterfuge, and counter-revolutionary rhetoric is found everywhere in American letters in the 1790s. The most powerful example of this came with the 1798 Alien and Sedition Laws which criminalized not only those people the state considered alien but also and more insidiously, any literature or speech which critiqued the government.

At the closing of the eighteenth century, however, the specter haunting America had transformed from a fear of anti-religious fervor stemming from radical Enlightenment figures such as Thomas Paine into national anxiety over the "Negro problem." The combined forces of abolitionist rhetoric hailing from Europeans like William Wilberforce, revolutionary terror from Jacobins in France and Haiti, and pressing concerns over when, how, or if to limit westward expansion of institutional slavery yoked violence and race throughout public discourse of the period. While smaller slave rebellions, such as a 1712 New York uprising, 1739 "Stono Rebellion" in South Carolina, and a large but poorly documented 1811 Louisiana rebellion, produced anxiety in their local contexts, it was not until the violence and bloodshed of so many white slaveholders in Saint-Domingue that commonly held perceptions of the slave as fundamentally content were seriously undermined. As many French and American plantation owners fled the violence-stricken Caribbean island, arriving in Virginia and South Carolina ports, stories of the heroic Touissant L'Ouverture circulated between Haitian and black American slaves. Tropes of "frenchness" were invoked in relation to the increasing incidence of slave conspiracy and the abolitionist threat to institutional slavery more broadly. As David Brion Davis notes, the Haitian Revolution "hovered over the antislavery debates like a bloodstained ghost" ("Impact

of the French and Haitian Revolutions" 5).[14] The horrific descriptions and images of revolution which were circulated by Bryan Edwards' pamphlet left an indelible mark on the collective psyche of the nation.[15] His descriptions of a "white infant impaled on a stake, of white women being repeatedly raped on the corpses of their husbands and fathers" (5), worked to terrify and mobilize white planters specifically and the nation more generally, to prepare for similar catastrophes should they materialize on native soil. The cumulative effect gave rise to a cultural milieu whereby local and largely contained slave rebellions were re-imagined as potential Haitian Revolutions. Widespread cultural fear of slave violence within the nation was thus displaced onto the French colony, linking black slaves in the early republic to colonial oppression by virtue of racial similitude. That is, the slave revolts throughout Saint-Domingue in the 1790s became for eighteenth-nineteenth-century-America what communism was for nineteenth-century Europe, according to Marx: a specter.[16]

Literary connections between conspiratorial design and fear of foreign invasion have long since been ascribed to Gothic Literature. Critic Robert Miles suggests that the "Gothic explosion," in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, "was collateral damage from the French Revolution."[17] Following the French and American Revolutions, Charles Brockden Brown takes up the Gothic tradition inherited from European authors, such as Anne Radcliffe, M.G. Lewis, and a young Wordsworth. A particularly avid reader of William

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[14] In *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic Worlds.* Ed. David P. Geggus. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001. 3-9.

[15] Bryan Edwards, *An Historical Survey of the French Colony in the Island of St. Domingo.* London: J. Stockdale, 1791.

[16] Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto.* In *The Revolutions of 1848: Political Writings: Volume I.* London: Penguin, 1993. First published in 1850, Marx begins "A spectre is haunting Europe—the spectre of Communism" (67). 62-98.

[17] Robert Miles, "The 1790s: the effulgence of Gothic." *The Cambridge Companion To Gothic Fiction.* Ed. Jerrold E. Hogle. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002. 41-62

Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, Brown's early gothic novels paralleled the nation's conflict between "'rationalism and religion, radicalism and reaction'."[18] As Levine argues, however, the Gothic tradition can be found in the widely popular seduction novels of the period as well. Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* and Hannah Foster's *The Coquette* provide instances of how virtuous women, and the nation, are deceived and corrupted by "French and British plotters."[19] Paranoia over French imperial designs on the New World, particularly in relation to the Louisiana Territory under contentious debate in the early nineteenth-century, helped to shape conspiratorial discourse, connecting anxiety over race with anxiety over aliens. In Brown's post-1800 writing, for example, in his extensive work for *The Literary Magazine, and American Register*, he argues vehemently against slavery as the most inhumane practice known to man. In 1805, Brown wrote his most pointed abolitionist essay, "On the Consequences of Abolishing the Slave Trade to the West Indian Colonies."[20] Here, he indicts slavery as "the most cruel experiment that ever was tried on human nature." He defends "bad" behavior of black slaves as a result of their conditions, rather than their inherent nature. Brown concludes that slave insurrection is the natural result of "a short-sighted and wicked policy," and warns that until slavery is completely abolished in the U.S., "the fate of St. Domingo will suddenly become the fate of all negro settlements." Brown, then, explicitly connects slave violence in the southern states with that of "St. Domingo" while he also constructs the Haitian Revolution as a specter, one which promises to continue haunting the early republic.

Brown's bold claim for the humanity of black slaves provides the rationale for slave insurrection altogether, but specifically in "St. Domingo," where violence is supportable, he

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[18] See Anne Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794); Lewis' *The Monk* (1796); Wordsworth's play *The Borderers* (1797); Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794); Wollstonecraft's *The Wrongs of Woman* (1797); Brown's *Wieland* (1798).

[19] *Conspiracy and Romance*, 21.

[20] In "Race and Nation in Brown's Louisiana Writing of 1803." *Revising Charles Brockden Brown*. 332-353.

suggests, because of Haitian slaves' rejection of French imperialism. The Louisiana pamphlets reveal Brown as critical of institutional slavery, and equally paranoid that French, British, or Spanish "aliens" will occupy the U.S. As it becomes for Frederick Douglass, Martin Delaney, and William Wells Brown in the mid-nineteenth century, for Brown the Haitian Revolution symbolizes the physical and intellectual capacity of black slaves to overthrow white domination. At the end of the nineteenth-century in a speech dedicating the Haitian pavilion at the Chicago World's Fair, Janurary 2, 1893, Frederick Douglass confidently claims the inestimable role of the Haitian Revolution for emancipation across the Atlantic World. He announces, "We should not forget that the freedom you and I enjoy to-day; that the freedom that eight hundred thousand colored people enjoy in the British West Indies; the freedom that has come to the colored race the world over, is largely due to the brave stand taken by the black sons of Haiti ninety years ago. When they struck for freedom…they struck for the freedom of every black man in the world." While Douglass acknowledges the many attempts at abolition native to the States and Britain, he argues that until the slave uprisings in Saint-Domingue, "no Christian nation had abolished Negro slavery….until Haiti spoke, the church was silent, and the pulpit dumb" (qtd in Davis 3).[21]

Douglass seamlessly links the voice of black slaves—"until Haiti spoke"—as violence, a connection not understood until after the Saint-Domingue uprisings. For example, in a letter to James Madison in 1787, Thomas Jefferson writes, "a little rebellion now & then is a good thing, and as necessary in the political world as storms are in the physical."[22] His acceptance of rebellion is voiced in support of the uprisings in France, a

[21] "Lecture on Haiti," in Frederick Douglass, *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*, 5 vols., ed. Philip S. Foner, New York: International Publishers, 1950-75. 4:484-4:486.

[22] Letter to James Madison, January 30, 1787. *Jefferson Political Writings.* Joyce Appleby and Terence Ball, Eds. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999. 107-109

revolutionary cause that coincided with the principles of Jeffersonian democracy, and his friend Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man*. Jefferson's organic model of political revolution is coupled with enlightenment philosophy which allows him to see rebellion as "little" and therefore controllable, even inconsequential: the "natural rights" of a people who nevertheless remain inside the established political system. Uprisings are a natural and necessary part of any free nation, Jefferson intimates, but pose no serious threat to the superior and rational governing structure of the New Republic. He continues: "Unsuccessful rebellions indeed generally establish the encroachments on the rights of the people which have produced them. An observation of this truth should render honest republican governors so mild in their punishment of rebellions, as not to discourage them too much" (Jefferson 108). Later that same year (1787) Jefferson makes explicit the appropriate response for governments in the face of rebellion: "[W]hat country can preserve it's[sic] liberties if their rulers are not warned from time to time that their people preserve the spirit of resistance? Let them take arms. The remedy is to set them right as to facts, pardon & pacify them. What signify a few lives lost in a century or two?"[23] Jefferson's conviction that the governing structure of the nation is safe, indeed, that the "spirit of resistance" is a sign of national health, signals his rhetorical and ideological integration of violence within his concept of the nation. As a nation born out of revolution, the ideological link between violence and freedom motivates many political and religious treatises of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and is often defined as a necessary evil.

Five years later, however, as Jacobin violence in France motivated the slaves in Saint-Domingue to rise up against slave holders and French colonialism, Jefferson's theory of

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[23] Letter to William Stephens Smith, November 13, 1787. Here, Jefferson refers both to Shays' Rebellion in Western Massachusetts and the subsequent fear of insurrection generally.

natural and inconsequential rebellion changes radically.[24] In a 1797 letter, he writes, "[I]f something is not done, & soon done, we shall be the murderers of our own children…the revolutionary storm sweeping the globe, will be upon us, and happy if we make timely provision to give it an easy passage over our land."[25] He concludes forebodingly, "the day which begins our combustion must be near at hand; and only a single spark is required to make that day tomorrow."[26] The ease with which he explains innocent lives lost in service of a new, just, and democratic nation by the hands of the Jacobins becomes a stark warning of future violence and a fearful expression of revolution as it is read in the context of slave uprisings in Saint-Domingue. [27] This philosophical change can best be understood as one which no longer understands "revolution" as "merely restoring a political system or constitution to some historically prior and uncorrupt state," but sees it instead as acting upon the political domain to encompass social and economic, *as well as* political restructuring.[28] Most importantly, this new concept of revolution places common people as independent agents of change, playing integral roles in revolutionary processes. Jefferson's "revolutionary

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[24] Prior to the establishment of the independent nation of Haiti in 1804, the West Indian island is referred to alternately as the French colony "Saint-Domingue" or part of Hispanola, "St. Domingo." I will most often use "Saint-Domingue" as it is during its violent contest with French imperial power that it becomes a specter of slave violence for the early republic. I will use "St. Domingo" only when a writer or speaker uses it. And finally, after 1804, the former colony takes the name "Haiti" and it is this final symbol of a free-black nation state won through slave violence that endures throughout nineteenth-century America as a terrifying specter.

[25] As in Edmond Burke's *Reflections*, on the French Revolution, Jefferson understands revolution as posing a choice between two poles: accepting the status quo or jeopardizing civil liberties, civilization, and white culture. His statements here reflect his acceptance of inevitable change to the status quo while attempting to manage and delimit the scope and quality of these changes brought on by slave violence and ultimate emancipation.

[26] In a letter to St. George Tucker, August 28, 1797. He begins the letter by situating his warning in inevitable revolution: "the first chapter of this history, which has begun in St. Domingo."

[27] In a letter to William Short, Philadelphia, January 3, 1793, Jefferson defends Jacobin violence, despite the loss of innocent lives. He writes of these losses that "[he] deplore[s] (them) as much as anybody…but as [he] should have done had they fallen in battle." He concludes, "It was necessary to use the arm of the people, a machine not quite so blind as balls and bombs, but blind to a certain degree."

[28] Mark Philip "Revolution." *An Oxford Companion To The Romantic Age: British Culture 1776-1832.* Iain McCalman, Editor. Oxford UP, 1999. 17-26

storm," thus, evolves from a relatively innocuous but vital expression of unrest by the common people—an expression that was easily incorporated into the political structure—to a violent and radical break, a restructuring of the social, economic, and political order. This move toward our modern conception of revolution is one that we might expect in light of the restructuring which came out of both the French and American Revolutions. But as Jefferson's many letters and political writings suggest, it is the Haitian Revolution which alters his conception of revolution as a violent break with tradition.

Thomas Jefferson's political writings not only provide the foundation for American disputes over the nature and extent to which black Americans survived in the "new world," they also express most eloquently the ambivalence, fear, and power at stake in debating institutional slavery. Jefferson's latent fear of revolutionary violence manifest in much of his writing following the 1791 onset of slave insurrection in Saint-Domingue can be found throughout early republican print culture and is the focal point of this project. Specifically, my argument for the development of a uniquely American gothicism is premised on this fear of black violence, made terrifyingly real for early republicans on all sides of the slavery debates through the bloodshed in the French colony. What Jefferson's writing makes clear, however, in ways difficult to overestimate is the extent to which this collective fear shaped national policies on the one hand—economic and political—and social perceptions on the other. The images of black slaves murdering white planters and mulatto overseers forced early Americans to contend with the very real possibility that revolution on such a scale could be replicated in the southern states. And regardless of the differing conditions of plantation slavery in the states relative to the West Indian islands, the ghost of the Saint-Domingue slave haunted multiple levels of discourse throughout the nineteenth century as a result of the successful slave revolution. Before Gabriel Prosser (1800) and Denmark Vesey's (1822)

conspiracies to revolt were discovered—many years prior to Nat Turner's Rebellion(1831) and John Brown's Raid on Harper's Ferry (1859)—Jefferson put the Haitian Revolution at the epicenter of a rapidly building, increasingly violent, storm. Jefferson's fears over the Haitian slaves' bloody revolution developed from private exhortations to friends and political allies to public exclamations warning of impending violence at home. It is this turn—from private to public discourse—that initiates and perpetuates the horrors of slavery as imagined through the Haitian Revolution. For example, in his *First Inaugural Address*, March 4, 1801, Jefferson alludes to the revolution in Haiti and connects it to the question of slavery in America. He writes,

> And let us reflect that having banished from our land that religious intolerance under which mankind so long bled and suffered, we have yet gained little if we countenance a political intolerance as despotic, as wicked, and capable of as bitter and bloody persecutions. During the throes and convulsions of the ancient world, during the agonizing spasms of infuriated man, seeking through blood and slaughter his long-lost liberty, it was not wonderful that the agitation of the billows should reach even this distant and peaceful shore; that this should be more felt and feared by some and less by others; that this should divide opinions as to measures of safety. (*Jefferson Political Writings*, 173-174)[29]

Jefferson insinuates that Americans risk becoming "despotic" if they continue to persecute their own citizens. Those who seek their freedom through "blood and slaughter," Jefferson suggests, are feared by some (white slaveholders), less by others (abolitionists), and most importantly this violence comes from somewhere else, arriving on "this distant and peaceful shore," creating agitation and divisiveness in its wake.

The proliferation of texts written by black and white Americans, of course, diverged greatly in their respective narrative accounts, imaginative uses, and general public outcries over the Haitian Revolution. Where David Walker, William Wells Brown, and Frederick Douglass saw a shining example of black freedom—evidence that slavery as an institution

[29] Jefferson's *First Inaugural Address* (1801), 172-176. In *Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought: Jefferson Political Writings*. Eds Joyce Appleby and Terence Ball. Cambridge UP: 1999.

was crumbling across the Atlantic at the hands of black men themselves—pro-slavery politicians, clergymen, and plantation owners re-articulated, and consequently reinforced, the need to contain the "violent race" by strengthening the institution of slavery.[30] White slave owners predictably used the Haitian Revolution to mass produce fear of collective uprising by both free and enslaved blacks. Critics like Eugene Genovese have argued convincingly that the possibility for slave revolution on such a scale was in the U.S., in fact, fairly negligible.[31] Genovese illustrates that, unlike slaves in Saint-Domingue or Jamaica where the enslaved population surpassed that of the white slaveholding class, where absenteeism was the norm, and where frequently more than two hundred slaves lived and worked on any one plantation, American slaves were far more isolated, from their families and from a broad-based slave community. In addition, the proportion of Creole slaves in the early republic outnumbered those recently emigrating from Africa. In *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade*, W.E.B. DuBois provides another rationale for why a greater incidence of slave revolt existed in places like Saint-Domingue rather than in the early republic. He writes, "[t]he rough and brutal character of the time and place was partly responsible for this, but a more decisive reason lay in the fierce and turbulent character of the imported Negroes. The

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[30] David Walker's *Appeal, in Four Articles, Together with a Preamble, to the Colored Citizens of the World, But in Particular, and Very Expressly to those of the United States of American* (1829), particularly in section four, "Our Wretchedness in Consequence of the Colonizing Plan," Walker refers to the "sons in Africa" who refuse collusion with white domination and instead rise up again their oppressors, a not too veiled reference to slave violence in Haiti; William Wells Brown's "The History of the Haitian Revolution (1855) explicitly connects southern slave violence with the uprising in Saint-Domingue as a warning to early republicans of the dangers in maintaining chattel slavery; Frederick Douglass' "Lecture on Haiti" (1893) at the Chicago World Fair invokes the Haitian Revolution as the beacon of freedom for blacks across the Atlantic during Reconstruction when rights for blacks were systemically denied. For Walker and Brown, *see Pamphlets of Protest*, Eds. Richard Newman, Patrick Rael, Phillip Lapsansky. New York and London: Routledge, 2001.

[31] See *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1979. Also, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made.* New York, 1972.

docility to which long years of bondage and strict discipline gave rise was absent, and insurrections and acts of violence were a frequent occurrence" (DuBois 6).[32]
Despite the unfavorable conditions for slaves to plan or execute revolutionary violence, the "fierce and turbulent character of the imported Negroes," a notion inherited and disseminated by white supremacists, created the spark needed for pro-slavery Americans to spread suspicion and fear.

Abolitionist, James McCune Smith, reveals how the violence in Saint-Domingue was misunderstood and falsely mobilized in the states to maintain the institution. After attending the University of Glasgow, from which he received in rapid succession his bachelors, masters, and medical degrees, Smith returned to New York City in 1837 and joined the American Anti-Slavery Society. Very soon after his return, however, Smith's abolitionism is radicalized by the increasing anti-emancipation movements throughout the states and what he perceives as general apathy on the part of white northerners. In an 1840 lecture delivered at the Stuyvesant Institute in Manhattan, Smith addresses the mythological status of Saint-Domingue for early republicans. He argues that rather than the "fruit of emancipation" the violent revolution in the West Indies was the product of slavery and oppression. Pointing out the function of Saint-Domingue to "justify their racist views of emancipated blacks as bloodthirsty creatures seeking vengeance against their former masters," Smith notes that only 2,000 whites were killed by black insurgents while 10,000 blacks were killed by whites. Most importantly, Smith highlights that the "horrors of St. Domingue" compulsively invoked to strengthen the institution were instead the result of white domination through the violent

[32]W.E.B. DuBois, *The Suppression of The African Slave Trade to the United States of America, 1638-1870*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1968. First published in 1896. 6

institution of slavery.[33] Despite Smith's accurate corrective, Saint-Domingue and its immediate association with bloody violence and attendant images of white slaveholders and their families dying at the hands of renegade, black slaves.

One overarching aim of this dissertation is to illustrate the necessity of grounding critical understanding of the American gothic as a literary genre related to but different from the British gothic. Not only, then, does my project depend on understanding the importance of the Haitian Revolution in the development of the form, but equally essential is its relationship to the British romantic tale made popular by writers like Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe, Mathew Lewis, and William Godwin in the late eighteenth century. As a result, my approach falls within the emerging field of Transatlantic Romanticism rather than one defined as exclusively American. Such a field requires a zooming out at the same time it demands close analysis of the period typically identified as British Romanticism. As I have already suggested, postcolonial theory provides the most useful methodology to achieve bridging nations, re-formulating period distinctions, and understanding the complex ways in which domination and oppression play out in the literature of any period. To this end, I employ a postcolonial critical lens; however, I do not wish to claim the early republic as a postcolonial nation, for to do so would only invert the brand of American exceptionalism which has for many years driven criticism of American literature. Instead, I hope to illustrate how postcolonial criticism as a methodological tool is imperative for making sense of the literature of the early republic, and most especially, the early republican gothic romance.

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[33] See John Stauffer's *The Black Hearths of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race*. His discussion of McCune Smith, a black intellectual and radical abolitionist, comes in the chapter "The Panic and the Making of Abolitionists" wherein the specter of Haiti is described as an important feature of this panic. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2002. 125-126.

In Chapter 1, I survey the critical and bibliographical history of the gothic romance on either side of the Atlantic. By establishing the origins of the American gothic in its British predecessor, the chapter illustrates how the formal features of the gothic change over time and maps how these changes travel when they are in the very different political and cultural milieu of 1790s America. I trace the claims for a romantic tale from Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* as a unique "blend" of old world iconography with modern anxieties and concerns. Featured in the atmospheric symbolism and sexual anxiety of Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho*, especially as it relates to the female body, is added to the genre's list of preoccupations; perhaps most crucial is Radcliffe's claim for the female author which genders the gothic in British letters throughout the eighteenth century. Despite its identification as a female form, novelists like Mathew Lewis and William Godwin use the gothic in ways that create intense critical backlash in the British press. In the gratuitous use of mob violence and themes of persecution and terror, both Lewis and Godwin help to link the gothic with Jacobin violence and thus the French Revolutionary terror. It is this political and philosophical gothic romance which travels from 1790s Britain to 1790s America as we find in the novels of Charles Brockden Brown. The chapter traces then the critical history of the American gothic and suggests that heretofore gothic criticism has been unable to adequately account for its racial anxieties, formal features, and enduring popularity at the same time. By theorizing how the early republican gothic structures time differently than the British gothic, the specter of Haiti as a driving force in the genre becomes clear.

Chapter 2 examines the writing of British émigré William Cobbett and his widely popular newspaper *Peter Porcupine's Gazette* to show how the specter of Haiti becomes intertwined with counter-revolutionary rhetoric in the public sphere. Most known for his early nineteenth-century *Rural Rides* and newspaper *Political Register*, both published in Britain,

Cobbett's decade-long residency in the early republic has received scant critical attention. This absence is significant because of his prominent role in shaping the ways in which thousands of early republicans came to understand debates on the French Revolution, the press, the Irish émigrés, particularly the United Irishmen, and southern slavery. He lived in Philadelphia but his newspaper circulated throughout the early republic, and at the height of his popularity in the mid-1790s, Cobbett commanded the largest reading audience of any writer in the nation. Early American novelist Charles Brockden Brown lived in Philadelphia during the same period and is considered the first gothic novelist of the nation. By reading both Brown's novels and the non-fiction essays, particularly his pamphlets which grapple with contemporary debates surrounding the Louisiana Purchase and institutional slavery, I illustrate in this chapter how the specter of Haiti works rhetorically and ideologically to connect varying forms of print in the revolutionary decade. In the writing of both Cobbett and Brown, the gothic anxieties of Haitian slave violence are recognizable features and help to delimit the growing national preoccupation with American slave violence.

In Chapter 3, I read the narratives, newspaper notices, letters, and political documents surrounding three slave insurrections in the nineteenth century: Gabriel Prosser (1800), Denmark Vesey (1822), and Nat Turner (1831). By examining archival documents and contemporary historiography of these crucial slave conspiracies, I establish a link between the specter of Haiti, early republican fear of slave violence on southern plantations, and the development of the gothic romance. In each slave conspiracy, the ways in which the event is narrativized becomes increasingly gothic and works to mediate between a terrified readership and a government performance of power. In all cases, the specter of Haiti is featured and, as is the case in the narrative construction of Denmark Vesey, continues to haunt contemporary critical understandings of that historical moment. This chapter also

provides the rich paper trail throughout newspapers and letters all of which work to reinforce the connections between slave violence in the states and in Saint-Domingue for early republican readers. By the time of Nat Turner's rebellion in 1831, the specter of Haiti has become an integral component of narratives of slave violence. *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, I argue, provides the crucial literary connection between the ways in which slave violence became mediated for its readers and the creation of the modern gothic romance.

My concluding Chapter 4 turns to the modern example of American gothicism in three stories: John Howison's "The Florida Pirate" (1821), Edgar Allan Poe's *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838), and Herman Melville's *Benito Cereno* (1855). In each, to varying degrees, the specter of Haiti is sutured over, so embedded in the generic features of the work that its referent is taken for granted. John Howison's tale sits on the boundary between Britain and the early republic and thus provides an interesting example of how the gothic tale changes in its travels across the Atlantic. Howison's tale went through several editions between 1821-1834, printed in New York, Philadelphia, and Boston, and was widely popular amongst early American readers. Part sentimental slave narrative and part gothic horror, Howison's tale engages anxieties about slave violence and its relationship to "St. Domingo" through the black pirate Captain Manuel and his adventures on his ship, *Esperanza*. Perhaps Howison's most significant contribution to the genre through his tale is his suggestion that Haiti functions as an imaginary threat much more than any actual threat to the early republic. The tale also participates in the increasing elision between piracy and slavery throughout the Atlantic World. Both Poe and Melville's gothic romances have long been critically understood as classic statements of horror fueled by the racial anxieties of the antebellum period, which by the time of *Benito Cereno* had nearly escalated into a Civil War. What my reading contributes to this broad critical placement is, first, the integral feature of the specter

of Haiti in the narrative structure of each tale; and second, their placement as the first truly modern instantiations of the early republican genre, one whose genealogy can be traced back to the British romantic gothic tales of Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe, Mathew Lewis, and William Godwin. In the gothic romances of Poe and Melville, the theory of time first articulated by Charles Brockden Brown is given flesh, creating tales so haunting they continue to disturb in our present moment in time.

Chapter I: British Pasts, Haitian Futures: The Time of American Gothicism

What but ambiguities, abruptnesses, and dark transitions, can be expected from the historian who is, at the same time, the sufferer of these disasters?

Charles Brockden Brown, *Wieland* (1798)

There has long been critical difficulty in identifying precisely what the Gothic is. How, we might ask, can one genre include such varied "texts" as Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* (1764), Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland; or the Transformation, An American Tale* (1798), Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* (1847), George Romero's film *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), Stephen King's novel and film *The Shining* (1977), and the video game *Pac Man*? The gothic is variously referred to as an object and a mode, in terms of high and low culture, as primarily historical or psychological, as linguistic and as spectacle, as feminine and masculine, as violent and sexual, and as national and inter or transnational. Such multiple and contradictory characteristics, I want to argue, are only possible because of the gothic's historical and national contingency. Even so, there are shared features of the gothic which travel across the Atlantic, from Britain to America, and in its contemporary form, in the West Indies.[34] This chapter surveys the critical history and bibliography of gothic beginnings in the "German Tale," to its modern incarnation in Britain, in order to situate my claim for the historical and national specificity of American Gothicism.[35]

[34] While I only gesture here toward contemporary writers in a gothic tradition, I would suggest that a most fruitful example of the interrelation of genre and history and nation can be found in Caribbean gothicism, such as Alejo Carpentier's *Kingdom of This World* (1957) and *The Lost Steps* (1956), Maryse Conde's *Crossing the Mangrove* (1995) and Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966).

[35] The most popular "German tales" include Eliza Parson's *The Castle of Wolfenbach* (1793), Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774), and most influential to British Gothicism was Friedrich Schiller's *The Ghost-Seer* (1795).

One of the foremost literary historians of the gothic, E.J.Clery, points out that most critical studies of the genre address its etymology in some part and for good reason: the term "gothic" was not used in relation to literature, at least not its critical reception or analysis, until the 1920s. Rather, the gothic began with Walpole and was identified as "romance." Romance ushers in both the Romantic period (roughly 1780s through the 1840s) and its primary literary movement, Romanticism (1789-1832). Whether as genre, period, or literary movement, "romance" marks a divergent response to the literature of the first half of the eighteenth century, of Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, and Henry Fielding.[36] Each of these realist authors claimed their own distinct form in contrast with the earlier "otherworldly and outdated "romance"" of the seventeenth century (Clery 22). Eighteenth-century British novelists were keenly interested in distinguishing their own new "novels" from the widely popular French heroic romances, by focusing their concerns around the everyday existence of the middle-class subject and by structuring the narrative in progressive time. French romances such as La Calprenede's *Cassandra* (1644-1650) and Madeleine de Scudery's *Le Grand Cyrus* (1659-1653), both published over years and in ten volumes, work by way of "artificial diction, numerous coincidences, the promiscuous mixing of history and fiction, absurd idealism, and over-the-top heroics," rather than supernatural devices (22). All of these features, to some degree, can be found in the modern gothic. It is, however, difficult to talk about the novel *without* romance; as Clery argues, there is interdependency between the novel and romance, a dialectical relation. (23) Likewise, the gothic is impossible to

[36] See E.J. Clery's "The Genesis of 'Gothic' Fiction." *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, Ed. Jerrold E. Hogle. 21-39.

imagine without the novel; as Anthony Jarrells has suggested, it is what romance looks like after the novel and the Enlightenment.[37]

Horace Walpole sets out in *Castle of Otranto* to release art from the restrictive devotion to mimesis, while maintaining the "human character." In his *Preface* to the second edition of the text, Walpole attempts to explain his methodology and, as a result, offers what to this day remains one of the clearest theories of the gothic. He writes that "the great resources of fancy have been damned up, by a strict adherence to common life" (9).[38] *Castle of Otranto* is, he writes, "an attempt to *blend* the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern." While the former was predominantly "imagination and improbability: in the latter, nature is always intended to be, and sometimes has been, copied with success" (7 my emphasis). Walpole endeavors to "reconcile the two kinds" of art—one which puts nature over and beyond "imagination," the other which privileges "fancy" at the expense of human nature. He writes,

> Desirous of leaving the powers of fancy at liberty to expatiate through the boundless realms of invention, and thence of creating more interesting situations, he [the author] wished to conduct the mortal agents in his drama according to the rules of probability; in short, to make them think, speak and act, as it might be supposed mere men and women would do in extraordinary positions. (7-8)

Put another way, Walpole seems to introduce an aesthetic which highlights the dramatic tension between the average potential of the middle-class subject, male and female, within a broader cultural crisis, in order to "drama[tize]" the endless range and possibility of the human's capacity to respond more and less rationally. Walpole also introduces an integral feature of the gothic regardless of historical moment or national context: a tension between mimesis and the sublime. Walpole seems to offer a more limited range of possibility for the

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[37] See in Jarrells' working paper, "Provincializing Europe." Presented at *Scottish Romanticism in World Literatures*. University of California, Berkeley: September 7-10, 2006.

[38] See *Oxford World Classics Edition*, Ed. W.S. Lewis. Preface to the Second Edition, 7-12. (1982)

gothic than what I have only just sketched: he writes, "[t]hat in all inspired writings, the personages under the dispensation of miracles, and witnesses to the most stupendous phenomena, never lose sight of their human character: whereas in the productions of romantic story, an improbable event never fails to be attended by an absurd dialogue. The actors seem to lose their senses the moment the laws of nature have lost their tone" (8). Walpole's gothic aesthetic, however, remains slightly more optimistic, slightly more indebted to writers like Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding, than he claims. Ascribing a human ability to "never lose sight" of their human character diminishes the narrative's power to transport readers into another space and time. It is precisely this feature of the gothic, I would argue, which sustains its potency as art and as cultural critique. Walpole nevertheless lays the groundwork for the very rich and diverse gothic tradition in his creation of a "new species of romance" (12).

An enduring aspect of Walpole's fiction is his acknowledgment to "the brightest genius of [his] country"—Shakespeare. Under the "shelter" of the Shakespearean "canon" Walpole describes a feeling of "liberty to lay down what rules I saw fit for the conduct of" his new romance. Rather than "enjoy the merit of invention" he feels pride at having "imitated, however faintly, weakly, and at a distance, so masterly a pattern" (12). In other words, for Walpole, his new "species of romance" is historically contingent. In the works of Shakespeare, he finds characters both low and high, universal and esoteric—all of which respond to their societal conditions in ways that enrich the beauty and complexity of the whole. He asks,

> if [Shakespeare's] tragedies of Hamlet and Julius Caesar would not lose a considerable share of their sprit and wonderful beauties, if the humour [sic] of the grave-diggers, the fooleries of Polonius, and the clumsy jests of the Roman citizens were omitted, or vested in heroics?...These touches remind one of the Grecian sculptor, who, to convey the idea of a Colossus within the dimensions of a seal, inserted a little boy measuring his thumb. (8-9)

Walpole describes his own process, as well as Shakespeare's, as necessitating "domestics" and popular culture in order to heighten the dramatic tension of the social crisis and its primary agents, Hamlet and Caesar. But by drawing on Shakespeare, whose ideological investment in an Elizabethan nationalist mythology set the stage for all subsequent British writers, Walpole describes a relationship between history, nation, and the gothic which remains today. Too, his defense of Shakespeare's use of humor within serious drama agrees with his own aesthetic which, as Clery writes, remains a feature of the gothic up until the publication of Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), William Godwin's *Caleb Williams or Things As They Are* (1794), and Mathew Lewis' *The Monk* (1796).[39]

Aesthetics and politics were inextricably linked in the Gothic after the onset of the French Revolution in 1793. Contemporaries much more than current critics read the gothic as "collateral damage from the French Revolution" (*Gothic Fiction* 42). The Marquis de Sade famously argued that the works of Radcliffe and Lewis were the "the necessary fruits of the revolutionary tremors felt by all of Europe"' (qtd. in Miles; *Gothic Fiction*, 43).[40] Drawing on the path-breaking work of Peter Garside's *English Novel*, Robert Miles illustrates the two major phases of gothic production in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The first phase from 1788-1793 includes writers like Walpole and Reeve, and the second, far more influential phase encompasses 1793-1807 initiated by the publication of Radcliffe and Godwin's gothic novels and attendant revolutionary anxieties of the last decade of the eighteenth century.[41] According to Garside and Miles, from 1788-1807, the gothic takes up

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[39] See "The Genesis of 'Gothic' Fiction," 31.

[40] See Marquis de Sade, "Ideas on the Novel," in Victor Sage, ed., *The Gothic Novel: A Casebook*. London: Longman, 1990. 73.

[41] See *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, Ed. Jerrold E. Hogle, pg 42-43 for a diagram breaking down each year and number of gothic texts published. See also Peter Garside's, *English Novel II*, 56.

approximately 30% of novel production in Britain and reaches a high at 38% in 1795, but how these revolutionary anxieties manifest in the gothic novels of the 1790s varies widely. Radcliffe's oft rehearsed distinction between "terror" and "horror" accounts for one difference, say, between *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and Lewis' *The Monk*; yet another type of gothic comes out of Godwin's "philosophic romances" such as *Caleb Williams.*[42] Even during its peak in popularity, then, the gothic refused any monolithic objective status instead branching off into different "families" which were contingent upon the particular philosophic, aesthetic, and political positions of the writer.[43] A closer examination of these differences as represented by Radcliffe, Lewis, and Godwin provide the crucial literary scaffolding for what becomes the American gothic in the late 1790s.

Radcliffe's novel centers on the life of Emily St. Aubert who, after the loss of both of her parents, is raised by her father's sister, Madame Cheron. Set in the French countryside in 1584, the narrative essentially follows the sexual (or marital) development of Emily. She falls in love, but is separated from Valancourt by her aunt's evil husband, and is imprisoned in Italy in his castle Udolpho. Emily, then, is almost married off to yet another sinister Italian man, until she is reunited with her lost love Valancourt and married. Hailed by contemporaries and current critics as a brilliant creation of suspense, terror, and doubt through the psychological development of Emily and in its use of symbolism, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* : *A Romance,* extends the sublimity of Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* and brings Gothicism into the realm of sexual politics. Radcliffe, unlike Walpole and American gothic

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[42] Radcliffe's essay "On the Supernatural in Poetry" published in 1826 for the *New Monthly Magazine* famously works to separate her own aesthetic of "terror" whereby suspense is generated through imaginary and unknowable threats that lose their potency only when the far less terrifying reality is revealed in the end; and "horror" which shocks and disgusts, ultimately proving that reality is far more horrific than anything conjured in the imagination. See Clery, E.J., and Robert Miles, Eds. *Gothic Documents: a Sourcebook, 1700-1820.* Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000.

[43] See "The 1790s: the effulgence of the Gothic," 44.

writers Charles Brockden Brown and Edgar Allan Poe, declares her status as a female writer in large font in the title page of the novel Indeed, Radcliffe was the *first* novelist to earn enormous amounts of money from her books and name-recognition from the British reading middle-class. As such, Radcliffe "pioneered the cultural position of the author as famous producer of a certain commodity that would be inherited by [Walter] Scott and bequeathed as canonical to the nineteenth century" (Duncan 35).[44] As Ian Duncan notes, it is remarkable that this public persona was created by a woman. "Radcliffe's work reiterates the genre's preoccupation with sexual archetypes, to the extent that the gender of the author has become one of the romance's crucial literary effects. To find in Radcliffe," then, "a 'female Gothic' that distinguishes itself as such…is to note the involvement of a newly potent figure of subjectivity, the author, in the fiction of a human condition of private life determined by sexual archetypes" (36). Nancy Armstrong has suggested that writing allowed for the emergence of an identity that, for the first time, registered both economically and psychologically and that women were at the forefront of this modern emergence.[45]

I want to suggest, then, two important features of Radcliffe's writing: first, her position as a female writer of middle-class reputation, means, and popularity link Gothicism with "women's writing" in the public sphere in the 1790s; second, while, as Duncan suggests, this opens up a critical space wherein the feminine, if not female subjectivity, is made more ambiguous and therefore dangerous and powerful, it also gives rise to a whole host of alternative, masculine renditions of the genre. In other words, Radcliffe's feminine gothic gave generations of male authors' material to write against. Rather than simply a

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[44] See Ian Duncan's "The Culture of the Gothic," in *Modern Romance and Transformations of the Novel: The Gothic, Scott, Dickens*. 20-50.

[45] In *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel,* 8.

female figure within a narrative structure, one whose excess energies, usually sexual, can be contained by the controlling apparatus constructed by the male writer (whether named or pseudo-named), Radcliffe's female authorship (in addition to her heroine) creates and circulates an abject commodity. According to Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*, abjection describes the in-between space most symbolized by the initial separation from the mother at birth as fundamentally ambiguous, something both feared and desired. Abjection manifests as de-familiarized cultural objects and thus enters into social economies. The female gothic becomes, in 1790s Britain, the site of a broader cultural fear and desire for female sexual power.[46] But in order to manage and remove this site of horror, gothic "romance" became paradoxically identified almost exclusively with eighteenth-century British women writers like Maria Edgeworth and Caroline Bowles, which became the grounds for its dismissal by writers such as William Wordsworth. Only when we understand the female gothic as an abject commodity can its broad and generative influence on the masculine Gothicism of Lewis and Godwin make sense. How these authors, then, draw their female characters becomes a form of critique of female writers as well. We find abject representations of female characters throughout much of male-authored gothic fiction, but perhaps none more so than in Mathew Lewis' *The Monk*.

Published in 1796 and written when Mathew Lewis was only nineteen, *The Monk* entered the public sphere accompanied by mass sensationalism. Unlike the sublimated, careful atmospheric Gothicism of Radcliffe's novel, *The Monk* seemed to be written to shock and horrify its middle-class readers' sensibilities. Like Brockden Brown's novel *Arthur Mervyn; or the Yellow Fever Epidemic, 1793* (1799), *The Monk* is written in parallel plots that ultimately converge in the climactic conclusion. One part focuses on the monk Ambrosio,

[46] See Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* (1980), pg 4-10. See also Jerold E. Hogle's "Introduction: the Gothic in western culture" in *Gothic Fiction*, pgs 1-20.

his Faustian deal with the devil, and his ultimate descent into graphic, sexual, violence (including incest), murder, and horrifying death; the other part revolves around the forbidden love of Agnes and Raymond, young lovers who work against the repressive wishes of her parents, the church, and sexual mores. The double-helix of the plot mutually reinforces the moral degeneracy and false idolatry of the church, heterosexual love, and the patriarchal structure governing them. But Lewis' novel is far from advancing any neat moral or political position: the gothicism of the novel works primarily through spectacle rather than through narrative, the additional valence of which renders the already ambiguous genre far more inconclusive.

For example, a reader cannot help but be struck by the startling and violent images of women in the novel—the rape of Antonia; the devil in the form of Matilda; and most haunting, the picture of Agnes cradling and nursing her dead infant in the "crypt" which held her prisoner. She describes her condition thus: "often have I at waking found my fingers ringed with the long worms, which bred in the corrupted flesh of my Infant" (*The Monk* 415). And this, only after she gives birth while standing up, chained to a dungeon wall; the baby dies within hours from lack of care. The effect of the image of Agnes in particular—the devoted mother to her dead baby—is contrasted with her immoral, pre-marital sex. However, the personal dramas of Agnes and Ambrosio pale in comparison to the large-scale violence of the anti-clerical mob that literally tears the Abbess to pieces in the streets of Madrid. Miles points out that *The Monk* "was shockingly new, because it inverted, parodied, or exaggerated the features [of the gothic] it cannibalized" (*Gothic Fiction* 53).[47] Lewis' contemporary readers couldn't fail to connect the graphic violence of the mob in the

[47] That Lewis becomes a popular playwright after publication of *The Monk* illuminates how parody (as a feature of melodrama) might have featured in his earlier work.

streets of Spain with the French revolutionary violence which ravaged the streets of Paris and threatened the borders of the British nation. As the Abbess in Agnes' convent is constructed as an unsympathetic character that is meant to represent corrupt political and clerical authority, her graphic demise could be construed as an "apologetic reflection on the violence in France."[48] The object of this mass violence, however, is also located on the female body. Lewis' gothic romance seems to argue that at every site—the domestic, sexual, clerical, political—patriarchal violence, power, and potency oppress by way of violence all things female or feminine.

Despite this, the novel becomes seductive through its sheer gruesome imagery coupled with its satiric tone. While I would enjoy contributing to the vast quantity of scholarly treatments which analyze the psychosexual, social, and political attributes of the text, for my purposes it is necessary to comment here on how the exaggerated features of Lewis' novel provide yet another vein of □ othicism. First, Lewis inverts the register from that of authoritarian repression to authoritarian subversion. Unlike Radcliffe's heroine, who spends much of the narrative fearing the unknown and falling victim to the malign whims of Montoni only to be rescued by love, Lewis' anti-hero is the quintessential site of power whose spectacular downfall ends with "Eagles of the rock [tearing] his flesh piecemeal, and [digging] out his eye-balls with their crooked beaks (*The Monk* 442). Perhaps the most significant contribution to □ othicism is Lewis' gratuitous description of mob violence. The following scene takes place when the anti-clerical mob takes to the streets outside the convent and brutally tortures the Abbess:

> The Rioters heeded nothing but the gratification of their barbarous vengeance. They refused to listen to her: They showed her every sort of insult, loaded her with mud and filth, and called her by the most opprobrious appellations. They tore her one from another, and each new Tormenter was more savage than the former. They stifled with howls and execrations

[48] See Miles in *Gothic Fiction*, 53.

her shrill cries for mercy; and dragged her through the Streets, spurning her, trampling her, and treating her with every species of cruelty which hate or vindictive fury could invent. At length, a flint, aimed by some well-directing hand, struck her full upon the temple. She sank to the ground bathed in blood, and in a few minutes terminated her miserable existence. Yet though she no longer felt their insults, the Rioters still exercised their impotent rage upon her lifeless body. They beat it, trod upon it, and ill-used it, till it became no more than a mass of flesh, unsightly, shapeless, and disgusting. (356)

I quote this passage at some length because, on the one hand, it bears resemblance to the graphic violence we find in the insurrection narrative of Nat Turner in 1831, but also, it suggests a very different register than that found in Radcliffe's novel, one in which the inevitable corruption of old-world power leads to violence both to the individual and to the state. The private space of domesticity is contaminated but Lewis leaves no doubt that it will infect the entirety of the body politic. Critics of the gothic found in Lewis the smoking gun which linked literature—especially popular literature—to revolutionary violence. By connecting a Burkean "cult of the sublime" with Robespierre, for instance, critics could make accusations of literary regicide stick. Gothic writers, then, became for literary critics and, in turn, for their readers in the 1790s, a "semiliterate mob" (*Miles* 44).

Miles distinguishes between the three most prominent perceptions of what drives the gothic from the viewpoint of its contemporary critics in 1790s Britain: the gothic was the necessary art of a revolutionary age, it was revolutionary itself (as anti-Jacobins argued), or it was a result of the "widespread perception that all old structures were in a tottering condition, such as, for instance, castles, or the constitution, with its feudal, Gothic foundations" (*Miles* 44). As William Hazlitt hints, the "gothic vogue fed off the revolutionary anxieties of its readership" (*Miles* 44).[49] By moving from the domestic and more private register of Radcliffe's gothic novel, to the more public and overtly political

[49] Miles draws on William Hazlitt's *Lectures on the English Comic Writers* published in 1907, wherein he locates the anxiety for gothic romance in a more generalized anxiety produced by the transition between an old world and a new modern condition.

gothic of Lewis, a new interpretive frame came into focus which immediately drew the attention of literary critics and political conservatives. Lewis' disparaging use of the Bible, for instance, produced public outrage including legal threat which forced him to "expurgate" his novel. In part, the perceived threat stemmed from Lewis' status, one he highlights in the second edition by signing his name M.G. Lewis, Esq. M.P. In T.J. Mathias' deeply conservative and satirical poem *The Pursuits of Literature* (1798) he asserts that Lewis' use of the Bible is "indictable at Common Law" and calls for his legal prosecution.[50] Mathias also refers to the novel as "a new species of legislative or state-patricide." Mathias' remarkable conflation between literature and violence against the state is a feature of anti-Jacobin literature in the 1790s and includes Burke's *Letters on a Regicide Peace*, the *Anti-Jacobin Review*, and the Government sponsored *British Critic*. What becomes customary in literary and political discourse in late eighteenth- century Britain, from both sides of the political divide, is the conviction that the Gothic and Jacobinism were one and the same. This conflation is made possible because of a broad and acute fear of the relationship between the popular and large-scale violence against the nation-state. The French Revolution, as the most terrifying illustration of this link, functions as the engine out of which gothic anxieties were produced and consumed by late eighteenth-century British writers, readers, and literary critics.

What Mathias achieved, then, though by no means single-handedly, was the more widespread belief that literature had the power to create, shape, and ultimately destroy nations. In the third part of *The Pursuits of Literature*, he writes: "Some subjects are of an importance serious and urgent, not to be deferred. Wherever the freedom of the press exists, (and with us may that freedom be perpetual!) I must assert that Literature, well or ill

[50] See Emma McEvoy's "Introduction" to *The Monk*, Oxford UP, 1995, ix. See also T.J. Mathias *The Pursuits of Literature*, 5th Edition. London: T. Becket, 1798. 194.

conducted, is the great engine by which, I am fully persuaded, all civilized states must ultimately be supported or overthrown" (III.1). Mathias here echoes William Cobbett's simultaneous counter-revolutionary attacks on irresponsible "literature" in Philadelphia, a point I take up in the following chapter. It is not just any literature, however, which captures the attention of Mathias and Cobbett, and also Burke and Wordsworth, but specifically gothic literature. Each excoriates the "frantic novels, sickly and stupid German tragedies, and the deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse" for producing, as in the case of Wordsworth, something less than literary but, for Burke and Mathias, something far more subversive and potentially violent.[51] They were not alone in their beliefs. The "deluge" of counter-revolutionary criticism coincided with the new, national sanctions to the same "free speech" Mathias claimed to support. The mid-1790s saw the suspension of *habeas corpus* and also the famous treason trials of radical writers and members of the London Corresponding Society. The goal was to avoid replication of the 1793 Jacobin Terror in France by imposing limitations on public and written forms of dissent against the state; since, as Burke indicts in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), literary writers were in no small part responsible for bringing about the Jacobin Terror. These debates throughout British print culture in the 1790s existed in the "discursive shadow" of the Gothic, which made the genre's "terror" pregnant with radical and dangerous implications for the stability of the nation.[52]

I turn now to the final instance of the British Gothic novel which perhaps more than any other helped to shape the early American gothic novel. William Godwin published the first "Jacobin Gothic" in 1794 against a backdrop of the far-reaching treason trials in which booksellers, authors, and publishers were all tried and imprisoned for "seditious libel."

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[51] In Wordsworth Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, 249.

[52] Miles, "The 1790s: the effulgence of Gothic," in *Gothic Fiction*. 46.

Godwin's *Things as They Are, or the Adventures of Caleb Williams*, while never once mentioning revolutionary France, was instantaneously read as an advocate of revolutionary violence, subversive in its political intent, and an outright threat to the British nation. Unlike Godwin's later *St. Leon* (1799), which has been critically understood, to greater and lesser degrees, as a "metaphysical gothic," *Caleb Williams* was received upon publication in 1794, as it remains today, as a "political gothic." That is, its anxieties, character motivations, and settings (very often in trials and courts of law) are bound up with many of the most pressing political crises of the mid-1790s. In particular, *Caleb Williams* is taken up by themes of pursuit and conviction, as Maurice Hindle suggests in his 1987 "Introduction" to the novel.

In brief, the plot of *Caleb Williams* involves the self-same hero whose worship of his master Squire Falkland, a wealthy gentlemen, is transformed into awe and terror when he discovers that he murdered his neighbor, Tyrell. The discovery is made more significant by the conviction and execution of two innocent people for the murder. The novel opens with Caleb narrating his life, which "for several years [has] been a theatre of calamity" (5). Hunted by Falkland's henchman, the "sinister and relentless" Gines, and the law for escaping prison—the result of Falkland's false accusation of theft—Godwin positions Caleb in a terrifying and seemingly fruitless position. The only means by which Caleb can attain freedom from terror and pursuit is by exposing the truth, in part by way of his own confession, but also by tricking Falkland into confession for the murder of Tyrell. That the novel ends in just this way hints at Godwin's somewhat utopian belief in the power and possibility of truth and reason to right the injustices meted out by the state. But for the majority of the novel, Caleb (as well as the novel's readers) is in a perpetual state of panic and persecution, which functions as a thinly veiled allegory for the political conditions in 1790s Britain for Jacobin writers and philosophers.

Hindle points out that Godwin originally viewed *Caleb Williams* as "a vehicle for the philosophical anarchism preached in his magnum opus *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793)," a fact "made clear in numerous ways by the text itself, but especially by its Preface and the letter he wrote in response to a *British Critic* correspondent who attacked the novel in 1795, jut before its second edition" (x-xi). Godwin withdrew his Preface from the first edition on the eve of its publication in compliance "with the alarms of booksellers" on May 12, 1794, the same day *habeas corpus* was suspended and the London Corresponding Society leading radical Thomas Hardy was arrested. In the second edition, published October 29, 1795, Godwin releases the suppressed original Preface, explaining that "terror was the order of the day; and it was feared that even the humble novelist might be shown to be constructively a traitor" (4).[53]

Godwin was likely who this anonymous letter written to the *Monthly Magazine* in August 1797 had in mind by indicting the "terrorist system of novel writing":

> …and just at the time when we were threatened with a stagnation of fancy, arose Maximilian Robespierre, with his system of terror, and taught our novelists that fear is the only passion they ought to cultivate, that to frighten and to instruct were one and the same thing, and that none of the productions of genius could be compared to an ague….Our genius has become hysterical and our taste epileptic. ("The Terrorist System of Novel Writing" 1797)

Again, we find literary genre—the gothic—a metonym for the violent terror of revolutionary France. The relationship between the gothic and violence permeates all forms of British print culture throughout the 1790s. In the *Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine*, the popular conservative rag, "Jacobinism" is repeatedly connected to violence and republicanism. In a poem described as a "new song attempted from the French" we find the link between gothic and violence: "Two heads, say our proverb, are better than one,/But the Jacobin choice is

[53] All quotes from the novel come from Godwin's *Things As They Are; or, the Adventures of Caleb Williams*. Ed, Maurice Hindle. London: Penguin, 1987.

for five heads, or none./By directories only can liberty thrive,/ Then down with the one, boys! And up with the five."

The terror which seems to automatically follow any collective (five heads rather than two) is implicitly connected to the gothic, in that rather than using two heads Jacobin literature requires exaggeration to achieve its goal of liberty. The *Anti-Jacobin* makes its intention explicit in its published mission statement, which reads: "The regicides of France and the traitors of Ireland find ready advocates in the heart of our metropolis, and in the seats of our university. At such a time, what friend of social order will deny, that the press requires some strong controul? And what controul is more effectual than that which the press itself can supply?" (Vol. I., pg. 2). Rather than supplying a check and balance for the excesses of the state, then, the press as described through the conservative *Anti-Jacobin* is necessary to check the excesses of literature. This gesture is one taken up by William Cobbett in America—as I argue in some detail in the next chapter—when he often repeats that only he is able to distinguish between violent republicanism and secure federalism.

In response to the *British Critic* which accused *Caleb Williams* of "[throwing] an odium upon the laws of [his] country," Godwin wrote that his intention was actually of a "much greater magnitude, that it was, in fact, to "expose the evils which arise out of the present system of civilized society, to disengage the minds of men from presupposition, and launch them upon the sea of moral and political enquiry." He concludes by asserting his prime target "the administration of justice and equity, with its consequence, as it exists in the world at large, and in Great Britain in particular" ("Introduction" xi).[54] In tone and content, then, it is not difficult to accept the suppression of Godwin's Preface from the first edition of the novel; it is far more difficult to understand how it was ever published in the first place and,

[54] In *British Critic*, July, 1795.

indeed, how Godwin escaped exile or execution. Too, in his quite straight-forward agenda to provide "equity and justice" in his nation to those who might otherwise not be exposed to such concepts—the middle-class reading public rather than the British academic or intellectual elite—it is difficult to locate how the novel is gothic. It would seem more appropriately described as a precursor to the French naturalist tradition of Emile Zola or perhaps even sentimentalism in its moralizing aim to enlighten its readership. But Godwin achieves what previous gothic writers could not: the perfect "blend" in Walpole's language, of heightened symbolic terror through representation of his *present* political and cultural moment. Rather than situating his narrative in the distant past—the sixteenth century in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* or during the inquisition in *The Monk*—or in a displaced nation (Italy and Spain respectively) wherein British religious anxieties are brought to the fore by representing Catholicism as barbaric and medieval; Godwin's setting in *Caleb Williams* is in the present moment, in the local nation, and firmly within secular discourses. These features mark a decisive transition from the gothic as "romance" to the gothic as a modernist text. Though traces of gothic romance remain to our contemporary moment, it is this latter, modernist gothic that travels across the Atlantic to the early American writer, Charles Brockden Brown.

By the mid-nineteenth century Gothicism was made widely available in a far more popular form: the tale. Through writers like Washington Irving, Edgar Allan Poe, and lesser known critically though extremely popular in mid-nineteenth-century America, John Howison, tales came to embody local moments of political and cultural anxiety.[55] The "tales of terror" as a mode of Gothicism was much more accessible than that of Brown's difficult and confusing novels. The tales, most of which were published in magazines such as the *London Magazine*, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, *Southern Literary Messenger*, or *Fraser's,*

[55] In Chapter IV, I provide a fuller treatment of John Howison's "The Florida Pirate" originally published in *Blackwoods' Edinburgh Magazine* in 1821, it was reprinted in America seven times between 1821-1834.

are situational, shorter in length, and most often work through a collapsed temporal narrative. Jerold Hogle argues that "the Gothic has… come to deal, as one of its principal subjects, with how the middle class dissociates from itself, and then fears, the extremes of what surrounds it: the very high or the decadently aristocratic and the very low or the animalistic, working-class, underfinanced, sexually deviant, childish, or carnivalesque" (*Gothic Fiction* 9). The distinction between high and low could also apply to the distinction between novels, particularly the philosophic romances of Godwin and Brown, and the "tales of terror." While the novels methodically and philosophically worked to subvert cultural authority, the tales most often employed violence and spectacle to strengthen it. The radical underpinnings of the gothic novels, then, are quite different from the often reactionary tendencies of the "tales of terror." Both traditions, I want to suggest, are crucial to the development of American gothicism and both travel from British literary culture to a nascent American literary culture in the late 1790s, on the one hand, and in 1819 with the publication of Washington Irving's *The Sketch-Book*, on the other. As subsequent chapters address in more detail, each form of the gothic works through early American cultural anxieties. Like the obsessive fixation on the Jacobin reign of Terror of 1793 in the British gothic, American gothic novels and tales reveal an obsessive fixation on slave violence and its origins in the Haitian Revolution.

American literary criticism about the Gothic has most often claimed that the American gothic is, to different degrees and in different ways, different. Early American gothic writers like Charles Brockden Brown and Nathaniel Hawthorne themselves announced a difference between their work and that of their British predecessors. Take, for example, Hawthorne's Preface to *The House of The Seven Gables* (1851), in which he emphasizes the role of the "Romance" as a "Tale" that attempts "to connect a by-gone time

with the very Present that is flitting away from us" (2).[56] In its connection to a past, Hawthorne's Preface registers a self-conscious allegiance to its precursor across the Atlantic; however, the anxiety of his claim is located in the "Present" and in our inability to hold onto it. This anxiety seems to be two-fold: time itself is simply moving too fast, as reflected in the proliferation of social, political, and economic change taking place in mid-nineteenth century America; but more important to Hawthorne is our limited capacity to understand the Present before it transforms into something else. American gothic novels, then, are different from British gothic novels in their theory of history, a central premise of my broader argument which I discuss more fully later in the chapter. The theory of history expressed by the American gothic is intricately bound up with Haitian slave violence as it unfolds throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Upon declaration of independence from France in 1804, the first black nation state Haiti becomes the distilled symbolic representation of a horrific future.

The second distinction American writers claimed might best be described in terms of the tools of the gothic: the setting, use of supernatural, and symbolism. Hawthorne implies subtle points which separate his Romance from British Romance. In his description of the "latitude" writers of Romance are allowed compared with the requirements of the novel, he suggests that the writer of romance "will be wise, no doubt, to make a very moderate use of the privileges here stated, and especially, to mingle the Marvellous [sic] rather as a slight, delicate, and evanescent flavor, than as any portion of the actual substance of the dish offered to the Public" (1). In terms of gothic conventions, the difference between the American and British gothic, then, is one of degree rather than kind. As an extension of the anxiety expressed in the statement above, Hawthorne's Preface participates in an important

[56] Hawthorne, *The House of the Seven Gables*, Penguin edition, Eds. Milton R. Stern. 1986. 1-3.

feature of American gothicism introduced half a century earlier by Brockden Brown: rather than focusing on the distant past to comment on the political present, as British romances most often perform, Hawthorne's novel emphasizes the interconnectedness of this "by-gone time" with the present moment's "flitting away" to an unknown future. Like Brockden Brown, Hawthorne grounds the gothic romance in a theory of history, in which "the wrong-doing of one generation lives into the successive ones, and, divesting itself of every temporary advantage, becomes a pure and uncontrollable mischief" (2). By articulating this structure as a process rather than an event, that is, by understanding time in ways that go beyond sequential temporality dictated by Enlightenment philosophy, Hawthorne gestures to the unknowable future of the early Republic. It is not only the inheritance from a previous generation that concerns Hawthorne, but the "successive ones." He seems to suggest that a lack of attention to the complexity of the contemporary moment, including its relationship to the past and its possible paths in the future, will result in chaos or "uncontrollable mischief." Like Brockden Brown and William Cobbett, Hawthorne endows the literary with an ability to shape the future of the nation. But while Hawthorne remains interested in authorial agency in this process, Cobbett and Brown are invested more in how writers create theories of reading, and by extension, interpellate their readers.[57]

Charles Brockden Brown writes in his Preface "To The Public" of *Edgar Huntly; Or, Memoirs of a Sleep-Walker* (1799), of a merit he claims for himself: "that of calling forth the passions and engaging the sympathy of the reader, by means hitherto unemployed by preceding authors" (3). The subject of Brown's act of interpellation is the "liberal and candid reader" which he summons through his unique brand of gothicism. Not the "puerile

[57] I am drawing on Louis Althusser's understanding of interpellation, when he makes clear that "individuals are always-already interpellated by ideology as subjects." See *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation.*) (1969).

superstition and exploded manners" nor "gothic castles and chimeras," but rather "incidents of Indian hostility, and the perils of the western wilderness" provide Brown's "native tools." Brown clearly identifies his mode of narrating as a conscious departure from that which came from Britain. He writes:

> America has opened new views to the naturalist and politician, but has seldome [sic] furnished themes to the moral painter. That new springs of action, and new motives to curiosity should operate; that the field of investigation, opened to us by our own country, should differ essentially from those which exist in Europe, may be readily conceived. The sources of amusement to the fancy and instruction to the heart, that are peculiar to ourselves, are equally numerous and inexhaustible. It is the purpose of this work to profit by some of these sources; to exhibit a series of adventures, growing out of the condition of our country, and connected with one of the most common and most wonderful diseases or affections of the human frame. (4)

Brown adds to science and politics Godwinian "philosophic romance," and makes clear that the "native tools" he draws from are different from—but related to—the British gothic. By using his native "field of investigation" Brown situates the American gothic as equally engaged with his contemporary culture as the discourses of science and politics. The "most common and most wonderful" disease which affects the early republican "human frame" is sleep-walking, this provides the "theme" which Brown takes up in his gothic romance. *Edgar Huntly* has been critically understood as an allegory for the condition of early Americans' semi-consciousness, even while the post-revolutionary moment was one of radical action. Brown's gothic romance expresses anxiety over time; in particular, the swiftness with which early Americans' inability to understand their present moment in historical time threatens the immediate and long-term stability of the nation.

The stress Brown places on the time of the nation comes through not only in his Preface to *Edgar Huntly*, but is almost obsessively referenced throughout the first chapter. Situated as a "tale" related through a letter in compliance to a friend's request, the narrator explains, "Till now, to hold a steadfast pen was impossible; to disengage my senses from the

scene that was passing or approaching; to forbear to grasp at futurity; to suffer so much thought to wander from the purpose which engrossed my fears and my hopes, could not be" (5). The incapacity to see beyond a traumatic present, to "grasp at futurity," is the first of many crises Brown poses throughout the novel, but by focusing on temporality, Brown creates an overarching structure through which myriad topics can be processed. For example, sleep-walking becomes an apt vehicle to symbolize lost time; and through which significant events take place by a subject unaware and thus not accountable for his actions. The narrator introduces readers to the sleep-walker in a setting "romantic and wild" as he takes a walk at dusk, when he is suddenly transported to another time and the murder of a friend. This transport becomes confusing for the reader when she discovers that his entire motivation for walking in that setting is his renewed commitment to find and bring to justice the man who murdered his friend, Waldegrave. He claims, "I need not remind thee of what is past. Time and reason seemed to have dissolved the spell which made me deaf to the dictates of duty and discretion" (8). Not only, then, does Brown figure and refigure time throughout the chapter (the narrative hurdles toward a terrifying future while it is fueled by a past event and dictated as an epistle in the present) he creates a narrator who himself suffers from "melancholy," cannot "grasp at futurity," and misreads the present. The confluence of Huntly's personal desire with images and tales he cannot comprehend marks the novel as neatly within the bounds of □othicism. As Cathy Davidson has suggested about the gothic hero, his "mind is infinitely susceptible to benevolence and fellow feeling and simultaneously prey to superstition, delusion, or its own deviousness." For Davidson, the gothic "focuses on the systemic possibilities and problems of postrevolutionary American society and of the postrevolutionary self in action in that society" (*Revolution and the Word* 310). That *Edgar Huntly* is set just outside Philadelphia in 1787, in the nation's infancy, suggests that Davidson

is correct in positioning the American gothic as bound up with the promise and concerns related to the Constitution.[58]

I want to turn first to British critic Ian Duncan before turning to American critics, because his argument for the rise of the British Gothic informs my understanding of how the genre changes in its travels from Britain to the early Republic. In *Modern Romance and Transformation of the Novel*, Duncan looks at the rise in gothic production in the 1790s to argue that "more than anything else, this romance revival involved the confrontation with cultural origins that were at once native and alien" (21). Since, as Duncan suggests, the version of history invoked by the gothic is a secular one, theories of the eighteenth-century British gothic require a better understanding of its political meanings and tensions. On the one hand, the British gothic suggests that "a native liberty, the ancestral birthright of every Englishman, was menaced from above by colonizing alien powers throughout history and in the present" and this "alien" was "foreign, continental, aristocratic and prelatic…of which Norman feudalism and Roman Catholicism were the most powerful institutions." This version of the gothic, Duncan asserts, is best described as "radical nationalist." On the other side of the political spectrum is the more conservative, Whiggish view, "powerfully revived by Burke—[which] held that the 1689 Constitution marked the final defeat of Gothic barbarism, represented by contending forces of royalist absolutism and popular anarchy, and secured the liberty of the subject in private property-ownership." In this version of the story, "gothic" is the reverse of its radical counterpart. Instead, "it stand[s] for the alien forces of oppression, those of Pope and Pretender, and locates them in the past, or over on the continent—but not in the present historical establishment." Duncan concludes, "The ideological fiction shared by both these political myths is that of 'the liberty of the subject', a

[58] See Davidson's chapter "Early American Gothic: The Limits of Individualism." 306-355.

native essence belonging to history yet transcending it. Conversely, both apprehend national history as the field of alien forces in resistance to which the liberty of the subject achieves its self-definition" (23-24).

For Duncan, then, the anxieties manifest in the gothic include threats to British nationalism by alien forces which compel a reevaluation of origins, but also an emphasis on whether this threat primarily resides in the past or in the present. These alien forces, however, include movements to maintain the radical energies of a native Englishness as it existed in the dark ages, prior to the onset of liberal subjectivity in the eighteenth century. In other words, the "alien" for Duncan is multiple and simultaneous: not only geographic, but temporal and national as well.[59] In this way, Duncan's theory of the gothic looks ahead to Chakrabarty's postcolonial theory whereby Enlightenment categorization of a colonial subject is as much a construction *by* those alien others as it is by the Scottish Enlightenment. To Chakrabarty, "the writing of history must implicitly assume a plurality of times existing together, a disjuncture of the present with itself" (*Provincializing Europe* 109). Duncan's theory of gothic history also registers a "plurality of times existing together"; what makes Duncan's reading of the alien as both a subject not native to Englishness and a "force" which threatens the sovereignty of modernity is, I want to suggest, the same gesture made in American gothicism. The early republican gothic registers an anxiety over the nation's origins in the Constitution and implicitly interrogates whether or how the Haitian Revolution, an event both native and alien, is acculturative within the features of its own mythology.

[59] For Duncan, the gothic representation of a threatening past is the period from the 4th century to the Norman Conquest in 1066, which is made more vulnerable by *Magna Charta* in 1215, and is finally permanently abolished by the Glorious Revolution of 1688-89.

Criticism on the American gothic can be categorized into three schools: psychoanalytic, historicist, and discursive. Until somewhat recently, criticism on the American gothic has not only disagreed about the generic features of the gothic more generally, but has also seen these features and the many projects of the gothic, as discrete. That the American gothic variously subverts, upholds, or otherwise participates in contemporary constructions of history and ideology has not always been agreed upon. For example, critics like Nina Baym, in her essay "A Minority Reading of *Wieland*," use the "gothic" as a derogatory designator—as evidence of an otherwise "failed" narrative strategy.[60] Jane Tompkins, in her description of Brown's *Arthur Mervyn,* suggests that the novel "has been identified as a *bildungsroman*, as a Gothic tale of terror, as a study in moral ambiguity, and as a romance; but these designations do not succeed in accounting for the sense of déjà vu, of being trapped in the same predicament, the doubling, tripling, and quadrupling of weirdly interconnected persons and events that the reader constantly encounters in this novel" (64). Tompkins' description of Brown's novel seems an almost text-book definition of the gothic, even though it is in a list of many unsuccessful attempts to situate the novel within a genre. As Brown and Hawthorne's Prefaces reveal, the features of American gothicism are never more unmistakable in their essential ambiguity than in the romantic novels of late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century America.

In Teresa Goddu's path-breaking *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation* (1997), she suggests that the difficulty in identifying or recognizing American gothicism is a product of its almost complete critical erasure from literary historiography. Goddu argues that there was "no founding period of gothic literature in America, and given the critical preference for the term romance, few authors were designated as gothicists" (3). As a result, she claims,

[60] In *Critical Essays on Charles Brockden Brown*, ed. Bernard Rosenthal (Boston: G.K.Hall, 1981), 87-103.

"the American gothic consists of a less coherent set of conventions," and concludes that any "definition of the American gothic depends less on the particular set of conventions it establishes than on those it disrupts" (4). Perhaps Goddu's most important intervention into studies of the American gothic, however, is her establishment of it "as an integral part of a network of historical representation," which differs markedly from American criticism prior to her seminal 1997 book, which dismissed the genre as popular, escapist, or exclusively the terrain of women. In contradistinction, Goddu claims that the American gothic "registers its culture's contradiction, presenting a distorted, *not a disengaged*, version of reality" (2-3 my emphasis). In this way, Goddu transfers the focus on American gothicism from that of a failed set of generic features which never quite travel from their origins in Britain to the new conditions of the early Republic; to that which focuses on "a number of sites of historical horror," especially slavery. To reinforce her argument, Goddu exploits Leslie Fiedler's influential description of the American gothic as a "literature of darkness and the grotesque in a land of light and affirmation" (*Love and Death in the American Novel* 29). But while the reevaluation of the gothic as intricately bound up with history is essential to my own understanding, Goddu's reversal of the gothic's critical register maintains the imbalance she so aptly undermines in her critique of previous critics. That is, Goddu's theory of the gothic focuses on the historical at the *expense* of the aesthetic. A premise of this dissertation is that the cultural potency of the American gothic cannot be accounted for by either an exclusively aesthetic or an exclusively historical approach; both are needed to make sense of its enduring power in American literary and cultural history. In addition, as her critical summation suggests, the so-called lack of features in American gothicism seems more the result of the relative critical and theoretical neglect than of any real absence of coherence or structure. Transatlantic Romanticism was yet a burgeoning field in 1997,

which accounts for Goddu's failure to note that British writers too, with the exception of Ann Radcliffe and Horace Walpole, were never referred to as "gothic." As both Clery and Miles make clear, what we consider gothic did not appear in critical or literary parlance until the 1920s; all such literary production was labeled "romance."

Justin Edwards extends Goddu's historicizing gesture to post-structuralism in *Gothic Passages: Racial Ambiguity and the American Gothic* (2003), by describing the American gothic as a "discourse" rather than a genre. Edwards claims that the "polyphony of the gothic" can be located in contradictory political agendas, as well as in multiple forms, including both nonfiction and fiction texts (xxi). Gothicism as a mode or a discourse can indeed be found throughout late eighteenth and nineteenth-century American letters. Throughout this dissertation I read such instances of gothic discursive strategies in the development of popular print culture in William Cobbett's *Peter Porcupine's Gazette*, the trial transcript of Denmark Vesey, the "confessions" of Nat Turner, and the writing of Poe and Melville. Nevertheless, I distinguish between the gothic rhetoric of William Cobbett, for example, as he attempts to circumscribe public discourse about violence, and the novelistic and essayistic production of Charles Brockden Brown, whose writing works through symbol and allegory or what we might identify more readily as "gothic." Edwards' analysis avoids these generic markers in favor of asserting the gothic as a trope: the "art of haunting." He agrees with Goddu's estimation of the American gothic as something "haunting" the nation, but departs from her analysis in his assertion that historical narratives do not quite grasp its mutable and prescient cultural influence.

Edwards' analysis illustrates a disjuncture which has come to typify gothic criticism. First, he claims that the gothic is a discourse, a move that resists neat separation of British and American gothicism; second, that "racial ambiguity [is] a source of gothic production"

(xxiii). In the first instance, Edwards relies on an inaccurate reading of British gothicism that works to distinguish it from American gothic texts by suggesting that "European" gothicism has traditionally been dismissed as romantic fluff while American gothicism has "always been engaged with the political" (xxi). As the proliferation of print culture in response to publications like *The Monk* and *Caleb Williams* reveal, this consideration of the British gothic is flawed, both in terms of its reception and in its engagement with the political. As such, Edwards' move to eliminate any distinction between the British and American gothic rests on faulty claims, which renders his own argument vulnerable. Edwards' second gesture, to understand American gothicism as both a discourse and also bound to racial ambiguity, unavoidably devolves into a project that can only "chart [racial ambiguity's] changes, fluctuations, and developments in the writing of ante- and post-bellum writers" (xxiii). In short, where is the gothic? Why and how do these texts seem uniquely poised to "chart" such racial tensions? Edwards rejects Fiedler's infamous claim that the "proper subject for the American gothic is the black man," denouncing it as too "reductive" and "totalizing" as it leaves out the possibility for "gender, homosexuality, incest, genocide, rape, war, murder, religion, and class as 'proper' subjects of the nation's gothic literature" (xvii). And insofar as fear plays a constitutive role in the gothic novels, Edwards claim seems correct. However, the evacuation of all historic and cultural specificity undermines its critical purchase in its contemporary moment and neglects to account for its wide popularity amongst readers of the period. If we understand the "gothic text" as a genre preoccupied with fear and anxiety, as most critics have, then we are required to account for its manifestations and motivations in particular novels, stories, and discourse. In other words, what if Fiedler's claim that the subject of American gothicism is "the black man" is correct? From the 1790s through our contemporary moment, the assertion of black masculinity as a primal cultural fear seems

unimpeachable, thus we need to examine the specific conditions surrounding "the black man" to gain insight into gothic production of the period. This dissertation focuses on the origins of American gothicism in the 1790s, not just as a "site of slavery," as Goddu argues, or as the "art of haunting" as Edwards' argues, but as part of a transatlantic literary mode that, in its new conditions and realities, engages the specific anxieties and fears haunting the early republic.

As the French Revolution gave rise to a modern British gothicism, an influence made obvious when comparing the romances of Radcliffe, Lewis, and Godwin, the Haitian Revolution as a site of horror is uniquely positioned—ideologically, politically, racially—to account for the preoccupations, as well as the generic features, of the American gothic. In his letter to Governor of Virginia, James Monroe, Thomas Jefferson wrote in November, 1801, of the possible resolution to relocate slaves at the height of the Saint-Dominguan insurrections: "Conspiracy, insurgency, treason, rebellion, among that description of persons who brought on us the alarm, and on themselves the tragedy, of 1800, were doubtless within the view of every one; but many perhaps contemplated, and one expression of the resolution might comprehend, a much larger scope" (*Political Writings* 487). Jefferson's reference to Gabriel's Rebellion of 1800 and his assertion of the "much larger scope" of slave violence provide one of many strands of evocative discourse on the Haitian Revolution. There are many such references to "St. Domingo" in Jefferson's writing perhaps more than any other politician at the turn of the century; his writings suggest his acute awareness of the connections between slave violence in Saint-Domingue and its possibility in the United States. Years after his letter to Governor Monroe, Jefferson writes, "the hour of emancipation is advancing, in the march of time. It will come; and whether brought on by the generous energy of our own minds; or by the bloody process of St. Domingo, excited

and conducted by the power of our present enemy, if once stationed permanently within our Country, and offering asylum & arms to the oppressed, is a leaf of our history not yet turned over" (Letter to Edward Coles, August 25, 1814; *Political Writings* 493-494). Jefferson's sense of the inevitability of emancipation is thoroughly bound to the precedent established by the Haitian Revolution whether the "generous energy" of Americans participate in abolishing slavery or not. As I discussed in the "Introduction," Jefferson provides the most obvious example of how the specter of Haitian slave violence produced gothic strategies for circulating the increasingly apparent and widespread fear of black violence throughout the early republic. Jefferson's writing also offers powerful evidence for understanding such strategies as inextricably bound to the national mythology of early American culture.

Jefferson's attention to the influence of "the bloody process of St. Domingo" on American slavery renders it difficult to deny the relationship between specific national histories and the rise of particular forms of print engaged in mediating contemporary cultural anxieties. For this reason, Edwards' focus on the "trans-historical" aspect of gothic texts—that they are produced in many languages, nations, and cultural traditions—is problematic and counterintuitive in a critical study on the "American gothic." In *The Gothic Text* (2005), Marshall Brown shares Edwards' opinion even while he also points out that "the Romantic period was an age of growing nationalism." Despite this, Brown insists that the gothic "together with its dramatic counterpart, the melodrama, remains one form of literary endeavor that was not then and should not now be divided into national schools" (2). Citing gothic novels from Balzac's *Wild Ass's Skin*, Marquis de Sade's *The Romantic Agony*, and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, as well as authors from Germany, Italy, and America, Brown argues that the gothic is a fundamentally international genre, thus scholarship which "confin[es]…the literature written within specific national or linguistic borders" is

profoundly "parochial" (1). Like Edwards, Brown suggests that by "confining" critical studies of the gothic to a nation we undermine its value and perform "parochial" criticism. We might, however, use the same evidence of the ubiquity of the gothic to instantiate the opposite conclusion, which is to argue that the gothic is necessarily a *national* literature, despite shared features and conventions of the genre internationally. That the Romantic period is a time of developing nationalism, as Brown highlights, suggests an inescapable connection between the most popular forms produced in that period and nationalism. In the early Republic, then, some understanding of the nation's mythology becomes crucial to determine the role of its most popular forms of writing. An important aspect of early republican mythology was widespread belief in the intrinsic violence of black men, one that required ongoing attention and forceful suppression. This mythology, after the slave violence began in Saint-Domingue, became quickly attached to the more terrifying possibility of a violent, black collectivity. Even after emancipation, the specter of Haiti continued to perpetuate this mythology as is reflected in the gothic literature of the nation.

Edwards cites Eric Savoy and Robert Marin's belief that the American gothic cannot be "'constrained by historical comprehensivity or even critical consensus'."[61] Each, then, suggests that in the process of defining American gothicism, we limit its excessive energies and "'multivalent tendencies'." Edwards' claim for totalizing histories' inability to account for the excess energies of the gothic seems accurate. Enlightenment history relies upon a temporally sequential narrative, rather than a Benjaminian conception of "messianic time" or Chakrabarty's notion of "heterotemporality," both of which contrast the Enlightenment history as "Europe first, then elsewhere," with one that embodies simultaneity and

[61] Robert K. Martin and Eric Savoy, Eds. *American Gothic: New Interventions in a National Narrative.* Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1998. Introduction vii-xii.

interdependency. In addition, both Benjamin and Chakrabarty suggest that the local or fragmentary is as bound up with grand History as it is with the local.[62] To understand the American gothic requires a different theory of history—like those offered by Benjamin and Chakarbarty—to unpack the cultural anxieties that, from a predominantly psychological or aesthetic viewpoint, seem to find no direct historical referents. If we maintain the "heterogeneities without seeking to reduce them to any overarching principle," the "gaps" in gothic narrative become far more transparent. (*Provincializing Europe* 107-108). A theory of time is necessary to avoid oversimplification of the gothic and the kinds of cultural work it performs for the early republic. Fiedler's contention that the gothic might "best be called a pathological symptom rather than a proper literary movement" [63] is an example of how gothic criticism repeats itself in a surprisingly traditional way, one which situates the genre as something disconnected from history or dialectical process in favor of a psychoanalytic "symptom." It also points to the dominant strain in criticism of the American gothic—that which locates the anxiety of the text in the integrity and instability of a rising individuality in an increasingly hostile social milieu.

This tension in gothic novels is the result of eighteenth century philosophies, like those of Rousseau and Locke, both of which gave rise to the individual subject as something discrete and in struggle with its social environment. Nancy Armstrong takes this at least one step further when she argues that "the history of the novel and the history of the modern subject are, quite literally, one and the same" (*How Novels Think* 3).[64] For Armstrong, novels

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[62] See Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History." In *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. Ed, Hannah Arendt. 253-264.

[63] Fiedler, "The Invention of the American Gothic," in *Love and Death in the American Novel*.

[64] For my readings, I look at Armstrong's first two chapters, "How Novels Think" and "When Novels Made Nations" 1-78. *How Novels Think: The Limits of British Individualism from 1719-1900*. (2006)

produce the modern individual; they in fact conjure them: "to produce an individual, novels had to think as if there already were one, that such an individual was not only the narrating subject and source of writing but also the object of narration and referent of writing" (3). Armstrong's argument relies at least in part on the removal of the gothic as something uncontainable and undesirable in British culture, both pre-modern (in the sense of Romance) and too radical (in the sense of forward looking). As a result, in the early nineteenth century the rise of the novel displaces the gothic as a popular form in Britain. The gothic novel is replaced by the nation-building novels of Jane Austen and the Victorian novels of Thackeray, the Brontes, and Dickens as one means through which the modern-nation state reinforces its institutional and policing power. For Armstrong, then, novels police *gothic* novels as much as the modern subject. In America, too, the gothic increasingly registers an anxious relationship between the individual and society; despite this, Armstrong's theory does not quite translate in the early republic. In this context, gothic novels themselves often times work to police and repress the radical energies of antebellum American culture. But more importantly, early republicans lack a native past out of which to posit modern nationality. Rather than a notion of romance as something necessarily relegated to a past, romance in the new nation traverses temporality to include a non-native (British) past, a violent but idealistic present, and a future threatened by forces at once alien (French, Haitian, Irish) and native (slaves and Indians) to American nationalism.

Chakrabarty's theory of the relationship between "postcoloniality and history" is useful for making sense of this difference between the gothic in Britain and the gothic in America. He offers that any history which seeks to de-center a "hyperreal Europe" must necessarily explore the "connection between violence and idealism that lies at the heart of the process by which the narratives of citizenship and modernity come to find a natural

home in 'history'" (*Provincializing Europe* 45). While the "hyperreal Europe" centers on British nationalism, early republicanism in the United States is already de-centered from this notion of 'history' by virtue of its own violent separation from British colonial rule. In the early republic, as in most other previous colonies in 'history', both its proximity and distance from the metropolitan center are exposed in its literature. This is not to argue for an understanding of America as a post-colonial nation; rather, I want to suggest that the traces of British colonial rule which remain visible are embedded in the forms of its literature. The gothic as a genre which, unlike the novel, makes visible the seams of its own ideological structure is the ideal form through which to untangle the early republican inheritance of Britain. I am most interested in Chakrabarty's provocative connection between violence and idealism, a process which he argues lies "at the heart" of "narratives of citizenship and modernity." As becomes clear throughout the print culture and literature I survey in this dissertation, violence and idealism are integral components of the American gothic. This dynamic helps account for the primacy and power of the specter of Haiti for a budding national consciousness forged on both margins and center of the nation through the Gothic. In short, the American gothic looks not back to Britain for its cultural anxieties, despite the legacy of British gothic features which remain; but instead, it goes *out*, away in space from the metropolitan origin and out in time, to a future cut from its native fabric of anxieties—both in its violence and idealism—and embeds them in gothic literary production of the period. Thus the geographic space of the early American nation gives rise to a new historiography, one in which the ideology of slavery is refracted through the lens of its geopolitical relationship to the French colony of Saint-Domingue, and as a result, radically reconfigures the most national of the literary genres: the gothic.

I turn briefly now to a relatively critically unknown transatlantic tale, but one which nevertheless caught the imagination and attention of its nineteenth-century readership, by way of illustrating how the British gothic undergoes transformations, both subtle and more radical, once it is produced across the Atlantic. John Howison's "The Florida Pirate" was published in *Blackwood's* in August, 1821 and was so popular with its American readership that it went through seven reprints between 1821-1834.[65] In addition to "The Florida Pirate," Howison published seven other stories in *Blackwood's* between May 1821 and July 1822, which made him one of the biggest contributors to the magazine of the early nineteenth century.[66] Prior to his *Blackwood's* tales, Howison received praise for his *Sketches of Upper Canada* (1821), which continues to be his most often cited work. John Galt wrote in a review of the *Sketches* in *Blackwood's* that it was "by far the best book which has ever been written by any British traveler on the subject of North America" (qtd. in *Pickering and Chatto* p183). Before returning to Britain, Howison traveled extensively through the United States, Cuba, and the West Indies, finally settling into a job as a surgeon with the East India Company in Bombay in 1822. He remained there for twenty years and throughout his tenure in India traveled across the country and into parts of Africa all the while continuing to write and publish his tales. Three collections of stories came out of his stay in India: *Foreign Scenes and Travelling Recreations* (1825), *Tales of the Colonies* (1830), and his final work, *European Colonies* (1834). But it was his tale of piratical adventure that engaged American readers most. In it, Howison combines several generic features that vie for the reader's attention, but the two most dominant generic tendencies are the gothic tale and sentimental

[65] See Daniel Williams, "Refuge upon the Sea: Captivity and Liberty in the Florida Pirate." In *Early American Literature*, 36 (2001), 71-72.

[66] *Blackwood's Magazine*, IX, August 1821, 516-531.

novel. I want to discuss here the opening of Howison's strange tale to conclude my discussion of the American gothic.

Howison's "The Florida Pirate" was his early attempt at writing a gothic tale, but which he returns to in his later tales of terror in *Tales of the Colonies*. As his first attempt, the form seems less easy to generically characterize—the combinations of forms never quite fit together. In part, I want to suggest, this is the result of the British form grappling with specifically American conditions and themes. The materials on which Howison's tale works toward a gothic effect are utterly bound up with the political and social anxieties of the early republic, anxieties which he clearly and rapidly picks up on in his travels to the United States. Yet critics of early American letters struggled to find ripe conditions for an American gothic tale. William Howard Gardiner, in his review of *The Spy* in *The North American Review* (1822), writes that America is "destitute of all sorts of romantic association," without any "traces of the slow and wasteful hand of time." He asks, "You look at the face of a fair country, and it tells you no tale of days that are gone by….How are you to get over this familiarity of things, yet fresh in their newest gloss?" (qtd. in *Gothic America* 54; 252-254). What critics failed to recognize, however, writers like Howison capitalized on to amazingly popular effect. It is, on the one hand, difficult to conjure a more romantic tale than that of American independence from Britain and Gardiner's claim highlights precisely what makes the American gothic text unique: its different representation of time. Without any past, America supposedly has no gothic sensibility; however, such an assumption is only plausible if one looks at the "face of a *fair* country"—at whiteness. The moment the writer or critic turns away from the "fair" face of the nation, the material conditions for a gothic tale seem to overcrowd all other literary possibilities.

Howison's tale opens with its narrator, an anxious white man "unexpectedly thrown…upon a foreign land" after a series of misfortunes, left destitute and terrified by "the alarming evils that threatened me on every side" (*Blackwood's*, XI, Aug. 1821, pp. 516). While pondering his horrible conditions on the shore of one of the Bahaman Islands, the narrator spots a "schooner lying at anchor" and asks a nearby fisherman of its origins. The fisherman offers that he suspects the ship of piracy, noting that "those on board of her are mostly blacks, and they seem very anxious to keep out of sight" (516). Upon hearing this, the narrator becomes "excessively agitated without knowing the reason; and felt an anxious desire to repress some idea" (516). Howison thus establishes in the opening paragraphs of his tale what become familiar tropes of American gothicism: geographic dislocation, unknown and terrifying "evils" which threaten the hero, oppressive though obscured anxiety, and blackness. Howison also introduces an important setting to achieve the gothic effect: that of a ship. It this early rendering of American preoccupation with racial violence, its West Indian origins, and what perhaps more than any other literary image has come to symbolize the horror of slavery—the ship—that suggests Howison's influence on the development of the genre in the early republic. In Chapter 4, I return again to Howison's "The Florida Pirate," to ground my discussion of two critical and modern instances of American gothicism and the deployment of ships: Poe's *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* and Herman Melville's *Benito Cereno* (1855).[67]

Howison's tale, like most American gothic tales, registers an anxiety over time, the elusive quality of the present moment as it rapidly slips into the a terror-filled future. As the

[67] As an avid *Blackwood's* reader, it seems critically certain that Edgar Allan Poe was familiar with Howison's "The Florida Pirate" as the similarities between it and Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1838) are undeniable. I examine these connections more fully in Chapter IV in my analysis of Poe and Melville.

narrator sits on the beach for days contemplating his survival, he wishes he "could retard the flight of time" (516). Soon after, claiming that "the law of nature compels me to violate the laws of man," the narrator boards the black pirate ship, entirely populated by former slaves who escaped but who nevertheless remain scarred by chains through violent rebellion. The action takes place on the ship for the rest of the tale and is largely taken up by a contest between white and black rebellion, the former black slaves' self-conscious awareness of their origins in "St. Domingo," and the narrator's passive complicity with the racist ideology of slavery while nevertheless benefiting from its capitalist system. Nothing so captures the mutually competing discourses and investments of the characters as the way in which gothic tales such as "The Florida Pirate" structure time.

Ian Baucom's magisterial *Specters of the Atlantic* (2005) draws on Glissant's *Poetics of Relation*, particularly his idea of the "folded-togetherness" of time, one profoundly realized through the image of the Atlantic "abyss" which combines an "ethics of global interestedness, a theory of cultural production, and an interested philosophy of history" (311).[68] The complex nexus of investment implicit (and often explicit) in the image of the slave ship is yoked to a necessarily complex theory of time. Baucom writes that "Time…does not pass, it accumulates" and so like Chakrabarty's release of time from the project of Enlightenment as something which happened in "Europe first, then elsewhere," Baucom's conception of time "break[s] not only with the mournful sensibilities of political liberalism" but also "abandon[s] the temporal schemes of its progressive philosophy of history" (311). The accumulation of time, Baucom suggests, is a *necessary* re-

[68] In Baucom's chapter "'The Sea is History': On Temporal Accumulation." *Specters of the Atlantic*. 309-333. This chapter draws its title from Derek Walcott's poem "The Sea is History" the opening stanza of which asks "Where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs?/ Where is your tribal memory? Sirs,/in that grey vault. The sea. The sea/has locked them up. The sea is History." Edouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation*, Betsy Wing, trans. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997) 6-8, 29.

conceptualization when we understand the "Atlantic slave trade as a (perhaps *the*) foundational event in the history of modernity" (his emphasis 311). Time as an "accumulation" becomes for me the ideal description of a literature which, to varying degrees, is forced to grapple with violence, domination, and race across geographic and national borders. Implicit in my suggestion that the event of the Haitian Revolution is crucial for understanding the literature and culture of the early republic is my investment in an "interested Atlantic cosmopolitanism." To Baucom, this critical investment implies "not only a way of being, presently, in the world but a way of conceiving a world which is resolutely 'after' the 'present,' a world in which, in not-entirely-Benjaminian fashion, now-being accumulates within itself a vast global array of what-has-beens" (312). The gothic tales and novels produced and circulated on either side of one of the most cataclysmic political, historical, indeed, ideological events of modernity—the Haitian Revolution—reflect this critical engagement with the "present" and simultaneously with the "arrays of what-has-beens" within a trans-Atlantic context. That is to say that the writers I discuss in this dissertation, John Howison, William Cobbett, Charles Brockden Brown, the various framers of the slave conspiracies of Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vesey, and Nat Turner, Edgar Allan Poe, and Herman Melville, all perform an "interested Atlantic cosmopolitism" starkly illustrated by the kind of Gothicism rendered in their work. To what ends this "interested Atlantic cosmopolitanism" is made manifest varies widely between the writers I examine; however, what is shared is the tension between the creation of literary nationalism within and alongside its Atlantic world context.

Chapter II: Transatlantic Translations—William Cobbett and Charles Brockden Brown

I. Introduction

Two things crossed the Atlantic from Britain to the early Republic, things which led to the development of American gothicism: first, the British gothic in the novels of William Godwin; second, counter-revolutionary rhetoric resulting from French Revolutionary terror, brought on by the massacres in September, 1792, and the 1798 Irish Uprising. Discourse surrounding American slavery was fraught with competing tensions over the contradiction to the Declaration of Independence and the widely perceived conviction that black slaves were prone to violence. Combined with contemporary transatlantic anxieties about conspiracy and revolution, in America slavery gave rise to something altogether different from the British or Irish Gothic. With the help of writers like William Cobbett, a figure immersed in fear of French and Irish threats to British colonial power and, as a disciple of Tom Paine, fluent in the language of the newly independent America, slave violence became linked with larger discursive threads which encompassed other nations and other anxieties. The rhetorical connection between the French Revolution and the impending crisis of American slavery was the Haitian Revolution; in it, early Americans could see their worst fears realized in the logical and horrifying conclusion of French Revolutionary philosophy in the hands of Touissant L'Overture and the slaves in Saint-Domingue.

During William Cobbett's ten year residence in America from 1792-1802, at which time he lived in Philadelphia, he inaugurated the very popular weekly *The Porcupine's Gazette* and circulated his political pamphlets. In these, Cobbett made frequent use of anti-Jacobin rhetoric, at its peak in popularity at the end of the eighteenth century. Cobbett played a prominent role in circulating anti-French, Irish, black, democratic, and misogynistic opinions

through his multiple publishing venues and enjoyed an unprecedented popularity and widespread readership during the 1790s. Despite this, there exists very little scholarship on Cobbett's role in politics, the popular press, or literature in the early American Republic. William Cobbett occupied an extremely influential position in the public sphere during the 1790s, and as a result, is important to any understanding of the development of literature during the period. His counter-revolutionary rhetorical strategies, borrowed from his own native concerns over British sovereignty, skillfully make use of the specter of Haitian Revolution to reach his American readership. Similar tropes can be found in the writing of Charles Brockden Brown.

This chapter examines the rhetorical, ideological, and generic overlap between the work of William Cobbett and Charles Brockden Brown. Looking at the simultaneous production of writers working in different registers, to ostensibly different audiences, in different genres, underscores the frequency and flexibility of the Haitian Revolution as a symbol of widespread anxiety about possible slave violence in the early republic. The supple Gothic tale in an atmosphere of nascent national consciousness and transatlantic conspiracies—tensions rehearsed through revolutionary and counter-revolutionary discourses—became the ideal literary form for grappling with the specter of Haitian revolution. While it is a critical commonplace that Brockden Brown ushered in something uniquely American to gothicism, I want to suggest that writers like William Cobbett—poised on the border between nations (Britain and America) and political ideologies (radical republicanism and anti-Jacobinism[69])—can help us account for the relationship between the

[69] List argues in her dissertation that we misread Cobbett as a conservative Federalist in America when we should understand his changed political proclivity as a Tory, the result of his sense of Britishness in the face of what he felt was an "immoral and empty" American culture. Karen K. List. *The Role of William Cobbett in Philadelphia' Party Press, 1794-1799*. Dissertation, University of Wisconsin—Madison: 1980.

Saint-Domingue slave uprising and the creation of this new national genre.[70] Both Brown and Cobbett invite readers into international discourses of revolutionary and racialized violence; both also translate this violence into the local geographic, political, and popular concerns of the new American nation. For Brown and Cobbett, the problem of how to represent violence in form is related to the national preoccupation with how to avoid it.[71]

II. William Cobbett's 'Cant of the Pickpockets'

William Cobbett has more recently become central in British Romanticist literary study, but in American literary study of the same period he has yet to receive his critical due. [72] This is regrettable given Cobbett's inexhaustible production of print in America during the anxious decade of 1793-1803. Because of the dearth of critical attention in American romanticist literary or historical scholarship, then, no figure seems more on the margins of eighteenth-century American politics than William Cobbett. [73] He remains to this day best known for his *Political Register* and *Rural Rides* in Britain from 1803-1840 and his radical position against British Toryism of the early nineteenth-century. I want to suggest here that Cobbett's writing provides an important generic and ideological link between British and

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[70] See Peter Kafer's *Revolution and the Birth of the American Gothic* and Bill Christophersen's, *The Apparition in the Glass: Charles Brockden Brown's American Gothic* for arguments about Brown's unique contribution to the development of the American gothic.

[71] Anthony Jarrells, "Bloodless Revolution and the Form of the Novel." In *Novel A Forum on Fiction*. Fall 2003/Spring 2004.

[72] See Kevin Gilmartin's "Radical Print Culture in Periodical Form." Tilottama Rajan and Julie M. Wright, Eds. *In Romanticism, Hisotry, and the Possibililities of Genre: Re-Forming Literature, 1789-1837*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP: 1998; see also Peter Manning's "William Wordsworth and William Cobbett: Scotch Travel and British Reform." Janet Sorenson, Leith Davis, and Ian Duncan, Eds. *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004. 153-169.

[73] For Cobbett's American sojourn, see David Wilson, Ed. *Peter Porcupine in America: Pamphlets on Republicanism and Revolution*. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1994. Also see Chapter 8 of James Chandler's *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism*. 441-479. Cobbett is very often mentioned in scholarship which deals with the tensions between early Republicanism and Federalist politics.

American revolutionary and counter-revolutionary discourse, and, as such, is crucial for the burgeoning sub-field of transatlantic romanticism.

One reason for Cobbett's relative absence in American studies is the difficulty in understanding his confused politics and his relationship to nationalist narratives. For example, Cobbett emigrated from Britain just barely escaping prison for seditious libel, a result of his anonymous publication of *The Soldier's Friend* (1792), a scathing satire of the British military. Fueled by his admiration for Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man*, Cobbett first fled to France before arriving in Philadelphia later that year. Upon his arrival, he sent a letter to then Secretary of State, Thomas Jefferson, stating his "ambition to become the citizen of a free state." Not very long after his arrival in the States, however, William Cobbett becomes associated in the 1790s with vitriolic diatribes against all things French, republican, African, Irish, American manners, and the "coarseness" of its people. Democratic pamphlets circulating throughout Philadelphia in 1795-1796 referred to Cobbett variously as "ass-brained, a booby, a nincompoop, a Lilliputian desperado, a mere adventurer, a monster, a murderer, and a headstrong horse."[74] James Madison wrote of Cobbett's "satirical scurrility" and Samuel Taylor Coleridge called him "the rhinoceros of politics with the horn of brute strength on a nose of scorn and hate."[75] Indeed, Cobbett played a central role in the emergence of the modern editorialist as star personality. The portrait of Cobbett is provocative, if not curiously popular.

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[74] Quoted in List, 4. List argues in her dissertation that we misread Cobbett as a conservative Federalist in America when we should understand his changed political proclivity as a Tory, the result of his sense of Britishness in the face of what he felt was an "immoral and empty" American culture. Karen K. List. *The Role of William Cobbett in Philadelphia' Party Press, 1794-1799*. Dissertation, University of Wisconsin—Madison: 1980. See also John Swanwick's *A Rub from Snub* and *A Roaster*; Samuel Bradford, *The Imposter Detected, or a Review of Some of the Writings of 'Peter Porcupine'*. Philadelphia, 1796. xii,xiii.; Jim Carey's *A Pill for Porcupine.*

[75] Madison quoted in Pierce Gaines, *William Cobbett and the United States.* Worster, Mass: American Antiquarian Society, 1970. pxiv.; Coleridge quoted in A.M.D. Hughes, Ed. *Cobbett.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923. 15.

These passionate attempts to disregard Cobbett during the revolutionary decade are well-deserved. Cobbett's publications during his ten-year residency in the early republic were numerous, including several political pamphlets self-published and circulated up and down the eastern seaboard and *The Porcupine's Gazette*, a weekly that at its height of influence in 1796 made him the most widely read political writer of the eighteenth century in America. [76] In his political pamphlets, he highlighted the hypocrisy of an American democracy that practiced slavery in *A Bone to Gnaw, for the Democrats* (1795), the horrors of the French Revolution and a warning to Americans that such horrors were possible on their own soil in *The Bloody Buoy* (1796), his suspicion of Jacobin conspirators between republicans and French émigrés in *The History of American Jacobins* (1795), and his most paranoid pamphlet wherein he spells out how emigrated United Irishmen were planning to overthrow the American government in *Detection of a Conspiracy Formed by the United Irishmen* (1798). In this last pamphlet Cobbett deconstructs the United Irish "plan" to subvert American leadership by invoking the specter of Haitian slave violence. The self-conscious gesture marks *Detection of a Conspiracy Formed by the United Irishmen* as one of the more visible participants in regenerating slave violence for a fearful readership. Cobbett's writing gave the reading public access to some of the political tensions and cultural and economic negotiations between Britain, America, France, and the West Indian colonies at an historical moment when the outcome of those relations were crucial to the nation's stability. He becomes, then, important for understanding the relationship between public perception, widespread anxiety, and how these are represented in literature.

[76] Pierce W. Gains, "William Cobbett's Account Book,." *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 78 (1968), 299-312.

In *Creole America: The West Indies and the Formation of Literature and Culture in the New Republic*, Sean X. Goudie argues persuasively that not only was the future survival and economic prosperity of the Republic dependent upon open trade relations with the West Indies—relations heavily resisted by the British, French, and Spanish empires—but that these economic and political realities shaped print culture, particularly in the aftermath of the American Revolution. "The archipelago," Goudie writes, "proves alternately threatening and alluring, abject and desired, entombed and fetishized across geographic, epistemic, and generic borders. As such, the West Indies function as a surrogate, a monstrous double for urgent political, cultural, and economic crises, not least among these is slavery" (10). Goudie's sweeping analysis of post-revolutionary relations between the West Indian and American "political, cultural, and economic crises" points to the contemporary trade relations that help explain tensions at the highest levels of government. My argument, however, intervenes at the intersection of "generic borders" and suggests that slavery was, in fact, a *powerful* source of anxiety for late-eighteenth and nineteenth-century Americans. More specifically, I argue that we can locate this anxiety not in the West Indies more generally, but in a specific *event* in an explicit geographic location: revolutionary slave violence in Saint-Domingue. That these uprisings result in the first black nation state of Haiti in 1804 reinforces, reproduces, and reinvigorates generic tendencies in American storytelling of the early republic, and serves to create what becomes the most enduring American form for telling the history of its race relations rooted in chattel slavery.[77]

[77] See Theresa Goddu's *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation*. New York: Columbia UP, 1997; Joan Dayan's *Haiti, History, and the Gods*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995; Justin Edwards', *Gothic Passages: Racial Ambiguity and the American Gothic*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2003. All argue for the indelible connection between slavery and American Gothicism. See Chapter I for a breakdown of their arguments. Also, novels like Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom*! testify to the form and its durability through our contemporary moment.

Cobbett's counter-revolutionary ideology, his vociferous war against French influenced democracy, and his paranoia regarding any and all foreign agents, French or Irish, all situate Cobbett at the center of the most pressing and revolutionary debates of the late eighteenth century. As editor of the *Porcupine's Gazette*, writing as Peter Porcupine, Cobbett commanded the largest reading audience in America during the revolutionary decade and so helped to create and indeed, seemed more and more shaped by, his own political hysteria. Newspapers and stories in different ways worked to suppress, challenge, and reproduce such hysteria, but Cobbett's transformative influence on other forms of writing during the 1790s warrants critical attention. He wrote voluminously during his residency in America from 1794-1800; his writings are roughly divided into two generic categories: editorials in *Porcupine's Gazette* (1797-1799) and political pamphlets (1794-1796).[78] The sheer *amount* of print he produced also helps explain how he became the most widely read political writer in the United States during the French Revolutionary period.[79] One need not look further than his own writing, particularly the pamphlets, for evidence that Cobbett was consciously working toward a specific kind of American, national sensibility, one that shunned all the "hell of democracy" and embraced a Federalist political position and British manners. In speaking with English anti-Jacobin writer William Gifford in 1799, Cobbett boasted, "It is astonishing, but not less astonishing than true that it was I, and I alone, that re-exalted the character of Great Britain in America" (Wilson 2).[80] But as this agenda became evident to his American readership, Cobbett's critics became progressively more vocal. Samuel Bradford

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[78] David A. Wilson, Editor. *Peter Porcupine in America: Pamphlets on Republicanism and Revolution.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994.

[79] Pierce W. Gains, "William Cobbett's Account Book,." *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 78 (1968), 299-312.

[80] Wilson cites George Spater's *William Cobbett: The Poor Man's Friend.* Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1982. Vol 1, 86.

publicly accused Cobbett of attempting to "establish a monarchy instead of a republic" in Philadelphia in 1796, at the height of his popularity.[81]

Cobbett's political pamphlets provide a more sustained engagement with arguments he only introduces in his newspaper articles, and therefore provide greater access into his rhetorical strategies. While the newspapers were more widely read than his pamphlets, his popularity guaranteed that the intellectual elite, of which Brockden Brown was a member, would possibly have focused more on Cobbett's political pamphlets, if only to provide more ammunition against him. By looking at Cobbett's pamphlets, I hope to establish his importance to the production of American gothicism. Cobbett's contribution to the development of American gothicism is two-fold: first, he brought counter-revolutionary rhetoric into the popular imagination and second, he linked conspiratorial violence to both Irish and Saint-Dominguan émigrés. Cobbett became increasingly critical of the nation and its inhabitants in his writing, convinced that the new republic in all of its naïve commitment to liberty and equality would be its own undoing. Moreover, his widespread popularity during the 1790s ensured that his dramatic rhetorical flare and frequent use of violent imagery would be linked for readers. The terror Cobbett relies upon in almost all of his writing, a terror explicitly connected to the French Revolution and all subversive "democratic societies" espousing equality, permeates popular and political writing and thus carries over into local and national self-representations. This terror also resembles that of gothic fiction. The gothic as a tale simultaneously local and national works to contain and repress violence, perhaps most memorably represented by Clara's father, in Brown's first

[81] Samuel Bradford, *The Imposter Detected, or a Review of Some of the Writings of 'Peter Porcupine'*. Philadelphia, 1796. xii,xiii.

novel *Wieland; or the Transformation, An American Tale* (1798), when he mysteriously and spontaneously combusts.[82]

Cobbett's ambiguous position—British and anti-democratic at base—must have been a confusing progenitor of any form of literary production in 1790s America. In one of his early political pamphlets, *The Bloody Buoy* (1796), Cobbett excoriates the French as a way of warning the new American republic of the dangers inherent in democracy. He writes, "[h]ardly had the word *equality* been pronounced, when the whole kingdom became a scene of anarchy and confusion" (Wilson 145). He opens his pamphlet by citing the Abbe Burruel's "The History of the French Clergy," in which scenes of martyred priests including a graphic scene of cannibalism whereby priests were forced to eat the Countess of Perignan and her three daughters, "stripped, rubbed over with oil, and then put to the fire," while revolutionaries were "shouting and dancing" around them.(Wilson 83) This brief account serves many purposes for Cobbett: he draws on readers' sympathy and outrage over the violation of both church and femininity while employing terrifying tropes of cannibalism. That he uses the scene of revolutionaries shouting and dancing around a fire coincides with popular images of Native American sacrificial ceremonies and participates in the tradition of captivity narratives from earlier in the century.[83]

Much of *The Bloody Buoy* is spent "tracing all the Horrors of the French Revolution to their real Causes" which, according to Cobbett, are at root found in the "doctrine of equality" and "the *name* of liberty." Cobbett's critical focus lies in the seductive power of language, its ability to be both an empty sign—liberty only exists in "name"—and a creative

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[82] *Wieland; or the Transformation, An American Tale.* Charles Brockden Brown. 1798. See Chapter I in my discussion of the gothic for an explanation of how the genre is at once a tale of the local, or regional, and the national.

[83] Captivity narratives were widely read during the eighteenth and nineteenth century, including *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison* (1823) and *A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* (1682).

force with material consequences. People kill and die for liberty, "birth, beauty, old age, all became the victims of a destructive equality." For the early American Republic, the nation called into being through the "speech act" of the Declaration of Independence, the lesson of the destructive power of words would hold particular resonance. Cobbett manipulates this faith in words to his own political agenda in a lengthy, rhetorical tour de force, warning Americans of the threat posed by the "words" liberty and equality. Cobbett writes:

> Let this, Americans, be a lesson to you; throw from you the doctrine of equality as you would the poisoned chalice. Wherever this detestable principle gains ground to any extent, ruin must inevitably ensue. Would you stifle the noble flame of emulation, and encourage ignorance and idleness? Would you inculcate defiance of the laws? Would you teach servants to be disobedient to their masters, and children to their parents? Would you sow the seeds of envy, hatred, robbery, and murder? Would you break all the bands of society asunder, and turn a civilized people into a horde of savages? This is all done by the comprehensive word *equality*. But they tell us we are not to take it in the unqualified sense. In what sense are we to take it then? Either it means something more than liberty or it means nothing at all. The misconstruction of the word *liberty* had done mischief enough in the world; to add to it a word of still more dangerous extent, was to kindle a flame that never can be extinguished but by the total debasement, if not destruction, of the society who are silly or wicked enough to adopt its use. We are told, that every government receives with its existence the latent disease that is one day to accomplish its death; but the government that is attacked with this political apoplexy is annihilated in the twinkling of an eye. (Wilson 146, Cobbett's emphasis)

Here, he skillfully chooses images and concepts most likely to inspire fear in his readers: disobedient servants and children, uncivilized savages, ignorance, idleness, and the final specter, the complete "annihilation" of the government by virtue of its own "political apoplexy"—an annihilation that would occur in a single moment. That such annihilation is the inevitable result of language which contains the force of revolutionary violence not only draws on Cobbett's contemporaries and their fears but seems to usher in the very thing that forces his own emigration from Britain (seditious libel) and ultimate departure from America: the Alien and Sedition Laws put into effect in three stages, with the Naturalization Law of 1790, the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793, and the Alien and Naturalization Act of 1798. The elision of servants, children, and uncivilized savages participates in a gothic mode of

representation by linking the family, home, and domesticity with blackness, immaturity, and violence. Cobbett both anticipates his critics and draws on his early radical defiance of such legislative enactments when he announces that "[n]o freedom is equal to that of speaking the truth," defending himself against what he "foresees" as the "cant of *modern patriotism*" that will be hurled against him for his pamphlet.(Wilson 142, Cobbett's emphasis)

Cobbett here constructs himself in various ways that coincide with the often conflicting discourses circulating during the end of the eighteenth century, in Britain, France, and America. While he argues that the only freedom worth fighting for is that of free speech, he offers himself up as the hero on the front lines of that battle, all his porcupine needles poised and ready to wield critical damage to his, and our, foes. These foes take many forms; most pernicious, however, are those wishing to censure the "truth" provided by, of course, Peter Porcupine. Cobbett describes most print culture in 1790's America as "acting like the tyrannized French public" during the reign. In so doing, writers and the popular press make themselves and the nation vulnerable to similar atrocities, violence, and danger. Cobbett seems to borrow a page from the Federalist agenda of John Adams and his ilk, in his accusations against democracy as a tyrant wrapped in a cloak of freedom and equality. However, Cobbett's mode, while borrowing from and therefore participating in American nation- formation and its subsequent ideological negotiations, reflects not only his allegiance to Britain, but more importantly a purposeful appropriation of those specters that haunt Americans, not the British: those of Haitian slave violence. In Cobbett's invective against the most dangerous of secret societies, the United Irishmen, he ascribes significance as an impending threat to American stability *not* through the image of a mad Irishman, however, but through that of the "negro slave to the Southward" (Wilson 254).

In Cobbett's *Detection* pamphlet, his conviction that the "French have formed a regular plan for organizing an active and effective force within these States" revisits the seat of his own violent specter: the Irish insurgent's attempt to overthrow British rule.[84] Cobbett claims that the United Irishmen have designs to overthrow the American government through infiltration of secret democratic societies, a dangerous leaning toward "Frenchified" notions of liberty and equality for all, and a willingness and ability to use violent force if necessary to achieve this liberty. The root of this violence for Cobbett lay in France (rather than Haiti) and the "tools" are the Irish: he writes, "real, sincere, villainy, then without property, without principles, without country and without character; dark and desperate, unnatural and bloody-thirsty ruffians; these were what they wanted; and where could they have sought them with such certainty of success, as amongst that restless rebellious tribe, the emigrated United Irishmen?" (242). Here he links violence with the "ruffian," a term that, as Iain McCalman argues in *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries and Pornographers in London, 1795-1840,* would carry a classed, as well as raced, significance. Drawing on images of terror, Cobbett's paranoid rhetoric evokes the French Revolution (property without principles), the Haitian Revolution (unnatural and bloody-thirsty ruffians), and the generalized fear of foreign invasion (without country without character).

Cobbett's argument that the Irish exist as a real and present threat to American sovereignty relies on a Burkean system—or System—that finds the greatest evidence of conspiracy in the Constitution itself. Cobbett writes: "This plan, which is called a constitution," suggests what Marcus Wood has described as a "Burkean Parodics." Burke was the most influential, anti-revolutionary propagandist of the first phase of the Revolution

[84] Wilson, 241-257. The full title is *Detection of a Conspiracy, Formed by the United Irishmen, with the Evident Intention of Aiding the Tyrants of France in Subverting the Government of the United States of America.* By Peter Porcupine. Philadelphia: Published by William Cobbett. May 6, 1798.

and became linked with Tom Paine, whose *Rights of Man* is frequently parodic of Burke's *Reflection on the Revolution in France*. Wood suggests that "parody is a strangely open phenomenon" which makes it the perfect mode for Cobbett's conflation of revolutionary violence and conspiracy, as well as his heightened rhetoric.[85] But, according to Wood, it was Burke's "emotionally unstable" *Letter on the Prospect of a Regicide Peace* that Cobbett adopts as a critical model through which to deconstruct the United Irishmen's Constitution. Like Burkes' *Letter,* Cobbett sees revolutionary conspiracy in the *form* of the Constitution—that is, its reliance on eighteenth-century English systematizing. Burke writes:

> The French Constitution…is founded upon what is called the right of man; but, to my conviction, it is founded on the wrongs of man; and I now hold in my hand an example of its effects on the French colonies. Domingo, Guadeluope, and the other French islands, were rich, happy, and growing in strength and consequence, in spite of the three last distressing wars, before they heard of the new doctrine of the right of man; but these rights were no sooner arrived at the islands than any spectator would have imagined that Pandora's box had been opened, and that hell had yawned out discord, murder, and every mischief; for anarchy, confusion and bloodshed, raged every where; it was a general summons for: "Black spirits and white, blue spirits and gray, mingle, mingle, mingle, you that mingle may."[86]

For Burke, as for Cobbett in *Detection of a Conspiracy*, the constitution itself is directly responsible for "that hell" that "yawned out discord." Most importantly, Burke elides the revolution in "Domingo" with that of the French. For Cobbett, a line-by-line analysis of the United Irishmen's Constitution is the only proof needed to believe that a much larger conspiracy is afoot, one that involves raising arms against the very nation they seek refuge in. As Cobbett suggests in *The Bloody Buoy*, the practice of reading is crucial to the avoidance of anarchy: Cobbett models a way of reading in order to secure national stability. Despite his unsubtle prose, declarations such as "Under the sacred influence of devotion to the Union, Equality and Liberty of ALL men" would not have inspired the visceral fear he seems to

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[85] Marcus Wood. "William Cobbett, John Thelwall, Radicalism, Racism and Slavery: A Study in Burkean Parodics." *Romanticism On the Net* 15 (August 1999): http:..users.ox.ac.uk/~scat0385/thelwall.html

[86] Edmund Burke, *The Speeches and Writings of Edmund Burke, 9 vols.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991-1997.

want to produce in his readership. Once again, Cobbett models his way of reading to ensure correct interpretation: "The declared intention of procuring 'equality and liberty to ALL men,' is clear proof Ireland alone was not in their view." As he argues in *The Bloody Buoy*, it is equality and liberty in "name" only, the semantic presence of which is evidence alone of revolutionary and transatlantic intentions.

Cobbett's rhetorical acumen is undermined by the very theoretical grounds on which he bases the *Detection* pamphlet. The "cant" surfaces throughout almost all of Cobbett's writing and often serves as the hinge his argument swings upon. The "cant"—with its differing connotations of hypocrisy, false piety, and jargon—plays upon the paranoia, sense of inferiority, and even piety of its readers. Cobbett, well aware of the unstable faith in language during the late eighteenth century, highlights this only to offer a solution to the problem (which he introduces as how to distinguish between truth, real language, and false or deceitful language): read like him. To illustrate, he deconstructs the United Irishmen: "The words Ireland, Irishmen, &c. are mere substitutes for other words, like the cant of the pickpockets, according to which a hog means a shilling, a pig means a sixpence, and so on" (Wilson 244). It is a telling slip between geography and subjectivity—Ireland and Irishmen—as Cobbett is building an argument about the dishonesty of the stated intention of the United Irish to liberate Ireland from Britain; but this slip allows him to perform the same "cant" later in his pamphlet, in effect, to alter both geography and people to Saint-Domingue and the "slaves to the south."

Cobbett's obsession with "cant" draws on a Johnsonian belief that language need be reigned in from its tendency to morph into something other than its original because of its misuse in the public sphere. In his *Preface to the Dictionary*, Johnson writes, "Our language, for almost a century, has, by the concurrence of many causes, been gradually departing from its

original Teutonick character, and deviating towards a Gallick structure and phraseology, from which it ought to be our endeavour to recall it" (Johnson 132). Recognizing that such leanings toward "antiquity" run the risk of alienating his contemporary audience, or at least, have the potential of being wholly misunderstood, Johnson clarifies the distinction between inclusion and exclusion of words. He explains that not all omissions are worthy of lamentation for "of the laborious and mercantile part of the people, the diction is in a great measure casual and mutable" (137). He concludes in this way: "This fugitive cant, which is always in a state of increase of decay, cannot be regarded as any part of the durable materials of a language, and therefore must be suffered to perish with other things unworthy of preservation" (137).[87] Johnson's use of "fugitive" suggests its temporary status, its meaning as continually in flux. Such words should be allowed to "perish" in their own due course. His attempt to ascribe meaning would be inappropriate as "cant" as it is not durable and therefore should not be canonized. Cobbett's use of "cant" however suggests a far more sinister purpose—its fugitive quality leaning more toward the criminal ("cant of the pickpockets") where "cant" is used to deceive, as a secret language might be used in a conspiracy. To Cobbett, "cant" is employed with the intention of hiding and misleading the reader; only someone skilled in identifying such misleading language can help redirect reception and safely chart a course through the massive quantity of print culture available to the eighteenth-century American consumer. Cobbett, in effect, offers himself up as our cultural guide, but he must first prove that the stakes for misreading are quite high, and that in all probability, the consequences of such misreading are nothing less than the murder of your own family and neighbors.

[87] E.L. McAdam, Jr. & George Milne, Eds. *A Johnson Reader.* New York: The Modern Library, 1964.

The United Irishmen Constitution is the perfect example of a document that threatens the safety of the nation if not read properly. Cobbett reads the "TEST" that each new initiate must take, most of which deals directly with questions of Ireland (such as, "Do you think the people of Ireland are in possession of the rights of men? Do you think Great Britain ought, of right, to govern Ireland? Are you willing to do all that in you lies to promote the emancipation of Ireland, and the establishment of a republican form of government there?"), as evidence itself of plans for conspiracy because of its infused Paninite leanings and obligation of "secrecy." This is followed by his certain belief in the alliance of the United Irishmen and the French Jacobins, by virtue of the printer, whose omitted name on the pamphlet signifies a sure collusion of revolutionary forces: "Next, observe that the closest intimacy exists between the sans-culotte French, who are here, the most distinguished of the emigrated United Irishmen, and a base American printer, notoriously in the service of France" (Wilson 249). Cobbett slips again between the French, "here the most distinguished of the emigrated United Irishmen" and the Irish conspirators, between a possibility of communication between them and the probability that the French *are* the Irish. For Cobbett's purposes, of course, they are the same: both threaten with their "cant" of liberty and equality, the logical conclusion to this similarity in language is the replication of French Terror in the newly independent democratic nation. Latent in the terms outlined by Cobbett's own argument is the revolutionary threat posed to British rule by United Irish collectivity.

A final bit of evidence for Cobbett that the Irish are in fact the French comes in his replication and interpretation of a letter issued by the American Society of United Irishmen, distributed in Philadelphia in December of 1797. In this letter, Js. Reynolds of the Committee describes the Irish as "a manly people whom six hundred years slavery could not

debase, [who] are about to be restored to their right" (Wilson 251). Cobbett promptly reads this line as "a very awkward translation of French cant" referring to it as "French in English words" (251). Despite every attempt to make a case for urgency in dealing with the United Irishmen as a threat to the American government—a case premised on the collapse in language through "cant"—Cobbett finally identifies what would have terrified his American readership: "What renders the situation of America more favourable to the views of France than any other country is the negro slavery to the Southward. On this it is that the villains ground their hope." Cobbett concludes, "I do not take upon me to say that these preparatory steps have been taken, but this I know, that nothing could be thought more hellish or better calculated to insure success" (Wilson 254). Sounding a lot like Burke in *Letter on the Prospect of a Regicide Peace*, Cobbett finally resorts to the specter haunting America, not Britain: that of Saint-Domingue. He also relies on his own carefully established concept of "cant" as something that can account for the substitution of a people, a nation, even a race, certainly ironic for a writer so attuned to the power and misuse of language.

Cobbett's concluding paragraph makes poignantly transparent where his own fear resides. He writes:

> The great body of the Irish, instead of contempt and reproach, merit admiration and applause. They have had greater temptations to resist, and a more formidable conspiracy to combat, than any other people in Europe; yet their loyalty has triumphed, still triumphs, and I trust it ever will triumph, over every art and violence, to which it has been or shall be opposed. Sufficiently great is the misfortune to be the countryman of a traitor, without being loaded with a share of this guilt. (Wilson 257)

Cobbett's own loyalty, as for all those rootless Irishmen, remains in question and as a result, his British nationalism multiplies in the fertile and contested political grounds of eighteenth-century America. These contestations, violent hauntings, Irish ruffians, and Black bandits find their way into the literature throughout the period, give rise to what becomes a proto-gothic mode in the insurrection literature of Denmark Vesey, Gabriel Prosser, and Nat

Turner and works out the ghosts in the American gothic tales of the period like those of Brockden Brown, Edgar Allan Poe, and Herman Melville. And Cobbett, most known for his British radicalism in the 1820s and 1830s, played a lesser known but crucial role in the most important debates of late eighteenth-century America. Cobbett's pamphlets forged the public identity he was to embody throughout his life, in Britain, America, and finally back in Britain where he wrote in 1828 near the end of his life, "Mine is the most curious history that has ever recorded the life and action of man" (*Political Register*, June 12, 1828).

III. Transatlantic Underworlds & Romanticism

The distinction between British and American radicalism helps open up interpretive space for understanding how black slaves, insurrection, and the Haitian Revolution as an historical event might have played a constitutive role in the creation of American gothicism. In Iain McCalman's *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries and Pornographers in London, 1795-1840*, people who made up the radical culture of the period are distinguished by one of three markers: first, they were artisans supportive of French Jacobin republicanism; second, they were "dedicated to moral and intellectual subversion"; and third, they were religious enthusiasts from the "lower classes" who devoted their passion to depose the existing order. These categories, McCalman suggests, often manifest in overlapping sensibilities but just as often splinter off into divergent spheres of influence as class differences (upper, working) and corresponding ideological structures of "respectability" and "roughness."[88] While these markers are unquestionably applicable to eighteenth-century American radical culture, the conceptual categories of "respectability" and "roughness" take on slightly different meaning

[88] Iain McCalman, *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries and Pornographers in London, 1795-1840.* Cambridge UP: Cambridge, 1988. 1-3.

when they pertain to 1790s America.[89] In many ways, William Cobbett and Charles Brockden Brown are perfect manifestations of how markers of radicalism change in their travels from Britain to America. Cobbett flees Britain from a libel suit, which carries a possible prison sentence, exportation, and death, for his radical satire of the British military, *A Soldier's Friend*, only to become the most infamous counter-revolutionary editorialist in America,[90] while Brockden Brown alters the British gothic of William Godwin to create American gothic tales that stage contemporary cultural anxieties while they foreclose revolutionary action.[91]

Radical groups like the London Corresponding Society, the United Englishmen, Sons of Liberty, and the United Irishmen were fundamentally and irrevocably altered in the wake of government raids, suppression, imprisonments, forced emigrations, and executions of the most prominent radical figures, from 1798-99 and then again, in 1801-02. Aided by the Libel and Sedition Laws—or gagging acts—of 1795, the 1794 treason trials, and by well-placed spies, the British government fueled by French revolutionary terror worked relentlessly to crack down on internationalist groups in particular. These crack-downs had devastating consequences: for the Irish whose hopes of overthrowing British colonial rule hinged on the invasion of French troops and for the British, who counted on French revolutionary zeal, if not actual force, for their cause. One result of the increased policing of underground politics was the polarization of the political left; other forces contributed to

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[89] See Margaret Jacob and James Jacob, Eds. *The Origins of Anglo-American Radicalism*. London, George Allen & Unwin: 1984, particularly useful in this collection is Gary Nash's article, "Artisans and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia." 162-184. And Richad J. Twomey's "Jacobins and Jeffersonians: Anglo-American Radical Ideology, 1790-1810."284-299.

[90] See Karen K. List, *The Role of William Cobbett in Philadelphia's Party Press, 1794-1799*. Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison: 1980.

[91] Many critics of written about the connection between Charles Brockden Brown and William Godwin, most notably Pamela Clemit's *The Godwinian Novel: the rational fictions of Godwin, Brockden Brown, Mary Shelly*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.

this polarization as well, including national and class-based conflicts. Despite this complex array of forces, conflict amongst underground political movements became articulated through violence, rhetorical and actual.

The degree to which radicals such as Thomas Evans, John and Benjamin Binns, and William Duckett, who were entrenched in a republican idealism spanning Ireland, Britain, America, and France, believed in the necessary use of violence to achieve its objectives was matched by reform minded political leaders like Francis Place, who cast such violent tendencies as "rough," "criminal" and generally profligate. An influential political figure in 1790s annals of the London Corresponding Society (1793-1797), Place separates his own "moderate reformism" from "force-revolutionary zeal" and uses Thomas Evans as a metonym for all underground, criminal political activity. As McCalman acknowledges, little is known of Evans' early political history, prior to 1816, his social background, or his death sometime after 1820.(7) The self-proclaimed moderate labor archivist, Francis Place headed the London Corresponding Society from its inception until 1797, when, according to him, it was hijacked by the more radical, revolutionary faction led by Thomas Evans. The historiography of underground radicalism in Ireland, Britain, France, and America is a network of documents, many of which are written for and by counter-revolutionary figures, whether government spies such as James Powell (the "best placed government informer"), federalist editorialists like William Cobbett, or resentful moderates like Francis Place. Despite the murky documentation of Evans' life, he provides a link between 1790s Jacobinism and post-war radicalism in Britain[92] and also between the United Irishmen,

[92] McCalman uses an impressive variety of sources to piece together a history of radical underground activity during the 1790s. A partial list of the most relevant sources include J. Robison, *Proofs of a conspiracy against all the religions and governments of Europe* (1798); Anti-Jacobin (pseudo.), *New Lights on Jacobinism* (1798); R. Clifford, *Application of Barruel's 'Memoirs of Jacobinism; to the Secret Societies of Ireland and Great Britain* (1798); W. Cobbett, *Bloody Buoy…Thrown out as a Warning to the Political Pilots of All Nations…*(1797); S. Payson*, Proofs of the Real*

French Jacobinism, and American counter-revolutionary republicanism. United Irish agent Reverend James O'Coigley and William Duckett—an espionage agent for the United Irish to assess the viability of French invasion and British overthrow in Ireland—became entrenched in political underground activities with a group of émigrés from Ireland, including brothers John and Benjamin Binns who arrived in Britain in 1794 and later emigrated to America (1799). Evans', then, participates in an internationalist underground movement whose principles of democracy and advocacy of revolutionary violence combined in ways which seemed, to people like Cobbett, to threaten the stability of early republican democracy.

The United Irishmen in particular furnished the London Corresponding Society, after 1797, with an "underground organizational model and broader internationalist programme firmly based on expectations of French military assistance."[93] Altering the focus from one of Englishness to one that transcended national border—both in its aims and methods—would have been Britain's worst nightmare realized; as Anthony Jarrells has written on Britain's own 1688 revolution, drawing on Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, "1688 must be understood not with but against the French Revolution." Jarrells concludes, "[i]n an argument often more literary than logical, Burke argues that the events of 1688 did not constitute a break with tradition but rather comprised an extreme attempt to maintain it" (4). [94]

Existence and Dangers of Illuminism (1802); W.H. Reid, *The Rise and Dissolution of the Infidel Societies in this Metropolis* (1800), passim. Reports from Parliamentary Committees*, Report from the Committee of Secrecy…relating to Seditious Societies*, 15 March 1799.

[93] Marianne Elliott*, Partners in Revolution: The United Irishmen and France.* New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1982. 144-150.

[94] Anthony S. Jarrells, *Britain's Bloodless Revolutions 1688 and the Romantic Reform of Literature.* London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. Jarrells' argument that the Revolution of 1688 is crucial for understanding how the French Revolution was represented in print and in turn gives rise to the "newly emergent category of literature" is useful both in terms of understanding the threat this transnational cadre of political underground figures would pose to any British imaginary; and because of the relationship between revolutionary and counter-revolutionary

This gesture toward violence as a means of suppressing it and substantiating existing political structures is replicated in the novels of Walter Scott. In *Waverly* (1814), Jarrells' writes, Scott's narrative "works to assimilate such spirit and character so that the insinuations of government will not seem so intrusive"; the violence is thus "mollified and familiarized by the act of representation."[95] In William Godwin's *Preface* to *Caleb Williams* (1794), on the other hand, Godwin explains that "the spirit and character of the government intrudes itself into every rank of society" ("Revolution and Romance" 31). Pamela Clemit has argued convincingly of the "complex pattern of literary, philosophical, and political interchange" which establishes its own "framework for debate" amongst the "Godwinian" novelists—including William Godwin, Mary Shelley, and Charles Brockden Brown (*The Godwinian Novel* 2). "What was distinctive in Jacobin fiction," Clemit writes, "was its attempt to illustrate Godwin's proposition that 'the characters of men originate in their external circumstance' by means of a 'unity of design', whereby the incidents of the story would be related to the developing character of the participants" (3).[96] Despite this attempt at a unifying design based on philosophical principles, for Brown as well as for Godwin, political and revolutionary violence resists representation: that is, violence does not allow for a seamless, national narrative. Brown's novels do not allow for the assimilation of violence—violence in Brown's first novel *Wieland; or the Transformation: A National Tale* (1798), for example, not only ruptures the family but also displaces it from the nation: Clara is no longer able to live in America where appearances dictate reality with devastating consequences but must

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print culture between 1789-1820, and literary production. My reading of William Cobbett and Charles Brockden Brown later in this chapter depends upon a similar theoretical gesture.

[95] Anthony Jarrells' "Bloodless Revolution and the Form of the Novel." *NOVEL A Forum on Fiction.* Vol. 37, Fall2003/ Spring2004. 24-44.

[96] Clemit refers to Gary Kelly's *The English Jacobin Novel, 1780-1805* (1976) and Godwin's contemporary, Thomas Holcroft, *Alwyn; or, the Gentleman Comedian*, 2 vols. (London 1780). All, including Brockden Brown, use Godwin's *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (2nd edition, 1796).

relocate to Europe, where the safety of her uncle, and her marriage to Pleyel, protect her from her native violence. Revolutionary America, for Brockden Brown, leaves no survivors, only those who retreat back to the old world can imagine a future.

Wieland offers up a horrific critique of democracy: as it does for Cobbett, democracy fosters participation by an unenlightened public, unpracticed in the art of interpretation. Brown and Cobbett share the conviction that the cost of misreading history is the promise of future mass violence which ruptures family line, and sanity, and leaves survivors without a nation. In a similar narrative move, Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson suggests that only by reading the obvious signs of violence throughout the world can the young American nation hope to avoid its own "annihilation" or "political apoplexy," in Cobbett's terms. Observing the violence in France and Saint-Domingue, Thomas Jefferson writes in a 1797 letter, "[I]f something is not done, & soon done, we shall be the murderers of our own children…the revolutionary storm sweeping the globe, will be upon us, and happy if we make timely provision to give it an easy passage over our land." He concludes by warning "the day which begins our combustion must be near at hand; and only a single spark is wanting to make that day tomorrow."[97] Like Cobbett's "twinkling of an eye," to Jefferson, the difference between peace in the new Republic and large-scale violence hinges on an event, a "single spark." For Cobbett and Jefferson, this moment remains outside national borders, still at a distance but menacingly near; for Brown, the nation is already contaminated, each individual, each family, a potential "spark" of violence. Brown seems to recognize what his peers do not: that Saint-Domingue is already a part of the popular,

[97] In a letter to Senator George Tucker of Georgia, dated August 28, 1797. Jefferson begins the letter by situating the inevitable "combustion" in America as the logical extension of "the first chapter…which has begun in St. Domingo."

legislative, and literary discourses and that its violent rhetoric and attendant possibility of slave violence already thrives within the nation's borders.

In "Juries of the Common Reader: Crime and Judgment in the Novels of Charles Brockden Brown," Frank Shuffelton argues that Brown's novels collectively ask the following questions: "If crime was thus a debatable term and private citizens were insufficiently qualified to detect error, what force could their judgments have in the public sphere, and what dangers did they run from alien poisons?" (*Revising Brockden Brown*, 100). Shuffleton points out that Brown's novels situate the "common reader" as part of a jury whereby she is constantly put under pressure to distinguish between appearance and reality, performance and truth. Both Clara and Wieland are unable to read their own history accurately which results in Wieland's murderous actions and Clara's loss of everything, including her national home. As Shuffleton's article suggests, Brown's novel expresses acute anxiety about eighteenth-century ways of reading. In particular, the novel seems to argue that early republicans are in jeopardy of misreading history, but also the present moment, especially the nation's vulnerability to alien influences, which Brown figures in the Irish Carwin, Irish Clithero, and West Indian Lodi.[98] And further, Shuffleton argues that Brown understood "his narrative revisions of public events not merely as reflections of the events but as part of the events themselves, as forms of participation in public reasoning" (*Revisions*, 100). Rather than instructing the "common reader" in the art of proper interpretation of historical events, as Cobbett's *Peter Porcupine's Gazette* and pamphlets do, Brown's novels stage the misreading itself and the dire consequences of this misreading: violent death and national loss. But like Cobbett and eighteenth-century British writers like William Godwin and Walter Scott, Brown seems to understand that literature, a category in the eighteenth

[98] These characters are found in Brown's *Wieland, Edgar Huntly*, and *Arthur Mervyn*, respectively.

century which encompassed much more than belle lettres, played an important role in shaping the new American public sphere; his consciousness of how an aesthetics could produce change in such an environment helps to explain Brockden Brown's centrality in early American scholarship and the more recent critical attention to his entire oeuvre, beyond his most famous four philosophical novels.

In his *England in 1819: the Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism,*[99] and not unlike McCalman's discussion of how class and political affiliation are connected in the imagination and political discourse of reform, James Chandler hints at the relationship between American "manners"—an obsession in early nineteenth-century British culture—and American political affiliations. That is, the more republican one's allegiance, the more "brute" "barbarian" and otherwise "half-minded" he was thought to be in the minds of the British.[100] According to Thomas Moore, William Cobbett and his wife clearly aligned themselves with these British ideals. During Thomas Moore's visit to America during the Peace of Amiens, he met with William Cobbett and his wife just short of their return to Britain. In an August 26th conversation at Cobbett's Long Island home, Moore writes: "[W]hen we talked of the rude manner of the Americans, Mrs. Cobbet said it was the Republican part of them that deserved this character, for the Royalist or Federal party were very different in their manners" (qtd. in Chandler, 445). Chandler argues that, particularly after the battle of Waterloo, the British were increasingly preoccupied by American manners, as they became "a circumstantial challenge to a normative frame of reference" (445). Here, Chandler is interested in the American influence on British Romanticism in the post-

[99] James Chandler. *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism.* Chicago and London: U of C Press, 1998. 441-479.

[100] Chandler cites a poem Thomas Moore wrote in response to his travels to America in 1803. The poem, titled *To Thomas Hume, Esq. M.D., From the City of Washington*, is a long diatribe against Americans and their manners. Thomas Moore, *Poetical Works* .New York: Appleton, 1846.

Waterloo period; but the meeting between Moore and Cobbett suggests something about British influence on American Romanticism as well. For what signifies class in Britain during the 1790s—rough and poor manners—becomes reassigned as political affiliation in America. Radicalism is thus transferred from the working class specifically to something more difficult to define but with potentially more far reaching implications. This latter category depends upon émigrés, of every stripe, but while Cobbett strives to make this threat his own, that is, part of the British Empire as the United Irishmen, Americans have their own threat, both local and international, in black slaves.

Romantic writers like Brockden Brown reveal the impossibility of repressing violence, including potential and real slave violence, in eighteenth-century America. It is this inability to make invisible past, present, and future violence that marks Brown's alteration of British gothicism to something historically specific to Brown's eighteenth-century American moment. Ian Duncan has argued that it is a typically gothic strategy to displace the threat of violence to an historical past; but, as I argue in Chapter I, the early American Gothic represents time differently, and while the setting remains within the nation, the crises worked through by Brown become inscribed as outside the nation, Saint-Domingue.[101] While Brown's journalistic and political pamphlets could not be defined as gothic, they nevertheless share a similar affective sensibility to his gothic fiction. The tale as a fictional form distinct from the novel—romance *after* the novel—provides the generic bridge between these two modes, as I will discuss in more depth in Chapter 4 in my analysis of Edgar Allan Poe and Herman Melville.

[101] Ian Duncan, *Modern Romance and the Transformation of the Novel: the Gothic, Scott, Dickens* (1992).

IV. Charles Brockden Brown and the development of form

Charles Brockden Brown is critically understood as "America's first man of letters to gain a livelihood with his pen" (Warfel v).[102] In the last twenty years, Brockden Brown scholarship has changed from that of an almost exclusively early American and biographically-inflected critical stance to that which has most recently placed him within transatlantic romanticism and postcolonial criticism, while also establishing his importance to any understanding of early American aesthetic and philosophic discourses.[103] A quick MLA search turns up 455 total entries, over 200 of which have been published in the last 20 years, and 43 dissertations in the last 5 years. Since the first collection of essays exclusively on Brockden Brown published in 1981, an onslaught of critical attention has been given to his work: first, as a flawed, difficult, and aesthetically unsatisfying writer who nevertheless made important observations about literature, politics, and history, and more recently, as a "touchstone for understanding the cultural transformations and conflicts of the early Republic" (*Revising Charles Brockden Brown* x).[104] In their 2003 collection of critical essays, *Revising Charles Brockden Brown: Culture, Politics, and Sexuality in the Early Republic*, the editors point out previous misunderstanding of Brown's work as extending a concept of American exceptionalism, as giving rise to a host of "crypto-hagiography, psychobiography, or over-aestheticized notions of authorial function," and as simply marginal to any construction of

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[102] Harry R. Warfel, Ed. *The Rhapsodist And Other Uncollected Writings.* Delmar, New York: Scholars' Facsimilies & Reprints, 1943, 1977.

[103] Early critical studies of Brockden Brown include David Lee Clark's *Charles Brockden Brown: Pioneer Voice of America.* Durham, N.C.: Duke UP, 1952; Alan Axelrod's *Charles Brockden Brown: An American Tale.* Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1983; Carl and Jessica Bridenbaugh. *Rebels and Gentlemen: Philadelphia in the Age of Franklin.* New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1942; Norman S. Grabo. *The Coincidental Art of Charles Brockden Brown.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981; Terence Martin's "Social Institutions in the Early American Novel," *American Quarterly* 9 (Spring 1957), 72-84.

[104] Bernard Rosenthal, Ed. *Critical Essays on Charles Brockden Brown.* Boston: G.K. Hall, 1981.

an early American republic of letters.[105] A number of changes in scholarship seem to have allowed for a more "cosmopolitan" positioning of Brockden Brown's work, not least of which is that we've only recently been able to ask "the questions that Brown's writing seeks to explore, if not answer" (xi). More broad-sweeping critical trends paved the way to scholarly attempts to answer the questions Brown's work asks, through the seminal work of scholars such as Cathy Davidson, Jane Tompkins, and Shirley Samuels, to name but a few.[106] Another important change that drastically altered the critical landscape for Brockden Brown scholars is the amount of Brown's work recently made available for the first time: Weber and Schafer's edited collection, *Charles Brockden Brown: Literary Essays and Reviews* (1992) and a current NEH funded project to construct all Brown's uncollected writings—some 5,000 pages—in *The Charles Brockden Brown Electronic Archive and Scholarly Edition*, headed by Fritz Fleischmann through Kent State.

Brown scholarship traditionally focused on his first four novels, written and published in rapid succession: *Wieland; or the Transformation: An American Tale* (1798), *Ormond* (1799), *Arthur Mervyn; or the Memoirs of the Year 1793* (1799-1800), and *Edgar Huntly; or Memoirs or a Sleep-Walker* (1799). Brockden Brown's novels have been read as something apart and privileged, as was highlighted by Steven Watts' famous announcement that "On or about April 1800 Charles Brockden Brown changed," in *Romance of the Real Life* in1994. The

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[105] Philip Barnard, Mark Kamrath, and Stephen Shapiro, Eds. "Introduction." x-xxi. They point out that much scholarship has traditionally fallen under the psychobiography category, however they do not unpack "over-aestheticized notions of authorial function" any further and I am unable to account for its meaning here. The editors do cite Steven Watts' *The Romance of Real Life: Charles Brockden Brown and the Origins of American Culture* (1994) as attempting of a "synthetic cultural study of Brown that examines his ideas and their expression, yet firmly grounds those ideas in the socioeconomic and political transformations of post-Revolutionary America." Barnard, Kamrath, and Shapiro's aim is to keep with Watts' critical impetus.

[106] Cathy Davidson's *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America* (1986) still reverberates throughout early American scholarship; as does Jane Tompkins' *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction*, 1790-1860 (1985). To a lesser extent but important for the critical moment in which it was published, and for my own work, is Shirley Samuels' *Romances of the Republic: Women, the Family, and Violence in the Literature of the Early American Nation* (1996).

confidence with which Watts proclaimed this break ushered in a new critical approach to Brockden Brown, one which wrote against this idea by seeing political, aesthetic, and intellectual continuity between Brown's important early novels and his vast production of journalism, political pamphlets, and his role as an editor. Even so, some studies have tended toward a defensive shift in valuation by suggesting that Brown's most important contribution came *after* he stopped writing fiction.

Michael Amos Cody's 2000 dissertation *Charles Brockden Brown and The Literary Magazine* examines Brown's role as Editor and chief contributor to the Philadelphia monthly *The Literary Magazine, and American Register*, published from 1803-1807. Cody argues that "the material in the *Literary Magazine* shows Brown in his most direct participatory role in what was already a fading republic of letters and represents his mature literary service in the name of a nascent American cultural nationalism" (14). Implicit in Cody's false assumption of a "fading republic of letters" is the elision between Brown's journalistic and other non-fiction endeavors and the important work of nation building. He draws on Brown scholar W. B. Berhoff's 1954 dissertation *The Literary Career of Charles Brockden Brown* as both recognizing the magazine as "a public forum for the concentration of literate intelligence and the diffusion of knowledge" and as "persistently encourage[ing] manifestions of literary nativism" (304; 306-7). Cody's work focuses much needed critical attention on Brown's non-fiction writing, and perhaps more importantly, his role as editor of one of the "three most important magazines in the first decade of the nineteenth century" (16). Of these three, including Dennies' *Port Folio* and *The Monthly Anthology, and Boston Review*, both "staunchly Federalist," only *The Literary Magazine* "claimed to be politically neutral" (Cody 16). But latent criticism of Brown's national allegiance and role in the public sphere misunderstands and undervalues the "cultural work" of Brown's earlier novels. It also

ascribes didacticism to Brown's later writing that simultaneously misreads and underestimates the complex ambivalence and parodic poetics of his non-fiction prose.

Cody situates his study in a matrix between the history of the book—"a study of the context of printed texts in a variety of forms and how those texts are produced, received, and interpreted—strongly anti-formalist in origin and intent"[107]—and postcolonial studies (Cody 10). While these critical gestures seem positive, he both makes too strong a case of assuming an "anti-formalist origin and intent" to Brown's non-fiction writing and oversimplifies postcolonial criticism as "exploring local conditions and self-awareness" as a process of decolonization (Cody 10). The tendency to polarize Brown's work into binary oppositions is manifest in debates over Brown's political leanings as either Republican or Federalist, his position as a pro-slavery advocate or abolitionist, and over the question of whether Brown's work expresses feminist or misogynist views.[108] But as W. M. Verhoeven argues, "Just as the neat division between Enlightenment and Romanticism is highly dubious, so the division between a radical and a conservative Brown is no longer tenable" (*Revising* 31).[109] While I take Cody's attention to *Brown's Literary Magazine* as an important means of accessing and assessing Brown's journalism in the public sphere, I hope to offer a less proscriptive analysis of the formal qualities in Brown's non-fiction prose, and a more nuanced understanding of how postcolonial criticism helps account for the difficult philosophical and political expressions in Brown's work overall. Rather than seeing these as

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[107] Quoted from Susan Belasco Smith and Kenneth Price, Eds. "Introduction." *Periodical Literature in Nineteenth Century America.* Charlottesville: Virginia UP 1995). 7.

[108] Throughout the essays in *Revising Brockden Brown*, which I take as my own critical starting point to examine the writing of Brockden Brown and William Cobbett, arguments that definitively read Brown writing as one, excluding the other, do exist, however, so do arguments that treat and attempt to account for Brown's complexity, ambivalence, and anxiety. This chapter will treat directly three of the essays in the collection to situate my own claims for Brown's work.

[109] In *Revising Charles Brockden Brown*. "Radicalism and Conservatism in Brown's Early Writings." 7-40.

opposing or otherwise different critical gestures, my argument is premised on the interdependency of form and a postcolonial framework, one found in Brown's writing, namely the "struggle between imperial and local claims to cultural authority" (*Messy Beginnings: Postcoloniality and Early American Studies* 2).

In Brockden Brown's *Arthur Mervyn: or, Memoirs of the Year 1793* (1799-1800), a local yellow fever epidemic in 1793 Philadelphia is thrown into contact with an ethereal, rebel West Indian slave. Bill Chistophersen reads the novel in *Apparition in the Glass* (1993) as imbued with racism and fear of black insurrection to support his assertion of Brown's abolitionism; and Sean X. Goudie has developed this argument in "On the Origin of American Specie(s)" to point out Arthur's turn to white supremacist thinking as a result of his encounter with Lodi, the West Indian slave. Identifying Arthur as a "natural historian" rather than a farmer, Goudie reads Arthur's impulse to objectify as systemic, and certainly the disease-ridden yellow fever epidemic, and need to contain it, upholds an interpretation of Arthur as a man of science.[110] Unlike Christophersen, Goudie avoids reclamation of Brown as either pro-slavery or abolitionist, and instead argues that Brown's works function as a "double-helix." Brown's works, both fiction and non-fiction, "interrogate these discourses from multiple vantage points at once, their narrative and plot structures frequently spiraling in several directions before doubling back on themselves, thereby rendering treacherous any effort to assert with any degree of certainty Brown's authorial—as opposed to the text's or his characters'—ideology on matters involving the intersections between race, nation, and empire building" (*Revising* 87). While I am uninterested in uncovering Brown's *true* (rather than fictional or textual) leanings here, or in any of his work, my own reading of the novel concurs with Goudie's claim for its ideological ambivalence and complexity. Too, I agree

[110] *Revising Charles Brockden Brown*, 60-87.

with how Goudie situates the novel in relation to the Haitian Revolution, as it "functioned as an assault on the deep racial structures upholding the U.S. nation-state and the national character" (*Revising* 68). But neither Christensen nor Goudie argue for the relationship between the novel's formal features as they both borrow and yet depart from British gothicism, nor do they explore how these formal features might be a response to—if not in dialogue with—the cultural anxiety produced by a pinnacle event such as the Haitian Revolution.

Despite Goudie's disavowal of any claim for Brown's authorial commitment to a politics or ideology, and despite his carefully researched argument for Haiti's role in the psychic, economic, epistemic, and political structuring of early American discourses, his analysis does not speak to Brown's innovative generic differences from his contemporaries. My contention is that Brown's contribution to American culture and letters cannot be accounted for by reading his work alongside British romanticism or by situating his writing within the contentious debates and fears of late eighteenth-century American culture; but both must occur simultaneously. A synchronic reading of Brown's work is necessary to understand how the historical phenomenon of revolutionary violence as it plays out in the Haitian colonial overthrow becomes the fabric of a new generic form in the period. Transatlantic romanticism as a subfield in literary study provides the most fruitful critical frame through which to account for Brown and later American gothic writers, in addition to figures like Cobbett, immersed as they were in the politics and culture of both eighteenth century Britain and America. Postcolonial criticism as a methodology further opens up the interpretative possibilities already expanded by transatlantic romanticism. Critics like Ian Duncan, Katie Trumpner, and David Shields all use postcolonial criticism to great effect in

understanding Scotland, Ireland, and Early American cultural productions and their ambivalent relationships to imperial discourse.[111]

In early American scholarship recently, there is a turn to postcolonial critical methodologies as a means of displacing what had become over-determined in scholarship, American exceptionalism.[112] Understood as a discursive practice—referring to "procedures and processes, representations and articulations" rather than whole societies, races, or moments in time—postcolonial criticism can help account for the kind of generic mixing and transatlantic conceptualizing found in much of the writing in the revolutionary period,[113]especially that of gothic tale writers, Brown and later Poe. Charles Brockden Brown's writing draws on Godwinian philosophy and form, British Romanticism, and gothic narrative strategies to engage cultural crises of the late eighteenth-century America, such as proliferating conspiracies, real and imagined, foreign agents, cultural authority, and slave violence.[114] Postcolonial criticism allows for access to understanding the dialectical relationship between metropole and periphery—the shifting ground of British and American

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[111] See Ian Duncan's "Edinburgh, Capital of the Nineteenth Century," in *Romantic Metropolis: The Urban Scene of British Culture, 1780-1840*, eds. James Chandler and Kevin Gilmartin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 45-64. See also Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997). David Shield's "'The Science of Lying'" argues that "postcolonial and anti-cosmopolitan skepticism emerged in the early republic as early as the 1780s, visible in hoaxing," which led to an "interrogation of global authority and universal truth" (224) in *Messy Beginnings: Postcoloniality and Early American Studies*, eds. Malini Johar Schueller and Edward Watts. 223-236.

[112] Some recent studies that highlight their position within a postcolonial framework, though in various ways, as a movement beyond American exceptionalism include Andy Doolen's *Fugitive Empire: Locating Early American Imperialism* (2005), Mark L. Kamrath and Sharon M. Harris, Eds., *Periodical Literature in Eighteenth-Century America* (2005), Sean X. Goudie's *Creole America: The West Indies and the Formation of Literature and Culture in the New Republic* (2006), Malini Johar Schueller and Edward Watts, Eds., *Messy Beginnings: Postcoloniality and Early American Studies* (2003), and Philip Barnard, Mark L. Kamrath, and Stephen Shapiro's *Revising Charles Brockden Brown: Culture, Politics, and Sexuality in the Early Republic* (2003).

[113] *Messy Beginnings*, 3.

[114] In W.M. Verhoeven's article "Radicalism and Conservatism in Brown's Early Writings" he criticizes Clemit's contribution to the "widespread misconception of Brown's novels as being essentially 'Godwinian'"(9), instead arguing for Brown has being more closely aligned with Godwin's late writings, like *St Leon* and *The Enquirer,* but not at all like *Caleb Williams* or *Political Justice*. Verhoeven also argues for situating Brown's novels as philosophical histories, as "gothic novels are clearly inadequate" (*Revising Brockden Brown* 32).

political and cultural crises that helped to produce the generic mixing which marks American gothicism in the late eighteenth century.

Brown's novels and non-fiction prose perform "cultural work" at the level of form by sublimating early republican anxiety about racial others and their potential to foment local slave violence through the example of the Saint Domingue uprisings throughout the 1790s. Slave insurrection in the West Indies came to exemplify the kind of horror possible in the new democracy, whether through direct allusion or conspicuous narrative absence. As I illustrate in the *Introduction*, references to Saint-Dominguan slave violence and the potential for the "violent contagion" to cross the water into the American south, are ubiquitous. The violent events in Saint-Domingue, in other words, are important for understanding early American historiography. In *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura 1922-1992,* critic Shahid Amin focuses on a particular violent event in India's history as a way of understanding how "nationalist history is made and remade," and to "uncover the strategies—narrative or otherwise—which go into its making" (3). That is, he focuses on a violent event that has developed into a nationalist narrative of "iconic status" and as such, becomes crucial to nationalist historiography. Amin suggests that the "triumph of such histories lies not only in making people remember events from a shared past: the nationalist master narrative also induces a selective national amnesia in relation to specified events which would fit awkwardly, even seriously inconvenience, the neatly woven pattern" (3).[115] Amin concludes by suggesting the implications for inclusion and exclusion of violent events in nationalist historiography: "These awkward events are recounted so as to embellish another and rather

[115] See also Ernest Renan's "What is a Nation?" in *Nation and Narration.* Ed. Homi Bhabha. London and New York: Routledge, 1990. 8-22.

more edifying tale. The exclusion of such events and the marginalized references to them serve the purpose of distinguishing authentic popular protest from 'crime'" (3).[116]

Amin's account of the way in which an anti-police riot in early twentieth century India has shaped Indian historiography provides a template for my own critical methodology: first, it suggests that popular violence overwrites progressive enlightenment historiography, reconfiguring around, through, and often in spite of the violent event; and second, that when popular violence *is* recounted, it is done so only to "embellish another and rather more edifying tale," a nationalist "master" narrative with claims to cultural authority. The insurrection literature of Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vesey, and Nat Turner affects this second feature by highlighting slave violence only to support and "embellish" the edifying tale of slavery and its importance to early American nationalism; but the first feature, in which violence ruptures the national tale, is what Brown's early novels achieve. This is in part, I want to suggest, a consequence of Brown's theory of history. Brown does not need to posit collective "amnesia," as Amin notes of Indian historiography, to support a master narrative of the historical present; rather, he looks to "the remotest period of futurity" in order to make sense of late eighteenth-century America.

Brown writes in his preface to *Edgar Huntly; or Memoirs of a Sleep-Walker*, of the inadequacy of European gothicism—"[p]uerile superstition and exploded manners; Gothic castles and chimeras, are the materials usually employed for this end" in favor of the materials for American gothicism—"incidents of Indian hostility, and the perils of western wilderness;…for a native of America to overlook these, would admit of no apology" (*Edgar*

[116] Amin's study relates how an anti-police riot of 1922 in a small market town in north India creates "peasant politics and Ghandian nationalism" by its many narrative representations and absences. Despite the different historical and geographic context, however, a similar narrative strategy takes place in 1790s America and coincidentally involves criminalizing dissent, though this not the central feature of my own analysis of Brown or Cobbett.

Huntly 3). Brown's representation of violence in his novels—what he refers to in *Edgar Huntly* as "Indian hostility"—is never buried beneath the surface or mollified into an "edifying tale" of national stability and tranquility; nor, however, is it exclusively reliant on local materials or circumstances to achieve its horror. Again and again, Brown relies on figures of foreign agency to alter the course of narrative history. His novels in no way affect simple racist or xenophobic ideology; rather they structure time as symbolized by a radical other—Irish and West Indian—to tell a story of American violence. The figure of the Irish interloper and the West Indian contagion reflect conflicting senses of time—one where an Irish past threatens the American present and a West Indian present threatens the American future. Brown's interest in the proper perspective for telling an accurate account of events is featured in most of his writing and highlights the relationship between historiography and a futurity which the present moment—his writing—depends upon.

V. Traces of futurity

In Brown's early journalistic writing published in *The Universal Asylum, and Columbian Magazine*, in Philadelphia from August through November of 1789, under installments entitled "The Rhapsodist," he offers a contract between writer and reader, expresses his ambition to be of "service to my country," and provides a theory of writing which shapes his future publications.[117] Brown explains that "several preliminaries remain unsettled between my readers and myself" and proceeds to clarify what these are, namely the reputation and style of a writer. Brown asks his readers to withhold "prejudice" whether it is based on superficiality of title or previous knowledge of the writer; in addition, he explains his style: "A rhapsodist is one who delivers the sentiments suggested by the moment in artless and

[117] Republished in *The Rhapsodist And Other Collected Writings, by Charles Brockden Brown*. Edited by Harry R. Warfel. 1943. 1-24.

unpremeditated language" (Warfel 5). Two aspects of Brown's claim stand out: first, unlike Cobbett's ridicule of common language as "cant," Brown suggests that only "artless" language will suffice to capture the moment; and second, that a historical present must be considered when choosing a narrative style. Brown concludes that a rhapsodist should "write as he speaks, and converse with his reader not as an author, but as a man" (5). But to achieve this, he should avoid "conversation" with people, in favor of conversing with "beings of his own creation" (6). Thus, being a man is a result of conversing with any and all "unanimated matter existing in the universe" (6). Brown's explanation of his method as embodied by the rhapsodist attempts to delineate the writer's responsibility to his readers by way of suggesting his aim, one shared by Cobbett, to guide readers in the act of proper or accurate interpretation. Brown's job is much more difficult than Cobbett's; as a writer of fiction rather than political and popular dogma, Brown must explain how the tools of "vivid fancy" model proper reading and provide aid in doing so. An important way in which Brown seeks to impress upon readers the vital implications for misreading is through an explanation of narrative time and historiography.

Brown's theory of time becomes his theory of the gothic. Brown explains that "we are too much interested in the scene that passes before us, to believe it unreal" (7). Our investment in the present prevents us from understanding how the nation's collective misreading of the past is already shaping its future. He continues,

> The conclusion of every act, and the final catastrophe of the drama, affect much more nearly than the fading colours of a vision, and the unsubstantial images of sleep. But perhaps it is necessary to abstract our attention from surrounding objects, to transport ourselves some million years forward from the present date of our existence, in order to form a rational conception of the present life, and of our own resemblance to the phantom of a dream. But distance, in this case, will only magnify the prospect. We shall quickly discover, that the present state is built upon a firm and immortal basis; that its traces are for ever visible, and its vestiges preserved entire to the remotest period of futurity. Such, in general, is the true opinion we should form of our present state. (Warfel 7)

In the movement from the writer's relationship to the reader, to an explanation of how the reader misinterprets history, Brown reveals a theory of representation, which he later uses in his fiction. Unlike the nineteenth-century Emersonian (and later, Whitmanian) insistence to remain in the present, Brown suggests that there is a danger in the nation's collective inability to escape present events and "catastrophes," just as the dreamer cannot escape the visions or "phantoms" of his own dream. Brown tells us that it is only when we imagine the future that we can properly grasp the present historical moment; by "transport[ing]" into the future and "abstract[ing]" ourselves from surrounding objects, we discover the "traces" that connect the future to the present moment in history. The writer, thus, provides the possibility for such an imaginary transport crucial for translating the repercussions of the historical present. The dislocation of time is a standard convention of gothic narrative strategies; but while the British gothic looks to the past to make sense of the present moment, the American gothic, as Brown theorizes, must look to the "remotest period of futurity" to accurately "read" the national moment.

Brown concludes his exposition on time in a claim that poses limitations on the writer. He writes, "the life of the rhapsodist is literally a dream. If he wishes to review the transactions of any former period, he searches in vain for the memory of it—it is nought but a shadow" (Warfel 7). Brown seems to be describing the peculiar circumstances of the writer in the early republic insofar as he is uniquely dislocated from any sense of a past. The writer can only "search in vain" for any memory; he has only the shadows of a European past at his disposal. As a result, the rhapsodist is "literally" in a dream-state, caught between visions and shadows of a history he has rejected, the present state of catastrophic events, and a terrifying and unknown future. Despite all of this, Brown identifies the national ability to

perceive the future as most important for the volatile present of the 1790s and early nineteenth century.

Brockden Brown's ability to "transport" readers into a terrifying future in order to grasp the significance of the present is a feature of all of his fiction. In different ways, each novel offers a warning to early Americans. In *Edgar Huntly Or*, *Memoirs of a Sleep-Walker* (1799) the warning is made manifest as sleep-walking through the urgent signals and threats surrounding the nation in the character of Irish Clithero, unreliable paternal figure Sarsfield, and Edgar Huntly, whose sympathetic identification with Clithero contaminates his body and mind, making him complicit with any present and future violence implied by the text. The only past available within the narrative structure of *Edgar Huntly* is that of Indian vengeance provoked by the character of "Old Deb" or "Old Mab"; but even this representation of an historical past is structured as a delayed vengeance in the present, as something continually and continuously haunting early America. It seems more of a backdrop to the bizarre relationship between and behavior of Clithero and Edgar Huntly. In Brown's first novel, *Wieland; or, The Transformation: An American Tale* (1798), for the citizens of Mettingen and Clara's immediate family, violence is provoked by the Irish (or Spanish) ventriloquist Carwin, whose interventions into their domestic society leave a wake of death and fear which dislocate Clara from the nation, in a fearful retreat back to Europe. That the violence in both *Edgar Huntly* and *Wieland* come about through the vehicle of a foreign agent, in both cases, an Irish agent, is relevant to the beliefs of Brown's contemporaries that conspiracy and violence hailed from outside national boundaries. For Brown, like Cobbett, the framers of later insurrection literature of Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vesey, and Nat Turner, and mid-nineteenth-century writers such as Poe and Melville, the contamination of a fragile, but still coherent, body politic in the future is at stake. In short, in the incarnation of

Edgar and Wieland, Brown illustrates how easily corruptible and extremely vulnerable the early American body politic is to violent and foreign contamination. What seems particularly interesting about Brown's first and last novels, *Wieland* and *Edgar Huntly* respectively, is the role played by an Irish villain. As Cobbett uses the "black slaves to the south" to inspire sympathetic identification with the perceived threat of the United Irishmen, Brown seems to use the figure of an Irishmen as a metonym for blackness, foreign agency, and eventual violence. But it is in Brown's *Arthur Mervyn; or Memoirs of the Years 1793* (1799, 1800) and in his political pamphlet, *An Address to the Government of the United States on the Cessation of Louisiana to the French, and on the Late Breach of Treaty by the Spaniards, Including the translation of a memorial, on the War of St. Domingo, and the Cessation of Mississippi to France, drawn up by a Counsellor of State* (1803), that the specter of Haiti is directly invoked.

Arthur Mervyn (and the character of Arthur) moves between a peaceful farming town outside the urban reaches of Philadelphia, and the city central, in the grips of a yellow fever epidemic in 1793. The action also takes place at the height of resistance to any foreign immigration and dissent as seen by the passing of the Alien and Sedition Laws: the Naturalization Law of 1790, the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793, and the Alien and Naturalization Acts of 1798. The connection between foreign resistance and shoring up slavery through the Fugitive Slave Act is best understood in light of two waves of immigration: the Irish, (250,000 came to American from Ireland between 1717-1775) and thousands of white and mulatto creole refugees and their slaves after the onset of revolution in Saint-Domingue in August, 1791, arriving in Charleston and New Orleans and infiltrating the major cities of Boston, New York, and Philadelphia.[118] The novel repeatedly hints that the yellow fever

[118] See Kevin Kenny's *The American Irish: A History*. Great Britain: Longman, 2000. The chapter on the Eighteenth Century details the different waves of immigration and their numbers, argues for an increased critical focus on the Scotch-Irish and their Presbyterianism as something apart from the Catholic, South

epidemic hailed from ships sailing from Saint-Domingue to America, a common belief throughout 1790s Philadelphia[119]. The September 3, 1800, edition of *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, reported that

> The Governor of Virginia has issued his proclamation, enjoining all vessels going from the port of Norfolk, up James River, to perform quarantine at Jordan's point — and also the same to be observed in all other ports within the commonwealth, in consequence of the existence of the yellow fever, or some other contagious disorder, at that place.[120]

Previous and subsequent editions of the daily paper reveal international preoccupation with the escalating violence in "St. Domingo" and slave rebellions and hangings throughout the southern states. The connection between the yellow fever plague afflicting thousands in urban Philadelphia and racial anxiety about West Indian immigration is not subtle. For example, when Arthur goes to the city in search of Sarah Hadwin's fiancé, Wallace, not heard from since the outbreak, Arthur is attacked by a "phantom" of the West Indies. Arthur finds another dying man in his mansion, and immediately concludes that, though scarred beyond recognition, it could not be Wallace: "[t]he life of Wallace was of more value to a feeble individual, but surely the being that was stretched before me and who was hastening to his last breath was precious to thousands" (147). The dying man's obvious "intelligence" and "beauty" and the "traces of pillages" Arthur notices throughout the mansion suggest that the havoc wreaked by the yellow fever has the most far-reaching implications for imperial stature and power. The link between beauty and riches—and the vulnerability to each by a disease which contaminates the economic and political corpus of

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Carolinian settlers, and suggests that over one quarter of the Irish immigrants settled in Philadelphia by 1790. Kenny briefly discusses the role of the United Irishmen and their contribution to radicalism in Philadelphia, as "an important catalyst for the radicalism of the contemporary Atlantic world" (41). 7-44. See also Maurice J. Bric, "The Irish and the Evolution of the 'New Politics'", in P.J. Drudy, Ed. *The Irish in America: Immigration, Assimilation, Impact.* In *Irish Studies* (4) Cambridge, England: 1985. 147

[119] See J. H. Powell, *Bring Out Your Dead* (1949; New York: Time, 1965), 30-46.

[120] I will look at more issues of *The Pennsylvania Gazette* in relation to Brown's political pamphlet, including a letter written by Touissant, or at least signed by him, published in the paper.

the nation—is placed on a source outside the nation, a "phantom" of the West Indies. As Arthur examines the mansion, he notices some "appearance in the mirror"—

> It was a human figure, nothing could be briefer than the glance that I fixed upon this apparition, yet there was room enough for the vague conception to suggest itself, that the dying man had started from his bed and was approaching me. This belief was, at the same instant, confuted, by the survey of his form and garb. One eye, a scar upon his cheek, a tawny skin, a form grotesquely [sic] misproportioned, brawny as Hercules, and habited in livery, composed as it were, the parts of one view. (148)

The near conflation of the dying man with the grotesque form of the apparition in the mirror suggests the proximity and danger of an imperial transformation into the racial other in all its distortion—"one eye" and violence that is written on his body—the "scar upon his cheek." The experience of seeing the apparition is felt by Arthur as a moment in time, collapsed into fear, as the "swiftness of lightening." To recognize the gross figure in the mirror is to be struck senseless: "A blow upon my temple was succeeded by an utter oblivion of thought and of feeling" (148). The immediacy of the violence collapsed into a brief moment echoes both Jefferson and Cobbett's reference to revolution beginning with a "single spark" and in the "twinkling of an eye." As Arthur lay unconscious, to be taken for "death" by hypothetical observers he introduces into his tale, he recollects being "haunted by a fearful dream":

> I conceived myself lying on the brink of a pit whose bottom the eye could not reach. My hands and legs were fettered, so as to disable me from resisting two grim and gigantic figures, who stooped to lift me from the earth. Their purpose methought was to cast me into this abyss. My terrors were unspeakable, and I struggled with such force, that my bonds snapt and I found myself at liberty. At this moment my sense returned and I opened my eyes. (148)

Through sympathetic identification with a slave—hands and legs fettered—Arthur's dream-state performs the kind of reversal of power that results from a single moment of violence at the hands of an unknown, partially seen, West Indian apparition. Brown repeatedly invokes the "eye" as the liminal space through which Arthur effects this transformation, both in his

waking state—as partially seeing the one-eyed figure in the mirror—and his unconscious state, through the never-ending pit beyond his visual field and as the ultimate connection to "liberty". As in *Edgar Huntly*, Arthur need only wake up to be free. Brown's catalyst for semi-consciousness is a form of racialized violence; but are readers to understand that fear of violence is clouding reality or that violence itself is the risk of sleep-walking? Brown partially responds to this through the metaphor of yellow fever when Arthur later judges that "the terror of infection, which made the inhabitants seclude themselves from the observation of each other," is responsible for the rapid contamination and increasing paranoia through the city (156).

The conflation of the yellow fever epidemic with West Indian violence is emphasized by Brown's confusing summation of Arthur's reflections after his assault. He writes, "[t]he memory of recent events, was, for a time, effaced by my visionary horrors. I was conscious of a transition from one state of being to another, but my imagination was still filled with images of danger" (148). The "recent events" and "visionary horrors" become one in the absence of any modifiers; while the "transition from one state of being to another" is also sufficiently vague as to suggest a national transition (memory of recent events, such as the American Revolution, French Revolution, or Haitian Revolution), corporeal transition (yellow fever), political transition (power reversal of the West Indian standing above Arthur as he hangs on a precipice), or psychological transition (sympathetic identification with the slave), simultaneously. At the end of his reflection, Arthur is still haunted by "images of danger" which suggest an unstable future. The power of these violent visions, like those created by ghoulish accounts of violence perpetrated by black slaves in Saint- Domingue, threaten to overtake the sensibility and security of white hegemony and all the political, economic, and cultural control that accompanies it.

The terror of contamination is finally metastasized when, after carrying several fever victims, Arthur himself is incapacitated with disease, leaving his "brain…usurped by some benumbing power, and…limbs that refused to support" (180). As in his reaction to the "phantom" West Indian assault, the fever's infection leaves him poisoned in mind and body. Goudie has argued that Brown's novel ultimately consolidates imperial power and resists West Indian violence through systemic racial classification.[121] But prior to Arthur's journey to the South, where he ultimately learns to control the threat of slave violence through this classification, Brown establishes Arthur's complicity through physical verisimilitude between Arthur, the noble dying man found in the mansion, and the Guadeloupe Lodi. Through these facial similarities, Brown figures the way in which "empires past and present…become embodied in the maze of relations heaped on Arthur Mervyn," particularly how "West Indian "blackness," resist the hemispheric dominance of the rising, and resolutely white, American empire and suggests the dramatic effect the West Indies had on the beliefs, fears, and desires of the United States in the 1790s and beyond" (*Revising* 72). The *future* of American imperial power, however, is what is at stake. The collapse between the fever epidemic, the belief that its origin was Saint-Domingue, and the violent West Indian figures of the unidentifiable "phantom," Welbeck, and Lodi—all who at different times in the text are imposed on the body of Arthur—make separation of the West Indies from early America structurally impossible.

The second half of the novel is taken up by Arthur's attempts to discipline through racial classification the "marauding West Indian slave" and any connection to it. The most startling example of a warning against Saint-Domingue slave refugees comes in a scene where Arthur, on his way to Baltimore from Philadelphia, shares a stage-coach. He

[121] In "On the Origin of American Specie(s): The West Indies, Classification, and the Emergence of Supremacist Consciousness in Arthur Mervyn." 60-87.

catalogues his company as "[a] sallow Frenchman from Saint Domingo…an ape, and two female blacks" (370). During this trip, the Frenchman sings to his monkey, while the "blacks…chattered to each other in a sort of open-mouthed, half-articulate, monotonous, and sing-song jargon" (370). Arthur is unable to make sense of the two, black, West Indian women, however, the Frenchman exclaims to his monkey "Tenez! Dominique! Prenez garde! Diable noir!" which roughly translates as "Stop! Dominique! Mind you! Black devil!" (350). On some level, Brown has readers understand the most basic kinds of racism driving Arthur's classification schema; the suggestion of laziness as represented by the two female mouths, which hang partially open, combined with the Frenchman's loss of control over his monkey—itself a racialized assignation—all connect neatly to the prevailing belief that Saint-Domingue slave revolts would not have been possible were it not for the irresponsible and ineffective managerial skills of French colonial power.

While *Arthur Mervyn* features refugees from the Haitian Revolution as objects of Arthur's scientific gaze, as if to model how the republic might handle such a threatening influx of creoles, the uncontrollable monkey signals an anxiety that such objectification may not suffice. That Arthur travels to the south locates precisely the geographic space wherein a Creole population from Saint- Domingue would be most dangerous. Brown's suggestion that a threat of slave violence exists in the near future is implied by the parallel plot of the yellow fever epidemic in the first part of the novel. By reading these two parts against and alongside one another, as Brown forces readers to do, the warning about Saint-Dominguan slave violence contaminating American southern slaves is veiled. This veiling and counter-veiling is a feature of Brown's writing, including the non-fiction, seemingly more didactic writing in his political pamphlets. Here too, the specter of Haiti thrives even while Brown compels readers to perform correct interpretations in order to solve the riddle.

To conclude my discussion of Brockden Brown, I want to turn now to one of his "Louisiana Pamphlets" as they are critically referred to. In 1803, Brown published anonymously two political pamphlets that spoke directly about the Saint-Domingue uprisings and their implications for America. I will focus on the first, entitled *An Address to the Government of the United States on the Cessation of Louisiana to the French, and on the Late Breach of Treaty by the Spaniards, Including the translation of a memorial, on the War of St. Domingo, and the Cessation of Mississippi to France, drawn up by a counselor of State.* Brown wrote *An Address* under the guise of an "ordinary citizen" who accidentally discovers a French plot to infiltrate and colonize Louisiana. This discovery is made by way of a letter, which the citizen includes in the pamphlet, written to Napoleon. Like Cobbett in *Detection of a Conspiracy*, Brown provides the letter as evidence and "translates" it for his readers. Unlike Cobbett, Brown veils himself behind a fictional character, one whose French origin marks it as tainted with revolutionary violence of its own, mismanagement of its colonies (St. Domingo), and ambivalent history with the early republic. What Brown's pamphlet performs most successfully, however, is the raising of Haitian slave violence as a warning to early Americans, "to awaken…from this fatal sleep"—a threat also veiled behind the tenuous grasp at French imperial retention of Louisiana (18). Drawing on the work of Ira Berlin, Robert Levine has encouraged a reading of Brown's Louisiana pamphlets in relation to "transnational and trans-American revolutions and their aftermaths—specifically, the emergence from revolution [by] the American Republic,…French Republic, and the…Republic of Haiti…within this larger frame, issues of federalism versus republicanism are subsumed within issues of nation and revolution, and Louisiana assumes particular significance as a site of contention" (*Revising* 334).[122] I would like to follow Levine's reading of Brown's Louisiana pamphlets as such; my own reading of

[122] Robert S. Levine, "Race and Nation in Brown's Louisiana Writings of 1803." 332-353.

Brown's pamphlet departs from Levine in two ways: first, I want to suggest that the rhetorical similarity between Cobbett's and Brown's political pamphlets bear on the proximity of Irish radicals in Philadelphia and on Cobbett's incredible influence on readers, one which seems not to have been lost on Brown; and second, I want to offer a different interpretation of how Haiti functions in the pamphlet.

Between early and late December, 1803, Thomas Jefferson brokered the deal with France that resulted in the Louisiana Purchase. Against criticism on both sides of the American political divide, Jefferson announced: "By enlarging the empire of liberty, we multiply its auxiliaries, and provide new sources of renovation, should its principles, at any time, degenerate, in those portions of our country which gave them birth" (qtd in *Revising*, 336).[123] And during the month of December, 1803, Brown published his political pamphlet. It seems, therefore, apt that the ordinary citizen of Brown's pamphlet, one that like Cobbett's *Detection of a Conspiracy*, unveils a plot of conspiracy which originates outside the American national boundary, would argue for the necessity of taking Louisiana for the benefit of France. But this aim is also clearly a ruse: the majority of the pamphlet focuses attention on the causes and outcomes of slave violence in "St. Domingo." The letter warns against any attempt to regain control of its former West Indian colony, arguing instead for the less bloody prospect of retaining Louisiana. The letter reads,

> [T]he eye will immediately be turned to St. Domingo. Alas! What have been the miseries of that devoted colony? Beneath what an ignoble yoke does it now groan! And how lost are its inestimable treasures to the parent nation! And shall not our first efforts be directed to regain these treasures? To break the iron sceptre of the negroes; that has already nearly crushed all the fair fruits of European culture, and which in a few years, by a series of cruel

[123] Levine cites Jefferson from Drew W. McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1980. 203.

wars and revolutions, will convert those beautiful plantations into an African wilderness. (5)[124]

The violence at the hands of the "negroes" and the prediction of ongoing revolutions will finally destroy any former traces of European civilization and its requisite financial gains for Europe, for "African wilderness." Brown raises the specter of "quandon slaves and naked Banditti" to further the letter's stated aim that France should avoid any more dealings with the "brutes" of St. Domingo, and should instead act with the "caution and deliberation….[that] are the virtues of men" (4,6). The letter continues,

'When I think upon the graves, the ignominious graves, that are gaping, in the plains of St. Domingo, for the conquerors of Egypt and Italy; the inevitable fate from the swords of banditti and slaves, or from the hovering pestilence, which awaits those veterans who have vied, in the usefulness and grandeur of their past exploits, with all that history or poetry has embalmed, I tremble with compassion….and with fear…[c]annot experience make us wise? Have we heard, without benefit, the lesson which the English in their treatment of their colonies have taught us?' (7,10)

Brown provides horrifying imagery of "gaping" graves, a result of either "swords of banditti and slave" or "the hovering pestilence," a reference to diseases acquired by Europeans in the islands, but also, to the widespread belief that diseases such as the Yellow Fever Epidemic in 1793 Philadelphia were the direct result of French, Creole, and black slaves immigrating from Saint-Domingue. His concluding plea to learn the lesson of the American Revolution is a direct reference to current debates over American slavery, those which called into question the hypocrisy of a Bill of Rights which nevertheless maintained chattel slavery. Brown vanquishes all subtlety, however, when the letter directly indicts the inhumanity of slavery and its inevitable results:

'Forty years has the genius of the French nation slept. Under the influence of the old government, all our faculties were benumbed. St. Domingo, indeed, was permitted to advance. Our islands prospered under that wretched policy, which *converted men into cattle*, and

[124] All quotations come from the facsimile of the second edition in the Louisiana Digital Library archives. Published by John Conrad and Co., Philadelphia and printed by M. Maxwell, 1803.

grasped at present benefits at the hazards of all the evils, by which they have since been overwhelmed…[i]t is time to awaken. Should this fatal sleep continue under the auspices of Bonaparte, fortune will have smiled in vain on that hero….the torrents of blood that are going to flow in that devoted colony'. (my emphasis, 17-18)

Brown's attention to the relationship between French policies of slavery, particularly its myopic focus on economic prosperity at the expense of humanity (turning "men into cattle") and the "torrents of blood," is best understood as an allegory for early American policies regarding slavery. Brown warns that American heroism, won through its courageous battle with its imperial mother England, will all amount to nothing should it continue to misread the signs of slave revolution in Saint-Domingue. The impending threat of slave violence in America would have been felt keenly on the heels of Gabriel Prosser's conspiracy to revolt in Virginia of that same year. In the *Philadelphia Gazette*, less than a month earlier, it reported that, "By a vessel arrived this day from St. Domingo—all the white French inhabitants are ordered off by the Blacks" (*Philadelphia Gazette*, November 26th, 1800).[125] The confluence of slave violence, yellow fever epidemics, French, Creole, and black émigrés from Saint-Domingue, trans-national radical movements, and the ongoing publicity of all of these in papers around the nation contribute a culture of fear that the Haitian Revolution came to symbolize during the 1790s up through the Civil War. What makes Brown's construction of Haiti interesting and original is the imaginative and figurative way in which it becomes entangled with America's self-conception through its stories. Levine's claim that instead of "stigmatizing Haiti…or invoking the specter of Saint-Domingue in the manner of Jeffersonians, Brown makes it clear in his magazine articles that the 'enemy' that should concern the United States in the early 1800s is France," seems to some extent to miss an

[125] In the *Gazette*, this quote is introduced as an "extract from a letter from Charleston, dated November 11th."

important point.[126] All revolutionary conspiracies, real and imagined, contributed to the fairly common perception that Americans were vulnerable—to forces from outside the nation, but of course, inside as well. The integrity of arbitrary geographic borders, in fact, was always porous, as it witnessed an increasing incursion of immigrants from all over the world, especially from the 1790s through the early twentieth century. But Brown's repeated use of the specter of Saint-Domingue slave uprising, through his fiction and the double-narrative voice in *An Address* (not unlike his epistolary romance novels), suggests anxiety over the possibility of slave violence in America which spanned the entirety of his writing and editorial career.

The imaginative dislocation of this specter, as is most obvious in the political pamphlet, illustrates Brown's awareness of a generalized anxiety throughout the states, one which spanned race, class, political party, and geography. Whether mobilized as United Irishmen, sleep-walking fanatics, ventriloquists, yellow fever, or monkeys, Brown's revision and circulation of what early Americans most feared, the specter of Saint-Domingue slave uprising, was a constitutive force in the burgeoning gothic literature of the nation. In the following chapter, I trace how Saint-Domingue comes together with actual accounts of slave conspiracies and rebellions in the early republic, and how such accounts begin to share features of a uniquely American gothicism already present in the work of Charles Brockden Brown.

[126] Levine's article details other of Brown's non-fiction writing to make a case for his increasing abolitionism and anti-French sentiments, such as in the pamphlet entitled *Monroe's Embassy*, where Brown writes, "I hate not the French. What I fear, is the French patriotism: and the ruin and confusion of my country I expect from their hands." *Literary Magazine and American Register* 2 (1804): 218.

Chapter III: Insurrection Narratives and the Rise of the Gothic: Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vesey, and Nat Turner

"A slave has no feeling beyond the present hour, no anticipation of what may come, no dejection at what may ensue: these privileges are reserved for the enlightened." William Beckford, Jr. *Remarks upon the Situation of the Negroes in Jamaica* (1788)[127]

I. Introduction

William Beckford's *Remarks* intended to sway opinion against emancipation in the West Indies introduces a nexus of contradictory ideas that would come to frame the way slave conspiracies were produced, circulated, and received in nineteenth-century America.[128] In it, he reveals the sort of circular logic used to justify chattel slavery by assuming the slave's inability to feel. Argued strongly across the Atlantic basin in the early stages of abolitionism and supported by scientific racism, blacks' inferior status evidenced by their inability to feel or plan was used often to explain away the separation of mother and infant, husband and wife, and other instances of inhumane treatment by white slave holders.[129] This evacuation of black subjectivity gets complicated by nineteenth-century paternalism in a gesture at once strangely intimate and horrifyingly delusional. The construction of the slave as a member of the family, both loving to and loved by his white owners, indeed depends upon the conviction that blacks were unable to properly care for themselves or each other and were simply better off in the care of white overseers. Like children, black slaves came to embody a

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[127] William Beckford, Jr., *Remarks upon the Situation of the Negroes in Jamaica.* London: T. and J. Egerton, Military Library, 1788. 84. That William Beckford wrote one of the earliest gothic tales, *Vathek* (1786), may simply be a fortuitous coincidence.

[128] Ed. And Introduction, Roger Lonsdale. *Vathek.* Oxford: Oxford UP, 1953. 3rd edition. Lonsdale claims that early reviews of the novel understood it as an "oriental tale" an imitation of an Arabian tale, "picturesque and sublime" but while twentieth century critics place the novel within a gothic tradition, he argues that the "potential melodrama and horror are almost invariably undermined and deflated by [his] detached, urbane, and often comic tone." *Introduction*, 1-xxxv.

[129] See David Brion Davis' *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (1975) and *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (1997) Saidiya V. Hartman.

reckless lack of forethought, in need of the firm discipline and authority of white parent-owners. The trope of family is a common feature of Anglo-Irish, as well as American, gothicism and as Brown's *Wieland* illustrates, violence features prominently in the family drama. The gothic narrative motif of the return of the repressed is made more threatening to the familial and national psyche when the child in the family is a black slave. American gothicism rehearses and appropriates the child-slave's racial, national, and genealogical loyalties in the shadows of the most unruly colonial children: the slaves of Saint-Domingue.[130]

The amount, different forms, and widely divergent sources of print devoted to the discovery and management of slave conspiracies, what I call "insurrection narratives," mediate these opposing characterizations of the black slave. Perhaps insurrection narratives like those of Prosser, Vesey, and Turner are most effective in their attempt to make meaning out of violence. The cultural work of these narratives is intimately connected to how violence is represented to its local, and ultimately national, readership. To effect this cultural work, insurrection narratives borrow and extend features of the gothic, ones that serve to heighten symbolic threats to the nation (Saint-Domingue) while suppressing any real interference (southern slave violence) with its stability, one which rests on a foundation of institutional slavery through the Civil War. In Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's book *Empire*, they write: "The Haitian Revolution was certainly the watershed in the modern history of slave revolt—and its specter circulated throughout the Americas in the early nineteenth century just as the specter of the October Revolution haunted European

[130] In Margot Gayle Backus' *The Gothic Family Romance: Heterosexuality, Child Sacrifice, and the Anglo-Irish Colonial Order*, she writes of Irish novels that "explore the position of children within a transgenerational familial and national system that appropriates them into a priori patterns of loyalty and animosity" (2).

capitalism over a century later" (123).[131] Certainly, the specter of Haiti is crucial to modern historiography of slave revolt; this chapter works first to highlight the origins of this historiography in the narratives of slave conspiracies and second, to suggest that the historiography of slave violence—yoked to the specter of Haiti—is inseparable from the origin of the gothic in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century America. What becomes clear by reading these narratives is the communal disavowal of institutional slavery as a systemic cause for instances of slave violence; rather, insurrection narratives serve to reinforce the domestic relationship between native-born slaves and their white owners while displacing violence and its many instantiations onto a distant and foreign agent: immigrating slaves from Saint-Domingue and their stories of insurrection.

Nineteenth-century black slaves and free-men relied upon at least three political models of freedom, providing powerful strands of discourse to propagate conspiracy: the language of the Constitution, Paine's *Rights of Man*; the mantra of the French Revolution—Liberty, Equality, Fraternity in the 1790s; and most importantly, the "Jacobinization" of Southern slaves, the contagion of violence and liberty which made its way across the Atlantic from Saint-Domingue.[132] This simultaneously liberatory and threatening discourse gets picked up in the mid-nineteenth century by abolitionists and literary figures such as Martin Delaney, William Wells Brown, and Frederick Douglass. For each, Haiti[133] is a model of black

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[131] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. *Empire*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 2000.

[132] See James Morton Smith's *Freedom's Fetters: The Alien and Sedition Laws and American Civil Liberties* ((1956) for Jacobinism and its relationship to the Alien and Sedition Laws; see also Richard J. Twomey's "Jacobins and Jeffersonians: Anglo-American Radical Ideology, 1790-1810" in *The Origins of Anglo-American Radicalism* (1984) 284-300

[133] A note on names: the aboriginal inhabitants—the Arawak Indians—called the island Hayti, "The Land of the Mountains." Between 1492-1697, when the Spanish governed the entire island, it was known as Hispaniola. From 1697-1804 the French ruled the western part of the island, and called it Saint Domingue, while the Spanish retained control of the eastern part known as Santo Domingo. When Jean-Jacques Dessalines expelled white settlers and soldiers in 1804, he claimed independence for the nation and its people, re-naming it Haiti, as it remains today.

resistance, both in method (violence) and outcome (freedom). The Haitian Revolution, unlike the American and French Revolutions, provided the perfect archetype for the overthrow of slavery, one based on race. In this way, black abolitionists as well as black slaves drew upon the national legacy promised by the rhetoric of revolutionary America—"All Men are Created Equal." James Sidbury has noted in his study of Gabriel Prosser's conspiracy that little was known of black slaves (but for their record as property tax),"unless they ran away, used violence against a White person, were caught stealing, or became subject to White observation for some other unusual reason" (20).[134] That is, violence against a White person offered recognition for the black slave, a dramatic declaration of individual and collective existence in an otherwise absent historical narrative for black Americans of African descent. Not only, then, do these bursts of violence expose potential weaknesses in the existing power structure by testing the authority of slave owners, they also contribute to black historiography. Slave violence worked to forge a collective black identity, but in equal measure, provided white pro-slavery radicals the opportunity to narrate and thus control this collectivity.[135] Thus, historian and critic John Ernest refers to black American writing in the antebellum period as "liberation historiography—a project not simply of historical recovery but of historical intervention, or what he calls "act[s] of moral imagination." [136]

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[134] In James Sidbury, *Ploughshares into Swords: Race, Rebellion, and Identity in Gabriel's Virginia, 1730-1810*. Cambridge, 1989.

[135] For an analysis on how slave rebellion worked to weaken the power structure, see Emilia Viotti da Costa's *Crown of Glory, Tears of Blood*; Haynes and Prakesh, "The Entanglement of Power and Resistance," 1-22; and James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*. My analysis of slave rebellion will look primarily at the geographic areas in which each rebellion or conspiracy took place. Thus, it is not until John Brown's raid of Harper's Ferry that I begin to look in more depth at how northern whites and blacks participated in the specter of Haiti.

[136] Ernest, John. "Liberation Historiography: African-American Historians before the Civil War." *American Literary History*. London: Oxford UP, 2002. 413-443

News of the rebellious slaves in Saint-Domingue reached the southern states of Virginia and South Carolina via ports and recently immigrated plantation owners and their chattel, directly from the French colony in the throes of bloody revolution. It is in this milieu that white writers identified "tropes of Frenchness" as linked to slave violence, conspiracy, and abolitionism more broadly. (Sidbury 138-40). In response to Gabriel Prosser's rebellion, the *Virginia Gazette* blames black insurrection on "the French principle of Liberty and Equality," and of contaminating "the minds of the negroes." And an anonymous gentleman asserts that the "dreadful conspiracy" originated with "some vile French Jacobins, aided and abetted by some of our own profligate and abandoned democrats."[137] Here, the foreign contagion of black Jacobins works in tandem with Jeffersonian republicanism, while the love of French doctrine was itself evidence of the national conflict over slavery.

Robert Levine argues convincingly for the connection between genre and nationalism, romance and what becomes a hallmark of American ideology—paranoia—in *Conspiracy and Romance: Studies in Brockden Brown, Cooper, Hawthorne, and Melville.* In it, Levine traces conspiratorial fears to Puritan New England's "'atmosphere of apocalyptic crisis," where plots of witchcraft and Satanism were believed to be behind the façade of everyday people's lives. By the eighteenth century, Enlightenment rationalism sought to understand the relationship between cause and effect to make sense of political phenomena, however, this simply replaced suspicion of divine plots with human plots. By the late eighteenth-century, American conspiratorial beliefs drew from radical Whiggism of England, and its "Country" mistrust of "Courtly" power. This would resonate in nineteenth-century Americans precisely because of divisions between northern urbanization and southern plantocracy. The

[137] The *Virginia Gazette*, September 16, 1800, refers to Prosser Ben testified in the trial of Solomon, a co-conspirator of Gabriel's. The gentleman's quote comes from the *Virginia Herald*, September 23, 1800.

fragile newness, Levine suggests, of the New Republic created anxiety over its survival through fear of British imperial conspiracy, Indian hostilities, and rogue frontiersmen. Responsible for more panic and hysteria than all else, slave insurrection embodied the horror of a nation still laboring to prove its own civilization against accusations of barbarity from the continent. Fearful of invasion from within (slave insurrection) and without (imperial takeover), American Republicans "taught of the ubiquity of corruption and conspiracy, and therefore demanded of its citizenry 'eternal vigilance'."[138]

The first-hand reports, newspapers, and myths surrounding slave violence in Saint-Domingue made an immediate impact in slave cultures in the southern states, in both black and white populations. But how and to what effect these tropes of Frenchness were used differed widely for each population, offering a path to freedom on the one hand, a specter of terror on the other. At the center of these opposing narratives is violence. What was told of each slave conspiracy—and how the violence was represented in these documents—tells us more about how white slave holders managed impending violence by the black population than it does about any actual (or imaginary) plan or individuals who participated. The strength of the insurrection narrative can be measured by its simultaneous ability both repress slave rebellion and to control which aspects of the story get published. The power of white leaders—and the consensus of the community, necessary to justify and maintain the status quo—depended upon their own narrative representation for control of both black and white populations. Thus, each conspiracy narrative functions to repress the spirit of rebellion amongst slaves, to ameliorate the horror of the white community, and to forge white

[138] Robert S. Levine, *Conspiracy and Romance: Studies in Brockden Brown, Cooper, Hawthorne, and Melville.* Cambridge and New York: Oxford UP, 1989. 6-11, 169-171. Levine quotes famous proslavery radical, Thomas Dew, from *Review of the Debate in the Virginia Legislature of 1831-1832.* Richmond, VA: White, 1832. 6. This pro-slavery tract was widely read, especially in the wake of Nat Turner's rebellion in 1831.

consensus by re-articulating the justification of existing ideology. It is in this way that the insurrection narratives written by leaders of the white community "tacitly attemp[t] to respond to the claims asserted by the conspirators" (Sidbury 120).

One strategy of representation we can trace through the developing genre of the insurrection narrative is found in how each rebel leader is featured. Little or no information is given about Gabriel Prosser's character, for example, or how his role as leader inspired others to risk their lives for the possibility of freedom in his 1800 conspiracy. Denmark Vesey, a free-black resident of Charleston who enjoyed some social, economic, and ultimately political success, was also the leader believed to be most intimately connected with Haiti, both in his origin and ultimate destination.[139] Du Bois writes that in 1822, the year of Vesey's thwarted plans for revolution, he would go "grimly to the scaffold, after one of the shrewdest Negro plots ever to frighten the South into hysterics."[140] What the insurrection narratives reveal is the deeply entrenched investment in constructing the leader of slave conspiracies as an invader, someone extra-national, and consequently, an anomaly rather than constitutive of slavery in the United States.

Slave insurrection challenged the ideological foundation of *The Constitution* and served to underscore the inadequate theoretical ground on which institutional slavery had stood. These challenges demanded narratives representative of community consensus, which made it imperative that conditions that gave rise to slave revolt in the first place were minimized, denied, or as in the case of my three case studies, deflected onto another space, historical

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[139] For an interesting but flawed scholarly treatment of Denmark Vesey's conspiracy and its aftermath, see *Designs against Charleston: The Trial Record of the Denmark Vesey Slave Conspiracy of 1822*. Edited and with an introduction by Edward A. Pearson. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999. I details its flaws later in the chapter.

[140] Du Bois, W.E.B. *John Brown*. Introduction and edited by David Roediger. New York: 2001, 45. Originally published in Philadelphia, G.W. Jacobs, 1909.

event, or imaginative representation. That is, the way slave insurrection was written *by and for* white readers vested everything in maintaining slavery as a benevolent institution and, consequently, slave insurrection as illogical. White politicians and militia were represented as more than able to disarm and immobilize any future rebellions. Most importantly, slave violence could inevitably be traced to foreign contagion—often a single blood-thirsty fanatic whose origin (real or imagined) was Saint-Domingue. While each of the three major revolutions at the end of the eighteenth century share features of violence and the overthrow of imperial domination, only the Haitian Revolution is bound up by racial anxiety and institutional slavery. That slave uprisings actually produced the first independent black nation in 1804 made it an ideal receptacle for southerner's and northerners' own terror over the possibility of slave violence on a mass scale.

These narratives capture in unique ways both local and global influences on abolitionist and pro-slavery discourses. But unlike later gothic literature, which employs strategies to suture over the anxiety produced by blackness, slavery, and the contamination of Haitian slave violence, insurrection narratives do not yet entirely hide their own processes. In particular, the negotiation of violence foreign to the nation and denial of native violence, black and white, remains visible in early forms of the American gothic. In all of the print generated out of these local conspiracies, we find similar tropes, symbols, and investments, which include the justification of the murder of many blacks, violent imagery to provoke wayward slaves against conspiracy and wayward owners to be vigilant in their authority over them, and a reassurance that the integrity of state power remains untouched and secure. What alters over the period between Gabriel Prosser's 1800 conspiracy and Nat Turner's 1831 conspiracy is the coherence and convention of insurrection narrative, so that by they time we read Thomas R. Gray's transcription of Nat Turner's jail-cell confession, standard

gothic conventions such as psychological terror, repression, religious mysticism, and the familial trope are all recognizable features. Added to these are those contributions to Gothicism uniquely American which the insurrection narratives of Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vesey, and Nat Turner reify: warning of the potentially dangerous future awaiting the nation and Saint-Domingue as its harbinger.

"Death," writes Walter Benjamin, "is the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell."[141] Like the "angel of history" who keeps her back to the future, instead stands horrified at the destruction of the past which threatens to overcome the present; the insurrection narrative denies the *role* of slave violence in abolishing slavery in America by obsessing over a past and distant slave revolution[142]. The specter of the Haitian Revolution, thus, haunts the present by narrating the past while denying its relationship to the future. It is the temporal structure of insurrection narratives which keeps these past and future revolutions in dialectic. The many documents—official and unofficial—which circulated around slave violence reveal the level of anxiety and fear white Americans experienced, especially as the uncanny resemblance between Haitian slave violence and Southern slave violence became undeniable.

During the nineteenth century, stories that relied upon scientific, historical, and otherwise secular discourse replaced sacred master-plots according to the dictates of Enlightenment Philosophy.[143] Enlightenment thought radically undermined the ideology of

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[141] In "The Storyteller." *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections.* Ed. and Introduction by Hannah Arendt. New York: Schocken Books, 1988. Originally published in 1955. 94

[142] In Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History." 257. Here, he famously indicts Enlightenment philosophy and its unrelenting belief in progress—in particular, its inability to recognize the violence which it depends upon for survival.

[143] In addition, this claim does not address the sacred narratives told by Vesey, Turner, and Brown. That these insurrection leaders employed divine reasoning to justify and guide their attempts to overthrow slavery attests to the competing, discursive tensions, and the differing modes of representation based on time, place, and race.

the "peculiar" institution which helps to explain why pro-slavery polemicists would resort to Biblical motivations and apocalyptic arguments in order to maintain slavery. And yet, the time-boundedness of narrative, what critic Peter Brooks has called "plot", resists easy connections between past, present, and future in Insurrection Literature. Brooks argues for an understanding of plot as "something in the nature of the logic of narrative discourse, the organizing dynamic of a specific mode of human understanding." This understanding, one that seeks an organization with a beginning, middle, and end is one of "boundedness, demarcation, the drawing of lines to mark off and order." As Aristotle wrote of tragedy, the plot must be "'of a length to be taken in by the memory'."[144] Each of these attempts to define and measure the significance of storytelling (Benjamin, Brooks, Artistotle) provide glimpses into how, why, and what form the "story" of slave insurrection had for its contemporary writers and readers. The need to delineate the space of slave violence in nineteenth-century America is never more clear than in these documents in their attempt to comfort readers by providing explanations which depend upon a plot (origins and conclusions) to remove the violence from American soil.

The impulse to provide a happy ending to each story of slave violence illustrates attempts to forestall what becomes increasingly possible during the nineteenth century: the overthrow of slavery. But as Brooks suggests, our impulse to narrate is a human one reaching as far back as *The Bible.* What makes insurrection literature unique, then, is not the quite human desire to make sense of confusing events by imposing a linear plot, but rather, its manipulation of a fearful readership to further the abuses of black Americans is most distinct. The story of Saint-Dominuguan slave uprising was so persistent that black

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[144] From Aristotle's *Poetics*, trans. Ingram Bywater, in *Introduction to Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973. P 678. Quoted in Peter Brooks's *Reading For The Plot: Designs and Intention in Narrative.* Cambridge and London: Harvard UP, 1984. 3-36

Americans, both free and enslaved, attached their own stories' origins, middles, and ends to it.

In this chapter, I read the official documents written in response to the slave conspiracies of Gabriel Prosser (1800), Denmark Vesey (1822), and Nat Turner (1831) as an integral part of the newly emerging American gothic tale. While little critical attention has been given to Gabriel Prosser, there has been fairly extensive focus on both Denmark Vesey and Nat Turner as symptomatic of the nation's horrific history of slavery. Recent scholarship has taken up the question of whether or not any conspiracy to insurrect even existed, in the case of Denmark Vesey, producing a lengthy and somewhat antagonistic exchange.[145] While I draw on some of these recent debates to reveal the persistence of our own cultural investments in the fiction of slave violence and Saint-Domingue—a fiction traceable to our current moment in historiography—I am not invested in proving whether or not Vesey's conspiracy existed. Indeed, the absence of any substantiated conspiracy only serves to emphasize my claim for understanding these narratives as constituting literary production and the development of a particular genre. Unlike the more or less arbitrary positioning of events in newspaper print, these narratives are novelistic and populated by "ghostly national imaginings."[146] Like Cobbett's popular writing and Brockden Brown's gothic novels in the late eighteenth century, the narratives of Gabriel Prosser, Denmark

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[145] See Michael P. Johnson's "Denmark Vesey and His Co-Conspirators" in the two-part Forum: "The Making of a Slave Conspiracy." *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Series, Volume IVIII, Number 8?, October 2001. 913-971. Johnson's controversial response to the existing scholarship of the Denmark Vesey Conspiracy began as a review essay of Douglas R. Egerton's *He Shall Go Out Free: The Lives of Denmark Vesey* (Madison, 1999); David Robertson's *Denmark Vesey* (New York, 1999); and Edward A. Pearson, Ed. *Designs Against Charleston: The Trial Record of the Denmark Vesey Slave Conspiracy of 1822* (Chapel Hill, 1999). In the course of researching the primary documents, Johnson came to the conclusion that "almost all historians have failed to exercise due caution in reading the testimony of witnesses recorded by the conspiracy court, thereby becoming unwitting co-conspirators with the court in the making of the Vesey conspiracy" (916). I examine the Forum, including Pearson and Egerton's response to Johnson's argument, in more detail in my treatment of Denmark Vesey.

[146] In Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. 9.

Vesey, and Nat Turner work to "first correct and control the interpretive contexts" in which each circulates.[147] Amidst the volcanic production of print at the turn of the century in America, representation becomes central for protecting against violence external—and internal—to the nation, one which came to be symbolized by the Saint-Dominguan slave.

II. Gabriel's Rebellion

In the summer of 1800, a group of slaves in and around Richmond, Virginia, began a conspiracy to overthrow slavery in the state by killing the leaders of the white community.[148] Their plan was to divide themselves into three columns, one of which would set fire to wooden residential and commercial buildings on the southeastern portion of the city, forcing the majority of whites to be preoccupied with extinguishing fires. Meanwhile, the other two columns would steal the guns in the state armory and take over the executive mansion, holding Governor James Monroe hostage until their demand for the abolition of slavery in the state was met. The insurgents' plan was to murder all of the white townspeople on return from fighting fires.

The insurrection was scheduled for August 30, 1800, but brutal rainstorms made the bridge leading into Richmond impassable—and fires unlikely—so Gabriel sent word that the uprising would be postponed until the following midnight. Two slaves from a local family, the Shepherd family, informed their master early on August 30th of the impending revolt.

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[147] See Stephen Howard Browne's "'This Unparalleled and Inhuman Massacre': The Gothic, The Sacred, and the Meaning of Nat Turner. In *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*. Vol. 3. 2000, 318. I turn to Browne's reading of Nat Turner much more in my own analysis of *The Confessions of Nat Turner*.

[148] Modern critical accounts of Gabriel's Rebellion include Gerald W. Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia.* New York: 1972; Douglas R. Egerton, *Gabriel's Rebellion: The Virginia Slave Conspiracies of 1800 and 1802.* Chapel Hill: 1993; and James Sidbury's *Ploughshares into Swords: Race, Rebellion, and Identity in Gabriel's Virginia, 1730-1810.* Cambridge: 1997. Summary of the insurrection—its discovery and repression—are drawn largely from Sidbury's account, 6-8.

Tom and Pharoah's story was convincing enough for their owner, Mosby Shepherd, to write a frantic letter warning Governor Monroe of the impending violence. The creation of a counter resistance, however, developed slowly, suggesting that first reports of Gabriel's rebellion were taken as inconsequential rumors.[149] By the Monday morning after Saturday's storm destroyed Gabriel's chance of getting over the bridge to Richmond, Monroe and his militia surrounded the capitol, began to round up suspects, and visited suspected meeting grounds to uncover more of the tale of Gabriel's planned insurrection. Two weeks after the insurrection was scheduled, on September 11th, 1800, Henrico County magistrates tried the first slave for conspiracy and insurrection.

Gabriel Prosser managed to elude authorities for over a month, but while on board a boat from Richmond to Norfolk, two enslaved ship workers turned him in, despite the efforts made by the ship's White captain to conceal him. Gabriel Prosser was tried and hanged on Friday, October 10. Almost seventy additional men were tried and forty-four convicted for the conspiracy to insurrection in Richmond; twenty-seven of these men were publicly hanged as a warning to future insurgents; a few were transported outside of the United States. (Sidbury 8)

We inherit the insurrection narrative of Gabriel Prosser from Governor James Monroe, who was Gabriel's intended target for kidnapping and execution by the conspirators. Like Denmark Vesey twenty-two years later, the "report" of Gabriel's Rebellion, as it is come to be known, exists as a governmental document; thus it carries not only an air of authority, but was likely interpreted by his contemporaries as an unbiased

[149] Precisely when Governor Monroe began to take the so-called rumors of insurrection seriously is somewhat contradictory, as Monroe's report to the General Assembly indicates that even after two of Mosby Shepherd's slave came forward with direct information, it was not until after the storm failed to completely abolish the insurgents' plans that Monroe and his militia focused their efforts. Sidbury's account implies that counter-resistance began very confidently and focused immediately after the informants' appeared.

transcription of events. His position of state authority as Governor of Virginia insures that the insurrection narrative would be received as political record in the public interest, not written to inspire passion, but rather to express measured concern and offer political strategy. As James Sidbury highlights in his analysis of the Monroe letter, the account of the insurrection was not seen as a story, but as objective proof that slave violence could be—*always would be*—contained by White power. He writes, "the process of repressing Gabriel's Conspiracy led to and was related to the process of representing the conspiracy, and when Monroe and others constructed stories of the insurrection scare, they continued their attempts to control the slaves' rebellious acts" (120). Governor James Monroe's letter to the General Assembly is a remarkable document, not only in the "absent cause" of insurrection—the specter of Haiti as revolution—but in its self-conscious construction of the state apparatus. The performance of benevolence by a state power, which also works to contain violent threats through its own acts of violence, begins with the Monroe letter recounting Gabriel's rebellion and gets replicated in later insurrection narratives. The confident performance of power is continuously undermined by terror over slave violence and the uncertainty about its origin, the depth of conspiracy, and loyalty of black slaves in the south. This pressure between confidence and uncertainty is constitutive of all insurrection literature, but perhaps most interestingly represented in the Monroe letter regarding Gabriel's Rebellion, because of its function as an internal governmental document, rather than court transcript, "confession", or what evolves into legend by the time of John Brown's execution for his raid on Harper's Ferry on October 16, 1859.[150] That Monroe's

[150] See John Stauffer's *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race* (2002) for a terrific discussion of how John Brown's insurrection gets mobilized throughout the Civil War. 236-281.

letter *does not* circulate in the public sphere grants it a sort of inventive status, one which illuminates the later narratives of Denmark Vesey and Nat Turner.

While Gabriel's Rebellion was not the earliest or first on record, it was the earliest to invoke slave uprisings in Saint-Domingue as a source of concern.[151] Monroe's letter to the General Assembly, at the turn of the century, reveals a somewhat early stage of thinking and talking about slave revolt. Rather than function to repress rebellion, as Sidbury argues, the document charts a path for future white leaders through a staging of how his administration managed the crisis. The attempt at a measured tone communicates to readers that white Richmond is never threatened in any real sense, that slave violence is relegated more to story-telling than to history, and finally, that white power remains intact. The document does not in itself repress rebellion, but more, shows white readers of Virginia—and the nation—that their dominance is unwavering. Despite Monroe's aim at pacifying his increasingly panicky constituency, the letter reveals uncertainty over the possible impact of unknown, though hinted at, provocateurs of slave conspiracy. The few moments in Monroe's document where anxiety and fear endanger the linear tale of white progress are those which connect Gabriel's insurrection to an "invisible" and alien force.

James Monroe, Governor of Virginia, writes in a letter to *The Speaker of the General Assembly*, on December 5, 1800, of the events surrounding Gabriel's Rebellion, which he deems his "duty to fully and accurately, in all its details submit to the General Assembly."[152]

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[151] See John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South.* New York: Oxford UP, 1979. 192-222; Paul Finkleman, Ed. *Rebellion, Resistance, and Runaways within the Slave South.* New York: Garland Publishing, 1989; and Eugene D. Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana UP, 1979. Two slave conspiracies of particular note that precede the narratives I focus on are a 1712 New York City attempt to escape slavery that resulted in the execution of 21 slaves, 1739 Stono Rebellion in South Carolina, where slaves killed roughly 30 whites.

[152] All quotes taken from James Monroe to *The Speakers of the General Assembly*, December 5, 1800, Virginia Executive Papers, Governor's Letter Book, 1800-1803, Library of Virginia, Richmond. See Appendix A for my own transcription of Monroe's letter.

The "duty" to tell the story of insurrection denies the overarching duty to protect the white power structure in Virginia through preservation of institutional slavery. Such narrative impulses reach back to an earlier genre, the captivity narrative[153]. Monroe does *not* transcribe events as told from a first-person insurgent, unlike the hypothetical confession found in *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, but rather veils any personal motive or bias behind the ceremonious impulse and responsibility bestowed upon him through state office. As a result, Monroe tacitly demands that his readership trust him, even though such trust requires the suspension of horror and disbelief. The tacit contract between Monroe's letter and a readership, one which seems to be imagined as a wider audience than that of the General Assembly, mimics the rhetorical gesture of the gothic romance. Brockden Brown's epistolary novels, which often begin by explaining their purpose to "comply with thy request," introduce the gothic tale by warning that it will test the reader's bounds of reason.[154] This gesture heightens the horror, paradoxically, by disavowing the horror. Its place within the letter and in all insurrection narratives makes sense, according to its interior logic, only as simple and objective fact. But this masks the justification of the white population's murder of free and enslaved blacks.

Monroe's letter emphasizes four important points, which get replicated in later insurrection narratives of Denmark Vesey and Nat Turner: the staging of white power, justified use of violence against blacks, an anthropological or sociological study of the inferior nature of blacks, and roots of insurrection foreign to American slaves. What later insurrection narratives add to this formula is a more stylized version of the story, and thus

[153] For an analysis of the genre see Richard Van Der Beets, "The Indian Captivity Narrative: An American Genre." Ph.D. dissertation, University of the Pacific: 1973. Analysis of the captivity narrative within other national narratives of violence can be found in Richard Slotkin's *Regenration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860*. Middletown, Con.: Wesleyan UP, 1973.

[154] Both *Edgar Huntly* and *Wieland* begin by asking the reader to suspend his/her disbelief and continue reading.

one more closed to multiple interpretations than its earlier instantiations, such as Monroe's letter. Here too we find features of melodrama embedded, though melodrama did not rise as a popular form until the second half of the nineteenth century.[155] Nevertheless, we can locate a template for melodramatic narratives of slave violence, especially in the promotion of American myths which include "signs of a foolishly simplistic world-well-lost, of a respectably simple age of American cultural childhood" (Cherry 5).[156] Unlike melodrama, however, these narratives are concerned with a mythic future, rather than a mythic past.

Monroe's letter sets out to explain to the General Assembly that a conspiracy to insurrection indeed existed, first discovered by Mr. Mosby Shepherd, a source trusted by Monroe. The immediate result was patrols in "every county" which culminated in Monroe's declaration that "the whole of the city was armed, its guard increased…to an hundred men." Monroe informs the committee that "the number of slaves in this city and its neighbourhood [sic] comprising those at work on the Publick [sic] building, the canal, and the Coalpits, was considerable," which establishes by sheer number the need for a powerfully staged defense by white men against the insurgents. Monroe seems aware that the possibility of slave insurrection has created widespread fear, and that this is a weakness in the power struggle between the rebellious black community, threatening not to consent to be governed, and the white community. As a result, Monroe gathered an enormous militia who "paraded daily" around the capitol, to "keep down the *spirit* of insurrection."[157] The letter

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[155] See Bruce McConechie's *American Theatre and Society: 1820-1870*. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1992; *Melodrama Unveiled: American Theater and Culture, 1800-1850*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1968; Jane Tompkins' *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860*. New York: Oxford UP, 1985. Tompkins sites early manifestations of melodrama as "sentiment".

[156] See James M. Cherry's dissertation, *Melodrama, Parody, and the Transformations of an American Genre.* UMI Dissertation Abstract, City University of New York, 2005. Introduction, 1-11. He argues that melodrama has the novel position as a genre that "exists in the popular imagination as a parody of itself" (iv)

[157] Monroe's *Letter*.

illustrates Monroe's keen attentiveness to the *imaginary* possibilities of insurrection, possibilities suggestive enough to threaten the stability of the community. He writes, "[t]he affect which this reassurance produced was easily and soon perceived. It was evident that the collection and display of this force inspired the citizens with confidence, and depressed the spirits of the slaves." Monroe's letter is remarkable in its recognition of how the performance of power enacts domination. It also provides the seed for later insurrection narratives in its representation of resolution. Twice Monroe speaks of the "spirit" of the slaves and their resistance, an abstraction which removes the ugliness of violence and catapults both motivation and fear away from the concrete conditions of slavery and racial oppression. It is in this government document, much more official than those of the later insurrection leaders, that slave violence is mystified, written about in the language of something other than the local, present, and visible.

Few hints of outside involvement in Gabriel's Rebellion are intimated by Monroe, but none more pointedly than those found in the following passage, where he attempts to make sense of the motivation for slave insurrection. Monroe indicates that he has been troubled by this question, claiming that it,

> [was] strange that the slaves should embark in this novel and unexampled enterprise of their own accord. Their treatment has been more favorable since the revolution, and as the importation was prohibited among the first acts of our independence, their number has not increased in proportion with that of the Whites. It was natural to suspect they were prompted to it by others who were invisible, but whose agency might be powerful.

He concludes this section by claiming that this "invisible" force made it "more difficult to estimate the extent of the combination and the consequent real importance of the crisis." Monroe constructs the native, black slave as incapable of planning or executing a slave revolt on his own, which dislocates violence from local policies and peoples to distant revolutions and peoples, such as black Americans' brothers-in-arms in Saint-Domingue. In addition,

Monroe's gesture participates in the developing ideology of domesticity, the virtues of which were crucial to maintain dominance over women, children, and black slaves. The belief that bonds of affection between master and slave should not be severed is evidence of pro-slavery advocates at their ideological limits as abolitionists became increasingly vocal and persuasive throughout the early nineteenth century. Joan Dayan suggests that the role of master/mistress was an "addictive pleasure" which relies on the premise that you "love most what you own…[and] own what you love." Dayan concludes that a "rare and special love between slave and master, based on the bond of property, becomes the medium by which perfect submission [is] equivalent to a pure (if perverse) love" (192-193)[158]. The paradoxical tension between the loving bonds of servitude and the vacuous, black body used to substantiate its misuse and abuse becomes especially visible in the discourse of slave conspiracies, rumors, and trial narratives. This domestic bliss became threatened by the perceived influence of at least 15,000 refugees from Saint Domingue seeking asylum in the United States throughout the 1790s. Akin to the yellow fever epidemic, slave violence from Saint-Domingue was largely understood as contagious, like Jefferson's single spark of revolutionary violence sweeping the globe.[159]

Another important strand of pro-slavery ideology is the belief in the slave's incapacity to perform intellectual work, such as the comprehension of space and time. What is striking about Beckford's claim that "[a] slave has no feeling beyond the present hour, no anticipation of what may come, no dejection at what may ensue: these privileges are reserved

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[158] See Chapter 4, "Gothic Americas" in *Haiti, History, and the Gods*. 187-259.

[159] In Ashli White's dissertation, *"A Flood of Impure Lava": Saint Dominguan Refugees in the United States, 1791-1820*, she suggests that by limiting our reading of the impact of the Haitian Revolution to questions of slavery and abolition we miss the much broader and far-reaching economic and political ramifications, which can be seen through the experiences of black, white, and mulatto refugees of Saint Domingue. 22. While I disagree with her dismissal of its impact on slavery and abolition, I agree with and extend White's analysis of the cultural responses to the revolution as seen through the experiences of and responses to a population: the refugees.

for the enlightened," is the impulse to fix the slave in a state of perpetual present: unable to either anticipate or dread the future, he becomes the ideal passive receptacle, without access to those "privileges" of enlightenment thinking, namely to plan for and defend against an uncertain future. The future, then, remains the realm of adulthood, inaccessible to women, children, Indians, or slaves. That the nation had only recently escaped from the yoke of its own parental, British ruler underscores its own ambivalent, anxious adulthood. The character of the black man, including his ability to conspire and orchestrate slave violence on a large scale, becomes animated by stories and images of black slaves committing horrific acts of violence against white masters in Saint-Domingue. It is this composite characterization of the American slave which drives so many discussions throughout the nineteenth century, both for and against emancipation[160].

Although Virginia prohibited the importation of new slaves into the region in 1778, the importation of slaves was not, in fact, prohibited in 1800 at the time of Monroe's letter, in all states, nor by *The Constitution*. The question of slavery as an institution was hardly mentioned at all, but serious debate over continuance of importing slaves from Africa did ensue resulting in the compromise which staved off abolition for close to a century. Georgia and South Carolina led the charge that the importation of slaves should remain the sole discretion of individual states, not to be regulated by a centralized government. Du Bois writes in his study of the slave trade that Georgia and South Carolina accused the "central states" of wanting to be the "vortex of everything," even matters of a "local nature."[161] To

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[160] See Stauffer's *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race* (2002), 125-126; see Sean X. Goudie's *Creole America: The West Indies and the Formation of Literature and Culture in the New Republic* (2006), and Maggie Montesino Sale's *The Slumbering Volcano: American Slave Ship Revolts and the Production of Rebellious Masculinity* (1997) for discussions on Prosser, Vesey, and Turner.

[161] W.E.B. Du Bois. *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade 1638-1870*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1969. First published in 1896. 55-57

this, they added that it was in the best interest of northern states to allow the importation of slaves, as it would "increase the commodities of which they will become the carriers." And finally, they argued that "if the Southern States were let alone, they [would] probably of themselves stop importations." Pro-slavery radicals argued that "the abolition of slavery seemed to be going on in the United States, and that the good sense of the southern states would probably by degrees complete it." As Du Bois points out, "economic forces were evoked to eke out moral motives: when the South had its full quota of slaves, like Virginia it too would abolish the trade; free labor was bound finally to drive out slave labor."

Monroe's benevolent claim of better treatment for Virginia's slaves finds echoes in George Mason's declaration that the slave trade was "infernal" during the debates in 1787, even going so far as to suggest that the "crime of slavery might yet bring the judgment of God on the nation" (DuBois 54-55). Monroe, like Mason, ignores the contradiction between abolishing the slave trade while upholding slavery. In 1800, the sixth congress met to debate a petition from a free African-American in Pennsylvania, arguing for the revision of the slave-trade laws, fugitive-slave act, and possible emancipation.[162] The reaction from Northern and Southern leaders alike was outrage and anxiety. Rutledge of South Carolina accused those filing petitions of exhibiting "too much of this new-fangled French philosophy of liberty and equality"; while Dana of Connecticut claimed that "it was likely to produce some of the dreadful scenes of St. Domingo."[163] Du Bois' analysis of how the Haitian Revolution made an immediate impact on legislation, both restricting the slave trade and shoring up pro-slavery arguments, suggests a clear relationship between *fear* of slave

[162] In the *Annals of Congress*, 6 Congress, Session I. .229

[163] Quote in Du Bois, *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade.* 82-83

insurrection in southern states and slave violence in Saint-Domingue. He cites South Carolina congressman, Rutledge, as issuing the following warning to his collegues:

> [W]e have lived to see these dreadful scenes. These horrid effects have succeeded what was conceived once to be trifling. Most important consequences may be the result, although gentlemen little apprehend it. But we know the situation of things there, although they do not, and knowing we deprecate it. There have been emissaries amongst us in the Southern States; they have begun their war upon us; an actual organization has commenced; we have had them meeting in their club rooms, and debating on that subject…Sir, I do believe that persons have been sent from France to feel the pulse of this country, to know whether these [ie. The Negroes] are the proper engines to make use of: these people have been talked to; they have been tampered with, and this is going on. (DuBois 83)

In Monroe's letter, Prosser's plan for insurrection is described as resulting from a "species of organization," a fact which clearly astounded Monroe, a sentiment echoed by Rutledge's surprise at discovering an "actual organization" of "emissaries" and southern black slaves. Like Rutledge, Monroe imagines foreign powers driving the "engine" of slave violence. Once again, black American slaves are not seen as agents. Prosser, like the leader of a white military organization, was given "the title of General," as was Nat Turner over thirty years later. The irony and condescension evident in Monroe's letter, Rutledge's speech, and many other public notices, narratives, and trial transcripts throughout the century, embody the paradox of slave violence: they simultaneously work to prove white domination, to stamp out future violence, and expose the terror building within the highest echelons of white power in the United States. Like many documents and narratives of the period, the inferiority of blacks is underscored and brought to bear on restrictions to their freedom, through the strengthening of the "peculiar institution."

Rutledge's speech was a direct response to the increased number of petitions to Congress to restrict the circum-Atlantic slave trade, abolish the recent Fugitive Slave Act, and ultimately, to emancipate American slaves. Petitions to Congress increased as the rebellious slaves in Saint-Domingue came closer to winning their freedom and governing

themselves.[164] The petitions combined with the specter of Haiti forced pro-slavery radicals like South Carolinian Rutledge to dig in their heels and fight for stricter prohibitions against foreign influences and stronger bonds of the institution. These debates took place during the 6th Congressional session in the spring of 1800 and resulted in the Act of 1800. The act prohibited "carrying on the Slave Trade from the United States to any foreign place or country," and took place only months prior to Gabriel's insurrection conspiracy. (DuBois 81) The debates highlight the degree to which fears over newly arriving slaves from St. Domingo shaped national, as well as state, policy. In both Monroe's hypothesis of "invisible…agency" and Congressman Rutledge's warning, passivity and happiness of American slaves is assumed. Were it not for these foreign elements—French doctrine of liberty and equality, and the power of violent insurgence to overcome bondage—institutional slavery would remain on its gradual (its "natural") course toward eventual abolition. While Monroe's letter to the General Assembly does not explicitly name newly arrived slaves from Saint-Domingue, nor the French doctrine which underpinned their revolution, he makes clear that this invisible force is foreign to Virginia, indeed, foreign to the United States. Congressman Rutledge, on the other hand, does not hesitate to indict the "horrid" events in St. Domingo; he also assumes a link between the oppressed and newly liberated slaves from the West Indies and those in the United States.

The first wave of French refugees—dislocated planters and their human property—arrived on Southern shores in 1793. By 1795, approximately twelve thousand slaves from Saint-Domingue resided in the United States, mixing with American slaves and spreading the news of violence and liberty from their West Indian country. While most southern states

[164] Congressman Waln of Pennsylvania presented a petition on behalf of free black men in Pennsylvania to revise slave trade laws, Alien and Sedition Laws, and to argue for comprehensive emancipation. See *Annals of Congress*, 6th Congressional Session, 1, 229. Cited in DuBois, 81.

immediately enacted laws prohibiting the entry of slaves from Saint-Domingue, Virginia failed to do so, which made the state a very popular resting ground for Haitian emigrants[165]. Almost two years after Gabriel's insurrection conspiracy, Governor Monroe was able to name the invisible agency: "The scenes which are acted in St. Domingo must produce an effect on all the people of colour in this and the States south of us, more especially our slaves, and it is our duty to be on our guard to prevent any mischief resulting from it.[166]" By 1803 when the eighth convention of American abolition societies met in Philadelphia, fear and repression replaced the elite liberalism of some northern, and most Virginian, citizens and legislators. The example provided by Touissant L'Oveurture, and (after Bonaparte murdered him) Dessalines and Christophe who renamed the French colony of Saint-Domingue Haiti in 1804, created radical pro-slavery arguments which served to entrench the institution and the racism driving it. As a result, President Thomas Jefferson "would do anything necessary to isolate or defeat that model of freedom."[167]

"It is a pity," exclaimed Charles Pettigrew, responding to the 1802 Easter plot, a slave insurrection that had been recently suppressed in Hallifax, Virginia, "slavery & Tyranny must go together."[168] Sancho, the leader of the conspiracy of 1802, who was on the periphery of Gabriel's Rebellion two years earlier, proved without a shadow of a doubt to

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165 Douglass R. Egerton, *Gabriel's Rebellion: The Virginia Slave Conspiracies of 1800 and 1802*. Chapel Hill: The University of Chapel Hill, 34-49.

166 James Monroe to John Cowper, March 17, 1802, *Executive Letter Book*, 1800-1803, Library of Virginia, Richmond.

167 Egerton, *Gabriel's Rebellion*. 169. For discussions on Jefferson's diplomacy toward Haiti, see Donald Hickey's, "America's Response to the Slave Revolt in Haiti, 1791-1806." In *Journal of the Early Republic* 2 (Winter 1982): 361-79; and Michael Zuckerman's, "The Color of Counterrevolution: Thomas Jefferson and the Rebellion in San Domingo," in *Languages of Revolution*, 83-107. 1989

168 Charles Pettigrew to Ebenezer Pettigrew, May 19, 1802, in Lemmon, ed, *Pettigrew Papers*, 1:285-86. For discussion of Sancho's Easter Plot in Hallifax, Virginia, see Egerton's *Gabriel's Rebellion*, 119-146. See also Sally E. Hadden's *Slave Patrols: Law and Violence in Virginia and the Carolinas*. 143-149.

Jefferson and Virginians that slave insurrection was producing a diseased body politic. In Virginia, legislation directly descending from Gabriel and Sancho was ushered into law, creating increased levels of fear, hostility, and more rampant abuses of black Americans. (Egerton 164-165) Those who had been arguing since the nation's inception for better fortification and expansion of chattel slavery found by 1802 an opportunity to capitalize on the culture of fear that came out of the earliest rebellions in Saint-Domingue in 1793. Between Gabriel's Rebellion and the 1802 Easter Plot, the specter of slave violence in the West Indies became not only associated with southern slave violence, but linked to the formal negotiations of slave violence. Any attempt to make sense of local slave violence went through a complex and contradictory process. On the one hand, responsibility for its origin became systematically displaced onto the example of Saint-Domingue; at the same time, however, whites also took credit for its repression as a means of reflecting a convincing performance of white domination, one that would resist any and all black violence in the future. These competing forces created a specter out of Saint-Dominguan slave uprisings for early nineteenth century culture. The imaginary relationship of the local crisis to a global site of imperial contestation with her colony is made possible through a widespread ideological investment in Pan-Africanism. This investment takes shape as affectively positive for black slaves or affectively negative for whites, as colonization movements of abolitionist discourse or violent contagion theories of pro-slavery advocates. Imperial practices and how these practices get represented have been a focus of postcolonial critical methodology. Understanding some of the ways in which these critical practices illuminate narrative will help to illustrate my argument about insurrection narratives, American Gothicism, and the specter of Haiti.

In Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (2000), he argues for an understanding of history which includes "the recognition that Europe's acquisition of the adjective 'modern' for itself is an integral part of the story of European imperialism within our global history; and second, the understanding that this equating of a certain version of Europe with 'modernity' is not the work of Europeans alone; third-world nationalism, as modernizing ideologies par excellence, have been equal partners in the process" (43). In order to claim this, however, Chakrabarty first establishes that historicism is a process that translates modernity (or capitalism) as something that has developed over time, a temporal plane constructed as "first in Europe, then elsewhere." He writes, "[h]istoricism thus posited historical time as a measure of the cultural distance (at least in institutional development) that was assumed to exist between the West and the non-West" (7). He concludes here by drawing on John Stuart Mill's "On Liberty" which argues that the pinnacle of civilization is self-rule, a position not quite suitable—"not yet"—for African or Asian colonial subjects. Chakrabarty explains:

> Some historical time of development and civilization (colonial rule and education, to be precise) had to elapse before they could be considered prepared for such a task. Mill's historicist argument thus consigned Indians, Africans, and other 'rude' nations to an imaginary waiting room of history. In doing so, it converted history itself into a version of this waiting room.…[t]hat was what historicist consciousness was: a recommendation to the colonized to wait. Acquiring a historical consciousness, acquiring the public spirit that Mill thought absolutely necessary for the art of self-government, was also to learn this art of waiting. This waiting was the realization of the 'not yet' of historicism. (*Provinicializing Europe* 8)

I quote Chakrabarty at some length here because the implications of his theory of historicism vis-à-vis liberal Enlightenment constructions of self-rule and those of other "rude" nations are rich for nineteenth-century American writers. As a nation ushered into modernity by Enlightenment principles through its own violent overthrow of imperialism, the grounds on which to dismiss other forms of violent disavowal are tricky, to say the least.

Americans were instantaneously set apart from other colonial struggles for freedom, like those taking shape across the Atlantic basin in the West Indies, Asia, and Africa, through *The Constitution* in its grasp of rational justification for self-rule, one that Mill draws upon for his own thinking. The struggle for autonomy by Saint-Dominguan slaves might have been easier to relegate temporally—despite occurring not long after America's own revolution—as well geographically, to "elsewhere" were it not for chattel slavery in the south. Slave conspiracies, whether imagined or actual, exposed deep ideological and political fissures in America. Slave insurrection narratives were forced to contend with some serious questions: How could white Americans historicize their own structures of domination and oppression and still preserve the integrity of their own Enlightenment premised on liberal humanism? Too, how could Americans make sense of the simultaneity of an "elsewhere" like Saint-Domingue?

My own investment is not to grant voice to slaves like Prosser and Vesey, though such critical endeavors are necessary and important interventions into historicism, as Chakrabarty describes it; but to understand that the insurrection narratives not only depended upon a silent subject, but tacitly link the black slave with subaltern subjectivity through the specter of Haiti. Not only, then, is it crucial to critically identify the kind of cultural work these insurrection narratives perform for nineteenth-century American readers, but on what grounds, images, and histories this cultural work is made possible. If we agree with Chakrabarty's belief that the "[w]riting of history must implicitly assume a plurality of times existing together, a disjuncture of the present with itself. Making visible this disjuncture is what subaltern pasts allow us to do" (109), then we must also recognize how reading the specter of Haiti in its various invocations and evocations becomes crucial for

making sense of American historicism as it is achieved through insurrection narratives, newspapers, and fiction.

The conclusion of the most engaged critical study of Gabriel's Rebellion seems completely at odds with Chakrabarty's theory and my own. Sidbury concludes his analysis of Governor Monroe's letter to The General Assembly by claiming that it "strikes a remarkably optimistic tone" which ultimately places the narrative neatly into a "comic story of reconciliation." He draws upon Hayden White's brief definition of the comic tale as allowing society to be "'represented as…purer, saner, and healthier as a result of the conflict among seemingly inalterably opposed elements'." Finally, he concludes: "The seemingly terrifying tale of slave rebellion culminate[s] with the triumph of White Virginians over the contradictory social forces at play in the world, turning the narrative of Gabriel's Conspiracy into an archetypal comic story of reconciliation.[169]" Monroe does indeed show White Virginians to be triumphant, more than able to stamp out slave revolt. But to see Monroe's letter as a comic tale is to perform a critical gesture not unlike that found in the letter itself. That is, reading it in a comic tradition denies the danger that Gabriel and his co-conspirators posed in the white community by rendering them invisible. That real danger existed for Monroe and his compatriots is, I would argue, undeniable: not only was there a short but significant pattern of slave revolts throughout the early Republic, but the larger-than-life example of revolting Saint-Dominguan slaves revealed the extent of the danger—the very real inevitability—that violence on an equal scale could be realized in the southern states.

Only by reading Monroe's letter in a gothic tradition, rather than a comic tradition, are the anxieties of black slave violence in its contemporary, that is to say, its circum-Atlantic

[169] Sidbury, *Ploughshares Into Swords*. 133-134. Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1973. 9

context, made visible. The traditional work of Gothicism negotiates ghosts that resist national recuperation—we could call it an honest national tale—through its preoccupation with violence, both literal and metaphoric. The specter of Haiti, as I have come to understand it throughout late eighteenth and nineteenth-century print in the United States, traverses generic boundaries from political pamphlets and newspaper editorials, to visual culture and literature, and most especially, the mixed-genre that we have come to recognize as the gothic.

Sidbury's reading overlooks what seeps through the cracks of the calm, powerful surface of the body politic—the fear which disrupts any seamless reconciliation of the insurrection narrative.[170] On the contrary, Monroe's anxiety over the "invisible…agency" responsible for Gabriel and his rebellion—and his repeated warnings to the Assembly, that "what has happened may occur again at any time with more fatal consequences unless suitable measures be taken to prevent it"—reveal grave uncertainty about the future of Virginia and the nation.[171] The tone of Monroe's insurrection narrative is *not* optimistic, but cautious, anxious, and threatens to unleash outright terror over the future stability of the nation. Rather than offer peaceful reconciliation, the insurrection narrative challenges readers to imagine an uncertain future, menaced by a host of terrifying unknowns, like those "invisible" slaves emigrating from Haiti by the shiploads, bringing their tales of violence and liberation.

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[170] In delineating what a subaltern history might look like, Chakrabarty explains that they would "have a split running through them" (93). This description is apt for insurrection narratives when read in their appropriate context—as signifying difference, rather than folding into a national, mythic narrative, a difference connected to Saint-Domingue.

[171] James Monroe to The Speakers of the General Assembly, December 5, 1800, *Virginia Executive Papers*, Governor's Letter Book, 1800-1803, Library of Virginia, Richmond.

The combination of fear, white power, and tension amongst abolitionists, pro-slavery radicals, and the increasingly distinct economies of the north and south coalesced in early nineteenth-century popular culture. Newspapers, songs, and literature provided the means of expressing a sense of foreboding that national ambivalence created by the opposing poles of democracy and slavery. On the heels of Sancho's failed insurrection, The *New England Palladium* printed the following poem:

> Remember ere too late,
> The tale of St. Domingo's fate.
> Tho Gabriel dies, a host remains
> Oppress'd with slavery's galling chain.
> And soon or late the hour will come
> Mark'd with Virginia's dreadful doom.[172]

Although a "host" resurfaced in smaller rebellions across the south, and still smaller though significant instances of individual or plantation resistance, Denmark Vesey's 1822 insurrection conspiracy solidified the specter of Haiti in the nation's psyche for the duration of the nineteenth century, producing a gothic tale horrifying, convincing, and resilient.

[172] Timothy Dwight, from "Triumph of Democracy." January 1, 1801. In *Amazing Grace: An Anthology of Poems About Slavery, 1660-1810*. Ed. James G. Basker. New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2002. 488

III. Denmark Vesey's Conspiracy

'O, my troubled spirit sighs
When I hear my people's cries!
Now, the blood which swells their veins
Flows debas'd by servile chains:
Desert now my country lies;
Moss grown now my altars rise:
O' my troubled spirit sighs
When I hear my people's cries!
Hurry, Orrah, o'er the flood,
Bathe thy sword in Christian blood!
Whidah will thy side protect;
Whidah will thy arm direct.'[173]

From "Ode. The Insurrection of the Slaves at St. Domingo," Anonymous, 1797

Perhaps no insurrection leader became more associated with the specter of Haiti than Denmark Vesey. It is, then, little surprise that no other slave conspiracy in American historiography has received as much attention and debate. This is in part due to the controversy in 1822 surrounding the legality of the trials. As the extant documentation of the Vesey conspiracy shows, both public and private dissent from the Court marked the days and months during which the conspiracy trials took place. Central to these dissenters' concerns was the suspension of *habeus corpus*, near exclusive reliance on the testimony of a few indicted witnesses, and the complete absence of Denmark Vesey's testimony, despite suggestions of his presence in *An Official Report*.[174] The Vesey archive is rich and deep, yielding two widely circulated narratives of the Denmark Vesey conspiracy in 1822 both of

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[173] Anonymous, "Ode. The Insurrection of the Slaves at St. Domingo." In *Amazing Grace: An Anthology of Poems About Slavery 1660-1810*. Ed. James G. Basker. New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2002. 438-9. The author notes that Whidah is "The God whom the Africans on the Coast of Guinea worship."

[174] See *An Official Report*, 89-90, which suggests that each of the accused was allowed to confront and cross-examine witnesses, make statements of their own, and be represented by counsel, though the court conducted all sessions behind closed doors making the above impossible to verify. Johnson says that "two of the witnesses against Vesey listed in the *Official Report*, William Paul and Joe LaRoche, testified on June 19 and June 20, before Vesey was even in custody….the manuscript discloses no evidence that Vesey himself was ever examined. Not a single word of testimony from Denmark Vesey exists in the manuscript….If a trial of Denmark Vesey was held, as the Official Report claims, no sign of it appears in the original manuscript of the court proceedings" (933-934). Johnson here is comparing Evidence B, the earliest documentation of the case, to everything that came after, including *An Account* and *An Official Report*.

which I treat here in some detail—*An Account* and *An Official Report*—newspaper articles, editorials, personal correspondence, separate and confidential witness testimony, and internal government documents.[175]

In addition to controversies found in the historical archive, the Vesey conspiracy has generated heated debate in contemporary scholarship. In October 2001, the *William and Mary Quarterly* published the first of a two-part Forum, "The Making of a Slave Conspiracy." Michael P. Johnson began the first part as a review of the recent Denmark Vesey scholarship, entitled "Denmark Vesey and His Co-Conspirators." Edward E. Pearson's study *Designs Against Charleston*, which this chapter initially relied upon for primary documentation of the Vesey File, has been the most scholarly treatment of Vesey to date insofar as it includes the trial transcript in full, rather than relying on *An Official Report* or *An Account*. But what Johnson illustrates in his provocative and lengthy essay is that scholarship on Vesey, including Pearson's, remains marred with transcription, editorial, and interpretive errors.[176]

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[175] I compare the two central narratives, entitled *An Account of The Late Intended Insurrection Among A Portion of the Blacks of this City*. Published by the Corporation of Charleston, 1st edition. The 2nd edition was published and circulated by the Mayor of Charleston, James Hamilton, and added "*Negro Plot*" to the top of the original title. The second narrative I look at in depth is Lionel H. Kennedy and Thomas Parker, Eds. *An Official Report of the Trials of Sundry Negroes, Charled with an Attempt to Raise an Insurrection in the State of South Carolina: Preceded by an Introduction and Narrative; and, in an Appendix, A Report of the Trials of Four White Persons on Indictments for Attempting to Excite the Slave to Insurrection.* (Charleston 1822). *An Official Report* was published after *An Account*, for reasons I explain in the chapter. Most of the research and archival documents I use are located in the South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina. Some research is from Duke University William Perkins Library and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. See relevant transcribed materials for Denmark Vesey in Appendix B. I am grateful to Shevaun Watson , whose research on Denmark Vesey put me on the right path.

[176] The *Official Report* has been taken by many historians, up until Pearson, as the primary document for trial testimony; however, it does not reflect an accurate or exact replica of the manuscript trial record. That record, submitted to the South Carolina legislature by Governor Thomas Bennett in November, 1822. Johnson points out that while Pearson claims to have used something he calls "Copy One" and "Copy Two," sequential manuscripts of the two different trials, in fact, no such documents exist as such. Rather, the two documents include one, brief narrative of the trial, called "Document B House of Representatives" and the other is labeled "Evidence Document B." Johnson argues that through comparison of the archive, it is clear that "Evidence B" predates the "Document B House" narrative, and therefore, "Evidence" (as it gets referred to) is the earliest and most faithful record of the trials. Pearson not only misdates and misreads what he replicates, but he in fact uses "House," rather than the more accurate "Evidence," as the original. Johnson's contention is that almost all interpretations of the Vesey Conspiracy have been based on this less accurate, secondary document in combination with the *Official Report* and *An Account*. Both are located in Records of the General Assembly, Nov. 28, 1822, Governors' Messages, 1328, South Carolina Department of Archives and History (SCDAH),

For historians like Johnson, Egerton, Pearson, and Robertson, these errors mark the difference between what happened and what didn't happen—in other words, the truth behind the Denmark Vesey Conspiracy trials. My interest is not in uncovering the truth of what happened to Denmark Vesey, but how his story came to symbolize the cultural crises of the early nineteenth-century and continues to reflect similar cultural investments in the early twenty-first century.[177] The kinds of errors that get replicated throughout scholarly treatments of the trials, errors that began in 1822 and have continued into our current critical moment, serve to reinforce my central claim: that the specter of Haiti functioned—indeed continues to function—as a driving force behind narratives of slave violence.

Before I turn to some of the more suggestive discrepancies in the Vesey documents and criticism, I want to provide some background most historians of Denmark Vesey and the conspiracy agree upon. Although the precise date and place of his birth is not known, Denmark Vesey was thought to be born around 1767 in the place where Captain Joseph Vesey purchased him—in either Saint Thomas or Saint Domingue—part of Denmark's West Indian empire.[178] Denmark Vesey's purchase made historical record when Charleston-based Vesey came over looking for slaves to buy and sell in 1781. Before returning to

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Columbia, South Carolina. Document B (called "House") is an 87-page manuscript in folder 2; "Evidence B" (called "Evidence") is a 113-page manuscript in folder 3. See *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Series, Volume IVIII, Number 8, October 2001. 921.

[177] In this way, I agree with Maggie Montesino Sale's description of her methodology, when she writes: "In examining the popular press coverage of these incidents, I do not intend to write a detailed history of events in the sense of creating narrative account of 'what happened.' Rather, I am interested in analyzing the discursive strategies employed by differently empowered groups as they produced, debated, and limited the possible range of meanings of the rebellions in the popular press" (64). See *The Slumbering Volcano: American Slave Ship Revolts and the Production of Rebellious Masculinity.*

[178] See Edward E. Pearson's *Designs Against Charleston: The Trial Record of the Denmark Vesey Slave Conspiracy of 1822.* Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999, pgs. Xxx-xxx. See also Document I, Letter from Stephen C. Crane to John Lofton, January 27, 1983 (Crane is a relative of Captain Vesey): "In the Fall of 1781, Captain Vesey traveled to St. Thomas and St. Domingue and purchased Denmark Vesey and 389 other slaves." In the Denmark Vesey File, Vesey Archives, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina. Also footnoted in John Lofton's *Insurrection in South Carolina*, 1964, p. 14.

Charleston, Vesey sold Denmark along with his cargo of slaves to planters in Le Cap, a city of about 50,000 people, in Saint-Domingue. Here, Denmark vanishes from record, but accounts of plantation life on the island suggest that he may have encountered building slave insurgence, brutal beatings, and Voodoo, a "syncretic form of religion" made up of the linguistic, pharmacological, and performative traditions of slaves. Voodoo was a "panoply of religious and magical beliefs for the island's slaves, [which became] a vital and creative expression of autonomy… offering psychological liberation from the terrors of the plantation order" (24-25).[179] Particularly during the establishment of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1816, many voodoo practices were believed to have found their way into the sermons and subsequent abolitionist rhetoric circulating around Charleston and other slave-holding communities.

Pearson suggests that shortly after Vesey was sold, however, his new owner diagnosed him as "'unsound, and subject to epileptic fits'" (27).[180] When Joseph Vesey returned to Saint-Domingue later that year, he re-possessed Denmark, not wanting to taint his name with the reputation of selling "damaged goods." After a period of sailing for many years—a time when, as Pearson argues, Denmark's radical political consciousness was probably fostered—Joseph Vesey returned to Charleston in 1790. Here, Denmark hired himself out as a carpenter, making $1.50 per day, and establishing a reputation as a man of

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[179] For a discussion of plantation life in Haiti, see Herbert Klein's *African Slavery in Latin America.* New York, 1986; Perkins, "Reminiscences of the Insurrection in St. Domingo," in Thomas Ott, *The Haitian Revolution*, 1789-1804. Knoxville, 1973. For a discussion of Voodoo, see Carolyn Fick's *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution From Below.* Knoxville, 1990. 40-55; C.L.R. James' *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution.* New York, 1938; Alfred Metraux, *Voodoo in Haiti.* New York, 1959. 25-57.

[180] James Jr. Hamilton*, An Account of the Late Intended Insurrection among a Portion of the Blacks in This City.* Charleston, 1822. p17 Pearson suggests that there is no medical record of Vesey's epilepsy, which may mean that he used "fits" as a form of resistance while in St. Domingo. Johnson suggests that Pearson, along with Egerton and Robertson, "by imputing legal knowledge, charades, and possibly even voodoo to fits the court termed epileptic….read the mentality of a wily fifty-five year old insurrectionist into the behavior of a fourteen-year old slave boy" (917).

"'great strength and activity" (38). This allowed him an uncommon degree of mobility and independence, so much so, that he bought a $6 lottery ticket in 1799. Denmark Vesey won $1,500 on November 9 of that year, affording him the opportunity to purchase his own freedom, which he did for $600—"much less than his real value"—on the last day of December, 1799.[181] Denmark Vesey is thought to have been thirty-three years old the year of his emancipation. He was reported to have seven wives, some simultaneously, and to have two sons, a daughter, a step-daughter, and two or more step-sons. He was also believed to have accumulated property worth $8,000 and possibly owned three houses. But these seem more appropriately described as part of the mythic fabric which makes an insurrectionary leader rather than a biographical account.[182] His house on Bull Street in Charleston, South Carolina was dedicated as a National Historic Landmark by the National Park Service in October, 1994, and remains a rental property, as it has always been.[183]

Because of the rich trail of court documents and newspapers notices surrounding the trial and execution of Denmark Vesey and others involved with the insurrection, we know much more of Vesey's character, plans, and methods of inspiration than that of Gabriel Prosser. Or as Johnson's essay points out, we certainly know more of what Vesey's contemporaries ascribed to Vesey's character, plans, and methods. For example, Bacchus Hammet, a prisoner of the insurrection, confessed that Vesey was not only a "man of great capacity," but also one who had a "bloody disposition." He was known to advocate killing indiscriminately, according to co-insurrectionary Smart Anderson. Anderson claimed that

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[181] Qtd. in Pearson, 39. *Manumission of Telemaque*, 31 December 1799, *Miscellaneous Records*, vol. KKK, 427.

[182] Thomas Wentworth Higginson's chapter from *Travelers and Outlaws: Episodes in American History* (1889) depends entirely on *An Official Report* for his quite similar account of Denmark Vesey. In particular, the section describing his hypothetical assets seems strikingly false.

[183] See *The Chronicle*, Charleston newspaper, May 30, 1981, article by William J. Kimball. This seems to contradict the idea of Vesey's multiple properties and assets.

Vesey's plans included the killing of women because, "[w]hat was the use of killing the louse and leaving the nit." The most damning evidence of Vesey's desire for "bloody violence," however, came during the examination of Joe, "a negro man belonging to Mr. La Roche," in *The Trial of Rolla*, who was one of the leading insurrection conspirators indicted and whose testimony against Rolla and Vesey was most likely given in an attempt to spare his own life.[184] Joe accused Rolla of telling slaves that there were "white men who have come from afar and who say that St. Domingo and Africa will assist us to get our liberty, if we will only make the motion first—that St. Domingo and Africa would come over and cut up the white people, if we only made the motion here first."[185] This was substantiated, Joe claimed, by Vesey who "told [him] that a large army from St. Domingo and Africa were coming to help us, and that we must not stand with our hands in the pocket" (187). There are a few significant pieces of this testimony that bear importantly on the ways in which we interpret it: first, Joe's testimony, like all of the testimony gathered and used as evidence in the execution of the slaves, was gathered in secrecy and made unavailable to the wider community of Charleston, the Governor of South Carolina, Thomas Bennett, and the accused themselves. Such disregard of Magna Charta and Habeas Corpus seriously

[184] Rolla Bennett, Batteau Bennet, Jesse Blacwood, Peter Poyas, and Denmark Vesey were the first five slaves to be executed as a result of the Vesey Conspiracy. Johnson puts forward a compelling argument that despite the "illusion of trials" that exists in *An Official Report*, that these first five executions took place immediately and without any trial, based exclusively on their believed guilt by the Magistrates of the Charleston Court—a ad-hoc court—and on secret testimony and confessions not only hidden from the accused themselves, but also from those who questioned the propriety of procedure, such as Governor Thomas Bennett and Supreme Court Justice William Johnson Jr. I will examine these two dissenting voices in more detail. See Johnson, 934.

[185] In "Transcript of the Denmark Vesey Conspiracy Trial," 20 June 1822. *Designs Against Charleston: The Trial Record of the Denmark Vesey Slave Conspiracy of 1822*. Ed. and Introduction, Edward A. Pearson. Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999. Pearson notes that the reference to "white men" was likely an allusion to the four white people who had some vague knowledge of the plot. "Tried, convicted of a misdemeanor for inciting slaves to rebel in October 1822, and imprisoned briefly, the men apparently told some enslaved men, in the words of one of them, 'that there ought to be an indiscriminate destruction of all the whites, men, women, and children.' In his defense, William Allen claimed that both drunkeness and a desire to obtain a reward for uncovering a conspiracy had led to his actions as 'the freedom of the blacks was an object of little importance to him.'" 169 It also hints that Saint-Domingue originated with white men during an entrapment scheme and not Vesey or his co-conspirators.

undermines the truth value of the court's findings; too, it produced two instances of dissent from the Court—one public and one private—that shed light on the make up of the Court, its findings, and how the specter of Saint-Domingue overwrites the entire process.

The first instance of dissent came in an article in the *Charleston Courier*, just two days after the court launched its first June sessions. One of South Carolina's most respected justices and member of United State Supreme Court since 1804 William Johnson, Jr., published "Melancholy Effect of Popular Excitement," describing a slave insurrection scare in Georgia that occurred in 1810. In it, he details how rumors produced the idea of a conspiracy, which led to the capture of a "'single poor half-witted negro….crossing a field on his way home, without instrument of war'" (qtd. in "Vesey and His Co-Conspirators" 935-936).[186] In order to appease the community that no danger existed, a "hastily convened Court of Magistrates and Freeholders"—one quite similar to the Court that convicted and hung Denmark Vesey—convicted the slave and sentenced him to public hanging. Johnson concluded his brief foray into the history of another slave insurrection scare by suggesting that it "'contained an useful moral, and might check the causes of agitation which were then operating upon the public mind'" in Charleston.[187] But rather than provide a check to balance the passions and swift actions of the Vesey Court, Johnson's public criticism produced an outcry. Historian Johnson has suggested that the result of Justice Johnson's article was the Court's rather increased attempt to justify its original action (the public hangings of the first five slaves) by sending many more slaves to the gallows and

[186] "Melancholy Effect of Popular Excitement," *Charleston Courier*, June 21, 1822.

[187] William Johnson, *To the Public of Charleston* (Charleston, July 1822), 5. Cited in Johnson, 936. This piece was meant to justify his article printed in June against the criticism he received from the Court.

almost as many out of the United States permanently.[188] In the public announcements of the impending executions, the Court published the following rejoinder to what they claimed amounted to slander on the part of Justice Johnson: to the Court, Johnson insinuated that they were "'capable of committing perjury and murder'" that he "'implied'" that he "'possessed sounder judgment, deeper penetration, and firmer nerves, than the rest of his fellow citizens'." The notice concluded that its own "'purity of motives'" remained intact and any suspicion otherwise reflected a lack of integrity on the part of the accuser. (Johnson 936)

The second instance of dissent from the Court not only reveals the chronology of events with more clarity—something often obfuscated by the narratives released by the Court itself, namely *An Official Report*—but also suggests that the Vesey Conspiracy became for early nineteenth-century South Carolinians what the Salem Witch Trials were for seventeenth-century Massachusetts residents. Governor Thomas Bennett had been a member of the State legislature in South Carolina since 1804, was Speaker of the House from 1814-1817, and was just finishing out his gubernatorial term in the summer of 1822. There are at least two mitigating circumstances surrounding Bennett's private machinations to alter what he considered to be a most unethical course of the Court: first, three of the first five slaves executed belonged to Bennett—Rolla, Ned, and Batteau all were hung along with Denmark Vesey on July 2, 1822, just eleven days after the initial proceedings began. Second, state power had only recently been transferred from Charleston to Columbia and therefore any collaboration between the two regions remained extremely divisive. That Bennett did not whole-heartedly accept the proceedings of the City of Charleston, then, makes sense in

[188] By the end of the Vesey trials, 34 slaves and 1 free black man were executed, 68 were transported outside the nation, and several others were in a state of limbo, possibly to be transported outside the United States.

the political and historical framework of early nineteenth-century South Carolina. Nevertheless, Bennett's skillful critique of the Court turns the tale of conspiracy on its head, suggesting a bit more than a last ditch effort to grasp power or a personal connection to those accused.[189]

In Bennett's *Letter to the General Assembly*, he begins by establishing that, as Governor, he took the appropriate steps necessary for repressing the rumored insurrection by establishing a strong militia, after which the "utmost tranquility prevailed." But attentive to the effects of these rumors, as "the public mind was excessively agitated" he did not immediately issue a warning to "give alarms in cases of an extraordinary character." Since the City Council of Charleston was keenly interested in the outcome, Bennett suggested to them that a "Court of Investigation" be established, an ad-hoc body of white freeman of some stature in the city that would precede the official trial. However, Bennett notes that it in just a few days, the city created a "Court of alternate jurisdiction…in every sense…an usurpation of authority, and a violation of the Law." Bennett continues to harshly criticize the actions of the court: collecting secret testimony, relying on this testimony clearly given by accused slaves "for the purpose of self-preservation" thus rendering it unreliable, and for not allowing the accused to face this damning testimony. Most of all, Bennett implies that the "illegal" actions of the vigilante court forced more executions and deportations than were necessary.

What makes Bennett's letter unique is the way in which he rhetorically constructs the insurrection more generally and Denmark Vesey in particular. His letter describes a conspiracy plan that was unorganized and therefore never a threat; depicts Vesey himself, rather than a figure of great persuasive, rhetorical powers, as an unremarkable character

[189] For a full transcription of Governor Thomas Bennett's *Letter to the Assembly*, see Appendix B.

unlikely to have led tens much less thousands of men; and finally, argues that slaves traditionally show loyalty to their owners, rather than each other, proven by the few who stepped forward to reveal the plan in the first place. Bennett concludes that "successful rebellions cannot occur in this state" and that "the liberal and enlightened humanity of our Fellow-Citizens produce many attachments, which operate as tricks on the spirit of insubordination." In this single document, Bennett both undermines the potential threat of Vesey's insurrection (indeed, all insurrections) and reverses the characterization of both white and black figures. As we read in *An Official Report*, Denmark Vesey is constructed as a trickster figure, one whose powers fall outside enlightenment philosophy and thus is thought incapable of containment. Bennett, on the other hand, ascribes white "fellow-citizens" as the tricksters, who seduce slaves into being loyal to them over and above their fellow-enslaved brothers. In this way, Bennett deflates the potency of Vesey as mythic figure of vast rhetorical power; it is the sole example of such a strategy throughout the corpus of the Vesey archive and because of its limited audience, never had any purchase, or any power to subdue the building hysteria in early nineteenth-century Charleston.

Conspicuous in Bennett's letter is the absence of any reference to Saint-Domingue. This absence is especially noticeable when compared with all the other documents then widely in circulation about the Denmark Vesey conspiracy. In these, St. Domingo, Saint-Domingue, and Hayti are used liberally to establish the degree and implications of the violence nearly unleashed in Charleston. I want to argue, in conjunction with Johnson's analysis of the archival documents, that the role of Saint-Domingue is perhaps more entangled with the rapidity and scope of the Vesey trials than has previously been understood. That is, if we agree with Johnson and Bennett's assessment that the "court of alternate jurisdiction" acted preemptively by executing Vesey and his four-slave compatriots

on July 2, in the sense that their death was an attempt not only to purge community fear but to establish without a doubt—in the absence of any material evidence—that the Vesey Conspiracy did exist, then Saint-Domingue and Vesey's hypothetical ties to it provides evidence, motive, and warning of future slave revolts *simultaneously*. That is, it functions as a specter—a powerful symbol working on multiple levels to instantiate white ideologies while it proves its continued ability to dominate over its black population.

The trial record of Denmark Vesey, and the ninety-one other free and enslaved black men who stood trial in the summer of 1822, provides interesting glimpses into how the white community perceived the character, plans, and faith of the "blood-thirsty" man accused of planning the insurrection. Despite this, Denmark Vesey's voice is never present in any of the accounts.[190] The absence of Vesey's own words (he is always only interpolated through witnesses) suggests the extent to which white slavery advocates believed in the notion of a Black Jeremiah.[191] Kennedy, Parker, and Hamilton all depict Vesey as a messianic anti-hero even though his aim suggests a far more inclusive and revolutionary agenda, more expressive of the Pan-Africanist movement that was only just beginning in the early to mid-nineteenth century.[192] The cultural work of Denmark Vesey's insurrection

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[190] The two published narratives of Denmark Vesey's conspiracy are J. Hamilton, *An Account of The Late Intended Insurrection Among A Portion Of The Blacks Of This City*. Published by The Corporation of Charleston. 1822. Lionel H. Kennedy & Thomas Parker. *An Official Report Of The Trials of Sundry Negroes, Charged with an Attempt to Raise An Insurrection In The State of South Carolina: Preceded By An Introduction and Narrative*. Charleston, 1822. Hamilton's narrative was published on August 16, and was a first-hand report of the discovery process, the initial phase of hearing about the insurrection, arrests, and narrative of the trial. *An Official Report* was prepared and presented by request from the Court that tried Vesey and his conspirators, and so bears a more authoritative seal. Both narratives alter the sequence of events and eliminate the voice of Vesey entirely.

[191] For discussions of how the "black Jeremiah" functions in abolitionist discourse during the nineteenth-century, see Robert S. Levine. *Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass And the Politics of Representative Identity*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997. 13, 34-37. Eric J. Sundquist. *To Wake The Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993. 81-83, 592-623.

[192] While the messianic savior of the entire race logically leads to Pan-Africanism, the implications for white southern pro-slavery radicals are very different. First, both power and threat are located in a single, male, black identity in narratives that write the insurrection leader as a Jeremiah. This also serves to mystify and therefore

narrative depends upon widespread conviction that he is a dangerous leader. This conviction contributes to the literary obsession with the figure of the Black Jeremiah in literature throughout the century.

An Official Report, written by the presiding Justices, was an offensive corrective to the more obviously vengeful *An Account*. The rest of the chapter will examine these narratives in their order of publication. I will focus particularly on the degree to which Denmark Vesey's connection to Saint-Domingue fuels the growing investigation, fear, and counter-revolutionary rhetoric. The existence of more than one narrative about Vesey's conspiracy, written and circulated within weeks of its discovery, emphasizes the ever-increasing and crucial purpose of narrative to assuage public terror over its conviction that Saint-Domingue was infecting local slaves with revolutionary zeal.

The first narrative is *An Account of the Late Intended Insurrection Among A Portion of the Blacks of This City*, written by James Hamilton, Jr., who "served as an officer during the War of 1812 before purchasing several cotton plantations on the Sea Islands." In addition to some administrative duties, James Hamilton was charged with municipal safety in Charleston: he commanded a small force of about one hundred men aided by a number of constables from each ward to protect Charleston from disorder. Hamilton was the first person on the scene of the investigation into the insurrection conspiracy. He entered national politics in the wake of the Vesey trials, completing the term of low country politician William Lowndes in the U.S. House of Representatives, and became governor of the state in 1830.

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debunk ultimate faith in its image as it goes radically against enlightenment progress which guides the century. Pan-Africanism, as both Frederick Douglass and Martin Delany prove in the 1840s-1850s, is a political philosophy which includes economic equality for all black people on either side of the Atlantic.

Hamilton was the first to construct a highly complex narrative of the conspiracy, so complicated in fact, that Governor Bennett nearly laughed at its implausibility. In part because of his access to the white community as a free-black man, and his role as Class Leader in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Vesey's oratorical skills were likely powerful; certainly he had the capacity to reach a wide audience of free and enslaved blacks in Charleston. It was guessed that he used this audience to challenge pro-slavery doctrine. The AME Church—established in 1816 by disaffected black Charlestonians who recently had found their funds and freedom restricted by their parent affiliation with the white-dominated Methodist Church—became "the most important institution" for the black community. Established in spite of protest and accusations by white ministers of "much corruption," the AME led by free-black Morris Brown withstood white resistance and provided the much needed spiritual and political uplift for Charleston's black community.[193] Locals claimed that the church attracted "noisy" and "frantic" worshipers and publicly worried that Brown's northern religious education (he was ordained in Philadelphia) amounted to a thinly veiled abolitionist agenda. But Brown kept the doors open to all, including white pastors, which made shutting it down based on suspicious activity far more difficult to achieve.[194] (Pearson 49)

The narratives attribute the seeds of resistance to Vesey at the AME, along with Jack Gullah's voodoo practices at Buckley's Farm.[195] But the solidarity portrayed in *An Account*

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[193] Anthony Senter, a newly arrived white minister, made this accusation, claiming that funds had been used to purchase the freedom of slaves through the church.

[194] Pearson notes that the association between the northern states, particularly Pennsylvania, with abolitionist organizations like the Quakers and the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery in Philadelphia, made the AME and its leader highly suspicious and prompted a lot of anger in Charleston's white community.

[195] In Pearson, 166-282.

and An Official Report shared by Vesey and his co-conspirators was not primarily religious, though theological explanations are a prominent feature of Nat Turner's narrative. Instead, collectivity seems based on political, social, and ultimately, transnational concerns.[196] Vesey's experience in Le Cap just prior to and at the onset of slave uprisings in Saint-Domingue and his sea travels where he learned to read, write, and speak other languages set him apart from other insurrectionary leaders. Denmark Vesey's was constructed as a powerful, articulate, and intelligent man capable of galvanizing hundreds (it was estimated at 900) to violently overthrow a deeply defended institution. But his connections with Haiti, real and imaginary, proved the most threatening element of his conspiracy, and helps to explain the narrative gaps in both written accounts consumed by a frightened public.

In Hamilton's *An Account*, the preface shares qualities with Thomas Gray's preface of *The Confession of Nat Turner*. The preface goes as follows:

To The Public.
In complying with the objects of the above Resolution, I have not been insensible to the difficulties and embarrassments necessarily incident to the subject, as to what it might be politic either to publish or suppress. With the advice, however, of the Corporation, I have deemed a full publication of the prominent circumstances of the late commotion, as the most judicious course, as suppression might assume the appearance of timidity or injustice. Whilst such a statement is due to the character of our community, and justification of our laws, there can be no harm in the salutary inculcation of one lesson, among a *certain* portion of our population, that there is nothing they are bad enough to do, that we are not powerful enough to punish.

(J. Hamilton, Jr. Intendent, Charleston, Aug. 16, 1822)

[196] Hamilton first questioned two slaves, Mingo Harth and Peter Poyas, both of whom were released from questioning within hours without obtaining any information about the insurrection. Peter Poyas was second in charge of organization to Denmark Vesey. According to Kennedy and Parker's *Official Report*, both men acted calm and cool, treating the accusation lightly and behaving utterly innocent. This loyalty to the cause, to each other, and to Denmark Vesey was displayed by most throughout the inquiry, trial and execution phases. Only George Wilson, a key witness and slave who had first-hand knowledge of the plan, purchased his freedom from the State for turning in the conspirators. Much later, he committed suicide.

Just as in Nat Turner's narrative, Hamilton (like Gray) describes the black population as a "certain" portion, marking off blacks, both free and enslaved, from the White Americans. Hamilton is keenly aware of how "politic" this text is. He acknowledges the fear that Vesey's plot fostered in the white community, but refuses to participate in fear himself. He writes of "our community" and "our character" to mark another means by which he can distinguish between the good and the bad, the white and the black, the slaveholder and the slave. The motivation for this emphasis is unveiled when he claims that no slave conspiracy or act of violence could change the balance of power in the community: blacks will forever remain enslaved and whites will forever be their masters. He concludes by saying that all acts of resistance would face punishment and that his weapon of choice is his pen. So, *An Account* is intended to punish the black community of Charleston. It is an interesting strategy against the threat of slave violence against real people in the community. As a symbolic gesture of power, Hamilton, like Monroe before him, stages authority. That he chooses to do so in writing rather than in person suggests an a priori reception of rhetoric to influence history. Vesey's insurrection never saw the light of day but he remains one of the most controversial and enduring images of slave violence in American historiography.

Narratives of slave violence depended upon a separation of good and bad slaves in order to mark slave violence as an exceptional instance of antagonism in a largely benevolent system. Hamilton's discussion of Mr. Paul's slave William introduces the good slave. Here, upon first hearing of the plan and being invited to participate in it, William claims: "I was so much astonished and horror struck at this information, that it was a moment before I could collect myself sufficiently to tell him I would have nothing to do with this business, that I was satisfied with my condition, that I was grateful to my master for his kindness and wished no change." He continues, "I did not however remain easy under the burden of such a

secret, and consequently determined to consult a free man of colour named—and to ask his advice. On conferring with this friend, he urged me with great earnestness to communicate what had passed between Mr. Paul's man and myself to my master" (Hamilton 5). The footnote given by Hamilton reads: "It would be a libel on the liberality and gratitude of this community to suppose that this man can be overlooked among those who are rewarded for their fidelity and principle" (Hamilton 5).

This introduction into the trial is crucial in establishing the credibility of the first witness, whose role is as informant *and* as evidence of the fidelity between slave-master. William's dual-position underpins the justification for the execution of Denmark Vesey and his co-conspirators. These initial words set up the drama that not only unfolds for the trial record of Vesey, but also serves as a template for Gray's "transcription" of Nat Turner's *Confessions*. Hamilton's William borrows the language of gothic: he was struck with "horror", the very fact of which aligns William with the white plantation owner.[197] Readers of this text, then, can sympathize and position themselves with William, alleviating the burden of racism and slavery by having white readers sympathize with a black slave. Moreover, it implies authenticity. In effect, William speaks for the black slave in the language of the white slaveholder. Satisfied with his position and grateful for his master, William is made to participate in familiar tropes used in the service of maintaining slavery. By creating a black slave who relies upon the "kindness" of his loving master, white readers can feel safe in the knowledge that this "certain" population is being taken care of properly.

The footnote Hamilton gives us regarding the free-unnamed black man who counsels William to reveal Vesey's plot to his master is the most self-conscious and

[197] See Jane Tompkins *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860* (1985) for a discussion of melodrama as "sentiment."

provocative piece in this initial section. Its sole purpose, it would seem, is to point out just how benevolent, just, and free of racism Hamilton and the white community of Charleston are. Hamilton's accusation of "libel" if the community were not to recognize the man's honesty suggests that the racist-free attitude is only a ruse, a very conscious performance to avoid accusations of cruel and unusual punishment of Vesey and his co-conspirators. The very declaration of fairness under these conditions suggests an impulse for revenge just beneath the surface of Hamilton's narrative. This performance of decency demands the creation of a mock-slave and stands in stark contrast to Denmark Vesey himself—also a free man of color, prominent and successful in the community prior to his execution.

We get no transcription of Mr. Paul's William—only assurance that "After a vast deal of equivocation, he admitted all these facts, but when the rest of his conversation was put home to him, he flatly denied it, but with so many obvious indications of guilt, that it was deemed unwise to discharge him"(Hamilton 5). The reader here is not allowed to decide whether or not his language covers over complicity with the insurrection, only Hamilton controls how the facts of the conspiracy can be interpreted, which is to say he is guilty of conspiracy to insurrect by having tacit knowledge about it.

Hamilton lists several accounts of how Saint-Domingue was to play a role in the insurrection in Charleston. One slave relates: "…in the event of their rising, they would not be without help, as the people from San Domingo and Africa would assist them in obtaining their liberty, if they only made the motion first" (Hamilton 9). The excessive attention to Vesey's time spent in Haiti, to his connections to the formerly occupied San Domingo as it becomes its own nation state, indicates the need for these southern white plantation holders to remove the threat from their own national boundaries.

The stipulation that each slave should not be tried without his "master" or "attorney" as representation is another strange feature of Hamilton's narrative. Since the master functioned as the primary recipient of his slave's violence, he hardly seems an unbiased or helpful person for representation. The conflation of master with attorney—their interchangeability—explicitly defines the master as the word of law. There is no one outside the slave economy that can justly analyze the conditions that lead to conspiracy—the slave is simply at the mercy of the one person he was plotting to resist, rebel against, or violently kill.

Of Peter Poyas, second in leadership to Vesey and a slave, Hamilton writes that "[he] spoke with great confidence of the succors which were expected from San Domingo" (Hamilton 14). We are told very little about how this leads to Denmark Vesey—much of the evidence, discussion, and confessions by the slaves say almost nothing directly about Denmark Vesey. We find no indication from what little verbatim transcripts are given from any of the slaves' confessions, that Denmark Vesey was the leader of the plot. The first time we hear directly of Vesey is in the footnote to Peter Poya's confession and ultimate verdict of guilty. Hamilton writes, "After the execution of Peter, his guilt, in the most flagrant degree became most abundantly established; affording, in every particular, the strongest corroboration of the testimony by which he had been convicted. It was apparent that he was the most efficient of all the ringleaders, and one who possessed the largest share of the confidence of Denmark Vesey, who was, in every sense of the term, the father of the plot" (Hamilton 14). This is illustrated by the introduction of Vesey's trial, prepared in conjunction with his Counsel, G.W.Cross, Esq. Hamilton writes, "It is perhaps somewhat remarkable, that at this stage of the investigation, although several witnesses had been examined, the atrocious guilt of Denmark Vesey had not been as yet fully unfolded. From the testimony of most of the witnesses, however, the Court found enough, and amply

enough, to warrant the sentence of death, which on the 28th, they passed on him" (14). The rush to conclusion apparent in the juxtaposition between these two sentences is alarming, nevertheless, proves sufficient "evidence" for the contemporary readers of Charleston in the throes of fear.

Vesey is characterized in predictable ways, as "animating and encouraging the timid, by the hopes of prospects of success; removing the scruples of the religious, by the grossest prostitution and perversion of the sacred oracles, and inflaming and confirming the resolute, by all the savage fascinations of blood and booty" (16). In the footnote Hamilton provides biographic information about Vesey meant to feed the popular image of him as a mythic, revolutionary hero. Hamilton writes that "among his colour he was always looked up to with awe and respect. His temper was," however, "impetuous and domineering in the extreme, qualifying him for the despotic rule, of which he was ambitious. All his passions were ungovernable and, savage; and to his numerous wives and children, he displayed the haughty and capricious cruelty of an Easter Bashaw" (17). That he was "ungovernable" contradicts all suggestion, supported by Hamilton himself, that Vesey was a loyal and hardworking slave for more than twenty years.[198] These brief characterizations in the footnote, along with the striking absence of Denmark Vesey's own words, are the only shreds of proof given to readers, which together create a fantastically one-sided portrait of what must have been an incredibly complex and intelligent man. Unlike *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, we are not given the opportunity to form our own opinion about the mythical Vesey; we only know that his passion and persuasive abilities were enough to motivate at least 135 men to rebel against

[198] Also important to note here that Hamilton gives his brief biography, to which he prefaces: "The following anecdote will show how near he was to the chance of being distinguished in the bloody events of San Domingo" (17). Hamilton also makes a point of further emphasizing the difference between black and white population. He indicates the change in his name from Telemaque to Denmark by the following: "which appellation has since, by gradual corruption, among the negroes, been changed to Denmark, or sometimes Telmak" (17).

slavery and wield violence against their masters. But most obvious is the repetition of and the obsession with Vesey's connection to Saint-Domingue in this document. The specter of Haiti looms large; it develops into a literary genre itself—that of the proto-gothic literary tale—embodying, critiquing, and offering the nightmarish version of the nation. Hamilton concludes his brief section on what has been for the other slaves convicted of crimes against the 1740 Act, a relatively detailed account of how their guilt was proven by offering only a hypothetical glimpse—a gesture as flimsy but powerful as the specter of Haiti.[199] Hamilton writes, "It was, perhaps, alone, in Denmark Vesey's power, to have given us the true character, extent and importance of the correspondence, it was afterwards proved, was carried on with certain persons in San Domingo" (19).

The obsession with Saint-Domingue in *An Account of the Late Insurrection* is evidenced on almost every page of the document. The role that the distant free, black, nation-state plays in the plot to violently overthrow the white community of Charleston in 1822 is relentlessly underscored by Hamilton, and the Justices presiding over the trials of the six most prominent leaders.[200] For example, the way in which many of the "witnesses" circumscribe the plot seems to always lead back to the West Indian slave revolt. Monday

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199 We read in the Appendix the defining clause of the Act of 1740 which Vesey and his co-conspirators violated. It reads: Every Slave who shall raise, or attempt to raise an Insurrection, in this Province, or shall endeavour to delude or entice any Slave to runaway and leave the Province, every such Slave and Slaves, and his and their accomplices, aiders and abetters, shall, on conviction thereof, as aforesaid, suffer death. Provided always, that it shall and may be lawful, to and for the Justices who shall pronounce sentence against such Slaves, by and with the advice and consent of the Freeholders as aforesaid, if several Slaves shall receive sentence at one time, to mitigate and alter the sentence of any slave, other than such as shall be convicted of homicide of a white person, who they shall think may deserve mercy, and may inflict such corporal punishment (other than death) on any such Slave, as they in discretion shall think fit, any thing herein contained to the contrary thereof, in any wise notwithstanding. Provided, that one or more of the said Slaves who shall be convicted of the crimes or offence aforesaid, where several are concerned, shall be executed for example, to deter others from offending in the like kind.

200 The "ringleaders" who were executed all on July 2nd, were Denmark Vesey, Peter Poyas, Ned Bennett, Rolla, Batteau and Jesse. These six were considered the most dangerous by virtue of their leadership role in persuading, organizing, and making passionate arguments for the violent rebellion against their white slaveholders in Charleston.

Gell, whose role in the investigation becomes crucial for identifying the scope of Denmark Vesey's influence over rural and urban slaves alike, is described as a learned man, able to read and write with "great and equal facility." Hamilton suggests that Gell is responsible for taking notes at all meetings which took place to discuss and plan the conspiracy, and claims that it is at these meetings that "he wrote more than one letter to San Domingo, for succors" (21). Vesey is accused of loyalty to Saint-Domingue, as one would be to their homeland, making him answerable on the grounds of treason. When attempting to designate a motive for Vesey's plot, one which Hamilton argues was in creation for four years prior to its discovery, Hamilton suggests that "the belief is altogether justifiable, that his end would have been answered, if, after laying our city in ashes, and moistening its cinders with blood, he could have embarked with a part of the pillage of our banks for San Domingo" (29). The mere mention of Saint-Domingue in conjunction with Vesey's intention to murder white women, children, and masters is enough to permanently fix the specter in the national imagination surrounding race and slavery. Like Hamilton's claim that "[t]he extent of the evidence adduced, therefore, against each individual, may be inferred with accuracy, by observing the punishment awarded him," the specter of Haiti occupies the space of material evidence that slavery is reasonable, if not lawful. The black slave, Vesey proves, is prone to savage and bloody violence. Religion too becomes poisonous in the hands of the black community. Gullah Jack, "born a conjurer and a physician" is described by Hamilton to reinforce in readers the connections between pagan "arts" or Voodoo, violence against whites, and cultish behavior. Hamilton describes Gullah Jack as a "[n]ecromancer, aware of his influence with his own countrymen, who are distinguished both for their credulous superstition and clannish sympathies" (24). Gullah, whose name we are told is meant to

signify his Angola home, is described as an animal: imprisonment for him amounts to being "caught" but not "tamed."

Hamilton justifies his own narrative omissions as an attempt to keep his readership properly entertained. He writes that the details of some testimony are put in the Appendix, rather than the body of the text, because to include them would "result in a repetition fatiguing and uninteresting to the reader" (22). Here, his narrative takes recognizable literary form and becomes part of a genre to inculcate fear. Hamilton concludes his narrative by drawing on divine and secular law, both of which serve humanity (not savage brutality) and in the process serve as evidence of the moral, just, and unbiased nature of Hamilton and the Justices who indicted and executed Denmark Vesey and his co-conspirators. He argues that the great and noble "character of his country"—that of his readers—has been untainted by "vindictive or barbarous modes of punishment;" the law "without even one violation" has ruled the day; and "justice has been blended with an enlightened humanity" to those who planned "murder, rapine and conflagration" of the white community. Hamilton's dramatic conclusion offers up his white community to the gods: "With little to fear, and nothing to reproach ourselves we may, without shrinking, submit our conduct to the award of posterity, and ourselves to the protection of the Supreme Ruler of Event" (30). Despite Hamilton's divine inspiration, his self-referential and self-conscious exoneration raises some doubt about the behavior of the Court and lends credibility to Governor Bennett's critique of the overall proceedings.

In 1822, the eleven-year slave uprising in Saint-Domingue provided images of black violence not too far removed geographically or temporally; as I hope my discussion of early nineteenth-century American slave revolts illustrates, they reflect on America's anxiety over blackness and slavery. Pearson follows the lead of nineteenth-century interpreters in

claiming that Haiti played a "central symbolic role" in Vesey's mind, in addition to the minds of his contemporaries, as he tried to expand the scope of his intended insurrection. Pearson claims that Vesey begins correspondence with Haitian leader Jen-Pierre Boyer hoping to receive additional forces to aid the Charleston rebels.[201] Vesey, Pearson argues, gave a letter to one of his insurgents who then brought it to Jen-Pierre Boyer. According to Monday Gell's confession, Vesey told several rebels that "St. Domingo…would come over and cut up the white people" (117). And to Pearson, Vesey resisted requests from the American Colonization Society to emigrate to Lybia, interpreting it as many free-black men did during the nineteenth century as a gradual return to bondage. Instead, Pearson, like most scholars before and since, believes that Vesey had every intention of traveling to Haiti after his insurrection was complete. This suggests that the specter of Haiti remains an entrenched part of the national mythology, so much so, that historiography of the period continues its circulation. Unfortunately, because of Denmark Vesey's silence, we cannot know if this is the case. Later in the nineteenth century, however, the specter of Haiti becomes a feature of abolitionist discourse (in the writing of Frederick Douglass and William Wells Brown, for example) as it held out the only possibility of a home free from white domination for people of African descent. As Haitian secretary general Joseph Inginac claimed for Haiti in 1818, "no white man…shall ever set foot [in Haiti] under the title of master or planter."[202]

The nineteenth-century newspaper *The Genius of Universal Emancipation*, during celebrations of the nineteenth anniversary of Haitian independence, claimed that "'nothing is

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[201] Pearson offers that Vesey may have read and remembered Dassalines' Declaration of Independence of the French Colony of Santo Domingo, in which he declared that "the God of Free men bids us stretch out towards them [the enslaved] our conquering arms." *Designs*, 117. The extent to which Pearson is willing to base his argument on hypothetical scenarios is troubling, but interesting insofar as he seems to have adopted uncritically the specter of Haiti for his own moment.

[202] Pearson cites the *Niles Register*, 1818. 118

more formidable than a people oppressed and driven to despair'" (Pearson 119). This same paper published a poem a few months earlier, which fits white perceptions of a Haitian homeland for the conspirators:

> To Hayti let us go, and then
> We may enjoy our natural rights,
> For negroes there are viewed as men
> And there thought as good as white.

Vesey is bound up with images of Haiti as they come to frame and symbolize narratives of freedom and possibility outside of a slave economy. He may or may not have understood the free-black nation state as a possibility for aid in the conspiracy to insurrect in Charleston, or as a final destination. But it is evident by reading the insurrection narratives of Denmark Vesey that the white community, responsible for framing and circulating his story, was acutely aware of how the specter of Haiti would strike a horrific chord.

Antislavery politics played an important function in the origin and strategy behind Vesey's plot for insurrection, according the narratives of Denmark Vesey's conspiracy. He was believed to have followed with interest debates surrounding slavery, particularly after the Missouri Compromise of 1820. One rebel, Jack Purcell, confessed that Vesey possessed considerable knowledge about legislation and abolitionist tracts, both of which he used to fuel commitment and passion for the insurrection. He collected "every pamphlet he could lay his hands on that had any connection with slavery" and often quoted from these to build momentum in his movement against the institution.[203] Vesey argued for his followers that

[203] Pearson suggests that although we have no record of Vesey's library, some of his abolitionist materials may have included *The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable* (1816) by Presbyterian minister from Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, George Bourne; John Kendrick's *Horrors of Slavery* (1817); Benjamin Lundy's *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, a newspaper that began publication in January 1821; and the *Niles Register,* widely available in the

the Missouri Compromise, rather than posing the debates about westward expansion of slavery, offered a clear path to freedom for blacks. Drawing upon the wishes of the enslaved for freedom, Vesey re-imagined the Missouri Compromise as an Emancipation Proclamation, thus fueling the frustration of slaves by suggesting that their white owners simply denied their already legally granted freedom. Vesey's ability to manipulate his audience points to his most powerful skill: his ability to read. Pearson suggests that "[l]iterate insurgents played an important practical role in the plot. Not only could these rebels read articles and speeches on key political issues to their confederates, but Vesey and Gell also appear to have compiled lists of recruits and composed letters requesting help from Haiti" (120).

If Hamilton's account of Vesey's insurrection borrows from religious sermons, counter-revolutionary tracts on slavery, and gothic tales, Kennedy and *Parker's Official Report* reads more like an amendment to *The Constitution*. Adorning itself in the legal accoutrements of a courtroom, the much more widely circulated "report" is openly didactic in its attempt to justify the death and expulsion of a large portion of Charleston's black community. That the insurrection leader was a free-black resident rather than a slave unhinged white readers, increasing the fear that infiltration of those foreign, former slaves from Saint-Domingue would undo the controlled veneer of the community. The "official" courtroom transcripts, framed by a comprehensible and compelling narrative by those in charge of the proceedings, Justices Kennedy and Parker, provided the suture crucial to sealing over what had become a horrific tear in their local fabric.

South, which reprinted Senator Rufus King's speeches to Congress urging that slavery be excluded from Missouri" (Designs 119-120).

Lionel H. Kennedy and Thomas Parker acted as the two presiding Justices for the Court during the trials of Denmark Vesey and his conspirators. In late October of 1822, they submitted to the public, "at the request of the court" what was meant as a corrective to James Hamilton's account of the insurrection. They offered a narrative "more authentic" as "the evidence [was] in most cases preserved, as it was originally taken, without even changing the phraseology, which was generally in the very words used by the witnesses."[204] That "most cases" are used, and the exact wording is "generally" provided allows room for the framers of Vesey's narrative to shape and mediate the horror according to their conception of what is valuable and appropriate for the public. Their intent, as they establish in the Introduction to the narrative and trial record, is "not to suppress any part of it." It is, in fact, advanced in order to comply with an act of Congress: "for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of maps, charts, and books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned;" and the supplementary act, "extending the benefits thereof to the arts of designing, engraving, and etching historical and other prints."[205] Not only, then, do Parker and Kennedy submit their narrative in acquiescence with the Court, publication of the insurrection narrative, they imply, is demanded by federal law for the protection of the country. The drama and weight of what is to follow is circumscribed for readers before they are oriented through basic plot summary, introducing Vesey's insurrection narrative beyond state boundaries, into a national and international framework. Moreover, readers are to understand the insurrection narrative as a vehicle for learning, just as the execution of blacks works "to deter others from offending in the like

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[204] *An Official Report of the Trials of Sundry Negroes, Charged with an Attempt to Raise An Insurrection in the State of South Carolina: Preceded by an Introduction and Narrative; And in an Appendix, A Report of the Trials of Four White Persons, on Indictments for Attempting to Excite The Slave To Insurrection.* Charleston: 1822. Introduction, 1.

[205] These Acts are written in a preface by James Dudley, District Clerk, of the District of South Carolina.

kind." The cultural work of *An Official Report*, thus raises the narrative beyond the immediate and local claims on the Denmark Vesey conspiracy into a symbol which relies upon events outside the nation for its potency.

The introduction to the narrative establishes the rules and regulations of the trials and is given to provide assurance to the reader that undue fear and revenge did not dictate the trials of "sundry negroes." The motivation to try and judge the insurrection conspirators is summed up in the Oath taken by each Justice and freeholder (of which there are five): to "put in execution on this trial an act, entitled, *An act for the better ordering and governing of Negroes and other slaves in this province*" (Pearson 120). Kennedy and Parker take great pains to illustrate fairness in sentencing by listing the fundamental rights of the defendants, which include the right to be represented by their owner or counsel and to receive one day's notice before their trial. In addition, according to Justice Kennedy and Parker, a death sentence could only occur in the presence of corroborated testimony and the accused were given the opportunity in such cases to cross-examine these witnesses. Two important procedures remain conspicuously absent in their preamble: first, 96% of all testimony in the trials was given in secret, and second, the Court used three "superstar" witnesses who provided 75% of testimony and three other men provided 20%--all were arrested slaves with their lives on the line.[206] Slaves in Antigua, 1736, and in New York, 1741, were tried for conspiracy to insurrection entirely in private, a precedent provided as evidence of the objectivity and formality of legal proceedings against Denmark Vesey, et al. That these slave insurrections

[206] Johnson highlights the coercive nature of the testimony (943-947); Governor Bennett questions the Court's tactics in his letter to the Attorney General, see Appendix C for their correspondence. The superstar witnesses were Monday Gell, Perault Strohecker, and Charles Drayton; the other three men were John Enslow, Billy Bulkley, and Harry Haig. According to "Evidence" 5 of these 6 star witnesses did not have trials and were set free as a result of their testimony to the Court. This contradicts the conclusions made by Pearson regarding the verdicts of the witnesses, which he bases on *An Official Report*, p311. This is one of the "5,000-6,000 discrepancies between the Evidence manuscript and the published transcript in *Designs against Charleston* (Johnson 925).

occurred almost a century earlier is not factored into the debate whatsoever. Finally, we are told that "the Court was likewise anxious to prevent the public mind from being excited by the exaggerated representations of the testimony which might have been circulated by auditors under the influence of misapprehension or terror" (Pearson 4).

It is unclear from these passages what "terror" in the "excited" minds of the public could lead to, as neither Kennedy, Parker, nor Hamilton actually suggest any possible outcome of exaggerated responses. On the contrary, no response seems to exceed the bounds of punishment the Court is willing and ready to give out. Edmund Burke in his philosophy on terror writes, "no passion so effectually robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as fear…[I]ndeed terror is in all cases whatsoever, either more openly or latently the ruling principle of the sublime."[207] Kennedy and Parker, anticipating the fear of the public and additional attempts at insurrection by slaves and free-black men, claim to write their insurrection narrative to subdue an otherwise hysterical public. The perfect vehicle for this ambitious agenda is "terror fiction" or what we would later call, Gothic. Although Kennedy and Parker endeavor to create an "authentic" document—thousands of discrepancies between the original trial transcript, Evidence B, suggest a far more imaginative form. As I argued in Chapter I, the rise in "terror fiction" in 1790s Britain "fed off the revolutionary anxieties of its readership," in response to the French Revolution.[208] Slave insurrection found an ideal and corresponding mode of representation. Indeed,

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[207] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful.* Ed. James T. Boulton. Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press: 1968. 557-58. First published 1757. Burke defines the sublime as that "state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror." Thus, the power of the sublime is not due to its being produced by its object(s) of horror, it anticipates our rational thought and "hurries us on by an irresistible force." 57

[208] Robert Miles, "The 1790s: the effulgence of Gothic." In *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction.* Ed. Jerrold E. Hogle. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002. 41-62 This article deals primarily with novels in Britain, but my argument not only corresponds to genre theory of the gothic, whose origins are in 18th century Britain, but also hinges on its relationship to revolution. For discussion of the gothic in poetry and drama, see Miles' *Gothic Writing, 1750-1820.* London: Routledge, 1993.

drawing upon the template created by Governor James Monroe twenty-two years earlier, Kennedy and Parker (along with Hamilton) usher Insurrection Literature into the nineteenth-century American imagination in their attempts to mediate the fear created by Denmark Vesey's violent plans. It is through slave insurrection and its representation as "terror fiction"—*the Gothic*—that the specter of Haiti and its revolutionary slaves becomes an indelible feature of American discourse, fictional, popular, and political. Because the specter of Haiti is *in itself* an expression of what it aims to suppress—slave violence—it drives the debates over slavery for the rest of the nineteenth-century.

What counts as "authentic" by Parker and Kennedy extends to those participants in the trial. While most of the accused are represented by the owners they intended to kill, Justices Parker and Kennedy allow for "the evidence of any free Indian or slave without oath" to submit their testimony. The Justices proceed to a racial breakdown of who can and cannot be tried, and who can and cannot be witnesses: "free Negroes, Indians, mulatto, or mestizo" all are given explicit permission to testify against any free or enslaved African American. This peculiar litany of participants hints at a tension in the legal system that becomes more evident as the century progresses. How can black subjectivity be denied and yet depended upon as legal evidence in slave conspiracy trials? Thomas Jefferson attempted to define black subjectivity in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*. He vacillates between admission that the inferior race has "never yet been viewed by us as subjects of natural history," and confident estimations of their value based on his observations of what lies within the black body. Jefferson describes African Americans as

> …more ardent after their female; but love seems with them more an eager desire, than a tender delicate mixture of sentiment and sensation. Their griefs are transient. Those numberless afflictions, which render it doubtful whether heaven has given life to us in mercy

or in wrath, are less felt, and sooner forgotten with them. In general, their existence appears to participate more of sensation than reflection.[209]

He concludes that "the blacks…are inferior in mind and body to the whites." Drawing on prevailing scientific rationale like phrenology and Enlightenment philosophy, nineteenth-century lawmakers and political philosophers like Jefferson assume blacks lack interiority. They are all "sensation" but this surface feeling is fleeting; moreover, there is no trace in memory, heart, or intellect of the black subject. Jefferson's characterization of blacks highlights Denmark Vesey's ability to dupe white and black (free and enslaved) people across South Carolina as uncanny. Vesey, in effect, becomes a trickster, a black Confidence Man, but unlike the northern white Confidence Man's play with surfaces to reinvent the self, Vesey's reinvention is read as dangerous and evil. The Confidence Man relies on the ideological play between surface and interior, deception in the service of liberty of the subject and creative capitalist virtue. In other words, not only is the deception valued as quintessentially American in a white subject, its success depends upon the dialectic between surface and interior, or what is seen and invisible. When these attributes are applied to black subjectivity, interiority is evacuated and those like Denmark Vesey are thought not only un-American in their values, but literally from outside national boundaries. Haiti, thus, becomes the ideal receptacle: it masks the black subject psychologically, historically, and geographically.[210]

Slave insurrection intervenes in the prevailing beliefs regarding black subjectivity. The ability to deceive one's owner, and an entire community, is duplicitous, and therefore dependent upon thoughts and feelings beneath the surface of the docile and loyal slave. The

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[209] Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*. New York: Harper and Row, 1964. 133-138

[210] Benjamin Reiss. *The Showman and the Slave: Race, Death, and Memory in Barnum's America.* (2001) See also black minstrel as subversive Confidence Man in Eric Lott's *Love and Theft*. New York: Oxford UP, 1992.

absence of pain (or "sentiment") attributed to black subjects allows southerners, like Jefferson, to justify the abuses slaves are forced to live with, like loss of freedom, dignity, and often, life. Nothing contradicts this conception more than the insurrection leader and his conspiracy. Not only is the image of a happy, loyal slave shattered, the concept of the black body as empty vessel is thrown into chaos. As an intrinsic part of pro-slavery ideology, the "benevolent" slave becomes inseparable from its opposite: the barbarous, violent slave. Without any legal or psychological interior, notions of black subjectivity exist solely as tropes for a white audience.

The *Official Report* grants far more intelligence, power, and agency to Denmark Vesey than Hamilton's *Account* does. Parker and Kennedy write that Vesey's plans were in the making for "several years before he disclosed his intentions to anyone." His "hidden transcript" remained a secret for long enough to shock and terrify the framers of Vesey's narrative, a fact which compels readers to consider Vesey, if not all of the conspirators, highly capable and intelligent.[211] In addition, Vesey's knowledge and manipulation of "the Scriptures" which he could "readily quote to [slaves] to prove that slavery was contrary to the laws of God" indicates an ability to read, interpret, and communicate his message beyond the comprehension of the white community. Parker and Kennedy are quick to point out that were it not for the distribution of "inflammatory pamphlets" as a "consequence of the unrestricted intercourse allowed to persons of color between the states of the Union," Vesey would not likely have found such a receptive audience. Finally, they suggest that the facility with Biblical, political, and regional discourse combined to win Vesey "incredible

[211] In *An Official Report*, Parker and Kennedy. 11. For a discussion of the subversive discourse of dominated groups, whose "hidden transcripts" critique the power structure, see James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1990. 12

influence among persons of color." They conclude that "many feared him more than their owners, and one of them declared, even more than his God."[212]

Justices Parker and Kennedy did not include any testimony from Vesey in *An Official Report*. In fact, a comparison between Evidence B and *An Official Report* suggests that Vesey was either silent of his own accord or silenced by the Court. Johnson writes, "The palpable menace of the court's power" silenced, altered, and produced black speech according to the aims of the white framers. "Black witnesses knew that their words, heard by an imposing group of white men, could send them to the gallows. They also knew that the right words might save them from the executioner's slipknots" (942-943). Most striking is the silence of the men executed: "of the thirty-five men eventually hanged, twenty-four remained mute" (943). Like the report itself, which was burned or hidden from slaves, Vesey's words are thought influential enough to create insurrectionary impulses in anyone who read them. His absence in the report allows the Justices to construct Vesey to fit their own narrative designs; the plot created by Parker and Kennedy is *not* that of Vesey and his conspirators, but is the counter-narrative of the white community.

For a nation in perpetual fear of usurpation, suspicion of slave uprising seems a natural and inevitable consequence, especially as abolitionist and revolutionary rhetoric crossed the Atlantic. However, the inability of pro-slavery radicals to conceive of slavery as anything but the best solution forced Americans to displace their anxiety and fear onto something other, something outside their conception of the nation. As "the bloodiest and most shocking insurrection ever recorded in the annals of history," the slave revolt in Saint-Domingue during the 1790s, in which more than sixty thousand people died to create the first black republic, terrified and riveted the nation. Insurrection Literature like that of

[212] Although the narrative says nothing here about Voodoo, Parker and Kennedy signal "his" God, a marker of separation between the black and white community, even between he and Vesey's preaching of Christianity.

Gabriel Prosser and Denmark Vesey worked to concretize the specter of Haiti for a confused and suspicious readership.[213] The ideological fissures created by abolitionists like Thomas Wentworth Higginson, and later, William Lloyd Garrison reverberated across the country compelling pro-slavery radicals to invent something large enough to stop emancipatory rhetoric from altering the status quo. Images of blood-soaked Haitian slaves coming out of the darkness to kill women, children, and slave owners symbolized early Americans worst fantasies of blackness becoming a specter against which equality and emancipation could be indefinitely deferred. What began as an explicit belief in the link between Denmark Vesey and his contacts in Saint-Domingue, and a political reference from James Monroe and Thomas Jefferson in response to Gabriel Prosser, evolved into a trope for both pro-slavery radicals and abolitionists for the duration of the nineteenth century. The ways in which Nat Turner's rebellion became represented illustrate already the sublimation of this specter and its determination to return as American Gothicism.

[213] The front piece of *The Official Report* reads, "Found in the garret of William Poe's house at Hilton Head, on the 9th November, 1861. It was among a number of old pamphlets and newspapers which had apparently been thrown out and forgotten by the owner. All the copies which could be found were destroyed soon after its publication—it was thought a dangerous document for the slaves to see. It was found by me two days after the battle of Port Royal." S.M.Weld, Jr. Harvard College Library.

IV. The Confessions of Nat Turner

"Who knows but that a Toussaint, a Christophe, a Rigaud, a Clervaux, and a Dessaline, may some day appear in the Southern States of this Union?"
William Wells Brown, "The History of the Haitian Revolution" (1855)

My final analysis of insurrection narratives is of a pamphlet, "transcribed" by Thomas R. Gray, of Nat Turner's jail-cell confessions about his role in the only successful slave conspiracy in the nineteenth century, one that resulted in the murder of roughly 70 white men, women, and children in August, 1831.[214] What we know of Nat Turner is very little: we know that he was part of a slave insurrection that began with the killing of his owner, Joseph Travis, his wife, and their child, that in the following twenty-four hours the approximately six original insurgents were joined by nearly 40 more, and that between 60-70 whites of the Southampton community in Virginia were murdered. We also know that every insurgent was killed as a result, by local vigilante gangs, militia, even federal troops—that an additional 100 or so blacks were also killed—and that Nat Turner remained at large for over two months after the revolt, and was captured on October 30, 1831. Apart from these details, what we know of Nat Turner and his rebellion becomes an extremely complex performance of authority, fear, domination, and repression which, like the insurrection narratives before *The Confessions*, tell us much more about white investments, fantasies, and fears than of the black communities or any of the participants in the rebellion itself. Thomas R. Gray was an elderly lawyer and owner of 33 slaves who, as Nat Turner historian Henry Tragle has suggested, clearly had "an eye for a good thing" (*Slave Revolt* 402). Within two

[214] See Herbert Aptheker's *Nat Turner's Slave Rebellion* (1966), where he points out that "any statement purporting to find the precise number of Negroes who took part in the revolt, or the exact number of victims, white or Negro, is to be suspiciously regarded" (33).

weeks after Nat Turner's execution on November 11, 1831, some 40,000 copies of *The Confessions* were published and distributed by Gray, who claimed to "transcribe" Turner's confession "with little or no variation, from his own words" (Apetheker 129). There is some contemporary evidence to suggest that despite its "seal" of authenticity, *The Confessions* was not believed to be an accurate portrait of Nat Turner. The *Richmond Enquirer*, very shortly after the pamphlet's public distribution, argued that Turner's language, "eloquently and even classically expressed…cast some doubt over the authenticity of the narrative," and gave to "the Bandit a character for intelligence which he does not deserve and ought not to have received" (qtd. in Browne, 311).[215] Gray ascribes intelligence to Turner, however, far less than he expresses his own horror and repulsion at the spectacle of Turner, his "enthusiasm," and his lack of remorse. The combination of the two opposing representations of Turner is a key factor in understanding *The Confessions* as literature rather than an historical or legal text.

In the nine years since Vesey's conspiracy, some important events had taken place altering the level of anxiety over slave violence. Perhaps most responsible for intensifying the alarm in white southern slave holders was the circulation of David Walker's *Appeal* (1829).[216] Walker was born a free-black man in North Carolina and became one of the most outspoken abolitionists in the early nineteenth century. He began his career in Boston in 1827 as the sales agent for the first African American newspaper, *Freedom's Journal*. He married a fugitive slave, spoke at black organizational meetings of various sorts, and began writing for black newspapers. But no black writing in the United States prior equaled the rhetorical power of the *Appeal*; in it, he spoke directly to the slaves and free-black men

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[215] See *Richmond Enquirer*, November, 22, 1831. 1

[216] Full title of Walker's pamphlet is *Appeal, in Four Articles, Together with a Preamble, to the Colored citizens of the World, But in Particular, and Very Expressly to those of the United States of America.* (1829)

throughout the United States, demanding not only their reflection on the condition of slavery, but their active participation in taking back their own freedom. In the aftermath of Turner's insurrection, a Baltimore paper *Niles' Register* published this notice:

> Incendiary Publications—The 'Vigilance Association of Columbia,' (South Carolina), composed of gentlemen of the first respectability, have offered a reward of fifteen hundred dollars for the apprehension and prosecution to conviction, of any white person who may be detected in distributing or circulating within the state the newspaper called, 'The Liberator,' printed in Boston, or the pamphlet called 'Walker's Pamphlet' or any other publications of a seditious tendency" (Tragle 131).[217]

After Turner's slave revolt, whites across the south openly attacked Walker's pamphlet for its contribution to slave violence by its militant call to the black population to "kill or be killed." The *Appeal* also attacked whites' assumptions of the inferiority of the black man, particularly those expressed in Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia,* Christian values, and the African Colonization movement.[218] Of the many themes put forth in the *Appeal*, one of the most interesting is Walker's persistent reification of black and white subjectivity. Rather than criticize slavery on the grounds of miscegenation, for example, Walker's pamphlet works to maintain a kind of racial purity not unlike white racist ideology which undergirds slavery. After his deconstruction of *Jefferson's Notes*, for example, he writes "The whites have always been an unjust, jealous unmerciful, avaricious and blood thirsty set of beings, always seeking after power and authority" (Levine 355). Walker employs the same kinds of rhetorical strategies used in the service of slavery when he attempts to characterize the white man, effectively turning racist ideology on its head. It is this kind of reversal that would have led white Americans in the early nineteenth century to fear for their lives: what if they were

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[217] See Henry Irving Tragle, *The Southampton Slave Revolt of 1831: A Compilation of Source Material.* Vintage 1973. In it, he devotes almost 150 pages to newspaper articles and notices published in the days and months following Nat Turner's insurrection. 27-170

[218] See Robert Levine's summation of Walker's pamphlet in the context section of *Clotel or The President's Daughter*, William Wells Brown. (2000)

enslaved by their black property, the pamphlet seems to ask? The pamphlet ends provocatively and menacingly: Walker writes, "The Americans may be as vigilant as they please, but they cannot be vigilant enough for the Lord, neither can they hide themselves, where he will not find and bring them out" (Levine 360). White slavery advocates and slave-owners, despite their vigilance in strengthening institutional slavery, could not hide.

Walker's *Appeal* produced a passionate response throughout the south. In 1830 in Virginia, a bill was introduced outlawing seditious writing and pronouncing that meetings of "free negroes" for purposes of literacy instruction would be punished. Similar legislation was introduced and put into law in states throughout the south including Georgia, Louisiana, North Carolina, and Mississippi.[219] Walker's *Appeal* also occasioned Governor Floyd of Virginia's request to Harrison Gray Otis, then the Mayor of Boston, informing him of the pamphlet and demanding that he do everything in his power to suppress it. Once circulating, however, Walker's *Appeal* could not be suppressed.

Fears over Saint-Dominguan refugees and the stories of revolt which accompanied them had already become apparent in response to Vesey's conspiracy; Walker's *Appeal* too produced anxiety over violent influences of foreign blacks. A law passed in Georgia in 1829 required a forty day quarantine of all vessels carrying any free black men, and made criminal any "circulation of pamphlets of evil tendency among our domestics; [made] penal the teaching of free persons of color or slaves to read or write; and prohibit[ed] the introduction of slaves into this state for sale" (Apetheker 28).[220] The obligation to quarantine any black immigrants suggests that foreign blacks were threatening, either by virtue of infectious

[219] Apetheker suggests that historians have traditionally understood this legislation as a response to Turner's rebellion, but in fact it preceded the revolt and was a direct response to Walker's *Appeal.* 27-32.

[220] He cites the *Niles' Weekly Register*, XXXVII, 341, Jan. 16, 1830 for publication of the Georgia legislation.

disease or potential violence; if these foreign blacks were required, then, to remain secluded from the blacks of the United States, whites could hope to suppress the "evil tendency" otherwise dormant, but clearly latent, throughout the southern states. In Virginia too, the Constitutional Convention of 1829-1830 created divisions amongst legislatures by the increasingly abolitionist discourse of some the state's Western delegates.[221] Finally, the "Negro Convention" first assembled in Philadelphia on September, 15, 1830, and again in June, 1831, was read as a sign of the greater movement toward black collectivity throughout the early republic. The implications of these events, of course, would change radically after Nat Turner's successful slave revolt on August 22, 1831.

The transition from Denmark Vesey to Nat Turner is a transition from history to literature. Nat Turner's narrative is more difficult to interpret than Denmark Vesey's because it is given to us as a personal confession, rather than a government document or trial transcript: what we read of Nat Turner is presented to his contemporaries, as it is to us today, as an authentic account from the mouth of the rebel leader himself. *The Confessions of Nat Turner* is situated in a genre that was a staple of the Romantic period. Since Jean-Jacques Rousseau's publication of *The Confessions of J.-J. Rousseau* (1782, 1789) ushered the romantic confession into modernity, American culture has had an obsessive, even if also ambivalent, relationship to the mode.[222] Confession in the tradition of Rousseau performs a kind of intimacy almost embarrassing for the reader; it discloses "hidden acts and thought in a form

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[221] See early treatments of the Constitutional Convention in C.H. Ambler's *Sectionalism in Virginia from 1776-1861*, Chicago, 1910, pp 141; H.H. Simms, *The Rise of the Whigs in Virginia 1824-1840*, Richmond, 1929, pp36-39; and more recently, Bruce Dickson's *The Rhetoric of Conservatism: The Virginia Convention of 1829-1830 and the Conservative Tradition in the South*, San Marino Ca, The Huntington Library, 1982.

[222] Confessional speech of contemporary culture, like that we hear daily on radio programs such as "This American Life" and talk-shows of all varieties are not the same as the confessional genre, though the share features. Brooks' writes of the general desire to want confessions but also to find them suspect. I will discuss this distinction more when I turn to the text of Nat Turner.

that reveals—perhaps in a sense creates—the inwardness of the person confessing" which allows for the possibility of his "punishment, absolution, rehabilitation, reintegration" (*Troubling Confessions* 2). Confession as genre of hidden acts and thoughts is only one of its discursive modes and was followed by other, more embarrassing ones not long after Rousseau's publication. In 1821, *London Magazine*, widely read in America throughout the nineteenth-century, published Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*. Later that year, Charles Lamb published his *Confessions of a Drunkard* under the pen-name Elia. The tendency toward more and more intimate revelations in these texts provided the occasion for parody of the confessional mode. Henry Thomson (under the pseudonym "Thomas Ticklepitcher") took aim at De Quincey and Lamb in particular in his *Confessions of a Footman,* published in *Blackwoods* in 1823. Thomson writes, "SEEING that the world, through the medium of the Press, is rapidly becoming acquainted with the miseries of all classes; that drunkards, hypochondriacs, water-drinkers, and opium-chewers, are alike received with sympathy and commiseration; I take leave shortly to address you upon the grievances of footmen; a set of men, I do believe, more universally persecuted than any other body of artists within his Majesty's dominions" (*Confessions of a Footman* 1).[223] Western cultures since Rousseau's *Confessions* "[have] made confessional speech a prime mark of authenticity….in which the individual authenticates his inner truth" (*Troubling Confessions* 4). But Thomson's "Footman" seems to ask if society really needs to authenticate and therefore value all human experience. The playfulness of Thomson's *Confessions of a Footman*, indeed, his satire of the seriousness with which the press take such revelatory documents is

[223] Footnote tells us that "water drinkers" are people who abstain from drinking alcohol and that a "footman" is 'A man-servant in livery employed chiefly to attend the carriage and wait at table' (*OED*).

conspicuously absent in Turner's *Confession*, which participates in yet another mode, that of legal discourse.

Peter Brooks claims that confession "plays a crucial role in moral cleansing and moral discipline," or religious and legal discourses. In the former, "confession of a wrong doing is considered fundamental to morality because it constitutes a verbal act of self-recognition….and hence provides the basis of rehabilitation" (2). In this way, the confessor releases himself from his own onerous interiority and reconciles his position in the world. Confession as a means of moral cleansing, then, is primarily interested in validating and helping the confessor to move from a state of abjection to a state of grace. While Turner's *Confession* remains a remarkable instance of black interiority, not from an abolitionist perspective but from a pro-slavery perspective, moral cleansing does not quite account for Thomas Gray's frame.[224] Confession as a mode of discipline, however, looks quite different and resembles how we read Nat Turner's text. First, "only confession…can bring release from interrogation" (Brooks 2). Despite this overt threat wherein silence receives punishment, the law circumscribes these confessions by claiming that they are made voluntarily. But in cases where guilt is already known, as in the case of Nat Turner, what accounts for the societal demand for a confession? In Brooks' analysis of our contemporary moment, he sees a "generalized demand for transparency…that entails a kind of tyranny of the requirement to confess" (4).

In "Narrativity of the Law," Peter Brooks intervenes in legalist discourse to argue for the centrality of narrative, both in scholarship and practice, as "an important tool for individuals and communities who need to tell the concrete particulars of their experience in a

[224] We find two prominent instances of a black subjectivity in *Olaudah Equiano The Interesting Narrative* (1789) and David Walker's *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World* (1829).

way normally excluded by legal reasoning and rule" (*Law and Literature*, 1).[225] As literary scholars, the assertion of narrative's primacy in constructing meaning out of the world is commonplace; but this is not so, according to Brooks, in legal discourse. With the exception of "storytelling for oppositionists"—a movement which tends toward naïve positive valuation of narrative and its motivations—recognition of the multiple narrative frames, interpretive communities, and what Dipesh Chakrabarty has coined "life-worlds" of those telling, hearing, and transcribing these stories remains critically misunderstood. Brooks points to the "many layers of storytelling involved in any adjudication before the law, the way stories are told and retold to different effects, the omnipresence of narrative" used for dominant and oppressed subjects that make up any legal discourse or process. I am interested particularly in Brooks' formulation of narrative "transmission and transaction: that is, to stories in the situation of their telling and listening, asking not only how these stories are constructed and told, but also how they are listened to, received, reacted to, how they ask to be acted upon and how they in fact *become operative*" (3 my emphasis). Insurrection narratives perform many kinds of cultural work, first and foremost, to write narratives wherein the hero of the story is the white community by virtue of the repression and punishment of the black community. That is, insurrection narratives become operative. This operation is especially complicated by the confessional mode, since "confessional speech is so complex and multilayered a phenomenon, activating layers of guilt, shame, abjection, dependency, propitiation…[s]torytelling without fear may in this instance be a utopian construct" (6). By close analysis of Thomas Grey's *Confessions of Nat Turner*, I hope to tease

[225] In *Law and Literature*, Vol. 14, No. 1. (Spring, 2002), 1-10. See also Brooks' *Troubling Confessions: Speaking Guilt in Law and Literature.* See Roland Barthes for a fuller understanding of narrativity, "Introduction a l'analyse structurale des recits," 8 *Communications* 1 (1966); also Brooks' *Reading for the Plot: Narrative Designs*….full citation.

out some of the multiple layers that make up this important strand of early American historiography of slave violence. Moreover, the implications of Brooks' narrative theory suggest a very small leap indeed into understanding something like the *Confessions* as part of the American gothic tradition, as in fact a crucial component of American literary history. Nat Turner's text marks a decisive turn into "romance" as the genre par excellence of the period. It also marks a turn in racist ideology in its radical display of the interiority of a violent, black subject. By giving us a glimpse of the inner workings of a rebel leader, Thomas Gray's *Confessions of Nat Turner* dramatically ushers slave insurrection narratives into the world of gothic romance, or what Michael Gamer has called "the romance of real life" (*Novel* 2).[226] For the first time, then, slave insurrection and literary genre combine in perfect measure.

Because we receive the story of Nat Turner as a packaged, literary document—evidence of Gray's keen awareness of the literary market and public sphere—my analysis of Turner remains less focused on the wide-reaching legislative effects of the insurrection, though for any history of abolition, such a survey would be necessary. Rather, I am interested in Nat Turner's story precisely because of its frame, the way in which it is transmitted and transacted, in Brooks' terms, and the recognizable literary features of the Turner narrative.[227] Unlike the narratives of Gabriel Prosser and Denmark Vesey, the point of origin in Turner's "confession" is not a court-room; the narrative is not given through

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[226] Michael Gamer's essay "Maria Edgeworth and the Romance of Real Life" argues that despite critical agreement that her work falls most neatly within realist fiction, her novels participate in other competing forms of fiction that partake of the "real." Gamer writes, "Maria Edgeworth's fiction is realist neither in its technique nor in its aims, and that its cohesiveness of construction cannot be understood un a realist rubric" (235). He suggests instead that her novels fall into "romances of real life" which more easily conform to a gothic tradition rather than a realist tradition. In *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, Vol. 34, No. 2, The Romantic-Era Novel. (Spring, 2001), 232-266.

[227] For a thorough historical and legislative study of the immediate after effects of Nat Turner's rebellion throughout the south, see Herbert Apetheker's *Nat Turner's Slave Rebellion* (1966).

arrested witnesses and other slave testimony, but ostensibly, through Turner himself. Gray's title page, which claims that Nat Turner, "the leader of the late insurrection in Southampton, VA…..fully and voluntarily" gave his "confession"…from "the prison where he was confined," seems to perfectly coincide with Brooks' outline of legalist discursive strategies of moral discipline. Gray's introduction to *The Confessions*, along with his savvy marketing through the southern states, further troubles our reception of Turner's narrative. What creates an especially obfuscating narrative is its *very claim to truth*, its "authenticity" as Gray writes. In addition, respected historians such as Herbert Apetheker have relied upon the confession as an authentic biographical study of Turner, replicating what is written about him as historical fact. Like the narrative of Denmark Vesey, then, interpretive errors persist well into the contemporary critical moment, illustrating the resilience of early American mythology of slave violence and its many symbolic representations.

The opening of the *Confession* presents a "Seal"—indicating by the Clerk of the District that the submission of Turner's account, as transcribed by Thomas R. Gray, is, paradoxically, a "true copy" and was used as "testimony" in the trial of Nat Turner. Turner's *Confession*, thus, functions on a number of levels: first, as "testimony", evidence of guilt in the leadership of a slave insurrection; second, as a sensational story of slave violence given as a first-hand account for a confused and fearful reading public; and third, to secure Gray's Copy Rights of Turner's narrative. In this way, it participates in multiple, competing public discourses: legal, literary, and literary marketing. It announces immediately that Gray was well aware of the conditions of production, the demand for sensationalism in the guise of truth, and that he was prepared to make a significant sum off of the "fearful tragedy."[228]

[228] All citations from *The Confession of Nat Turner, The Leader of the Late Insurrection in Southampton, VA.*, are taken from Herbert Aptheker's *Nat Turner's Slave Rebellion: Together with the Full Text of the So-Called "Confessions" Of Nat*

What follows is Gray's introduction to the *Confession*, which he addresses "To The Public". He begins by claiming that the insurrection "has greatly excited the public mind, and led to a thousand idle, exaggerated and mischievous reports," but immediately points to the "atrocious circumstances of cruelty and destruction, as could not fail to leave a deep impression, not only upon the minds of the community where this fearful tragedy was wrought, but throughout every portion of our country, in which this population is to be found" (129). Gray provides a justification for his circulation of Turner's confession as one of proper interpretation, a corrective to excitement, idleness, and mischievousness in an appropriately serious mode of confession. Nat Turner as the leader is the origin and source of the truth, according to Gray's interpretive frame. At the same time, however, he plays on the heightened state of anxiety in the white community, the very same his opening remarks claim to undermine: that is, the "atrocious" acts of "cruelty and destruction" and their deeply entrenched images of bloody white corpses that accompany them. This gesture of sensationalism marks the tension of Gray's narrative, one that asks to be understood as truth, or history, while adorning it with sentiment and vivid imagery. Thus enters the □othicism of Gray's text.

Stephen Howard Browne has argued that "to read *The Confessions* is in fact to read two texts at once, the one locating itself within a scriptural rationale for holy wrath, the other staking its claim to an emergent logic of free will and the perversities to which that will is subject" (*Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 310).[229] He concludes that the text "sustains in uneasy and dramatic tension competing modes of understanding the source, nature, and meaning of

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Turner Made in Prison in 1831. 127-152. Aptheker takes the Turner text from Tragle's original compilation of sources, including the *Confession*.

[229] In "'This Unparalleled and Inhuman Massacre': The Gothic, The Sacred, and The Meaning of Nat Turner." *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*. Vol. 3, 2000, 309-331.

violence" (311). To be sure, Browne's assertion that violence is at the center of *The Confessions* is undeniable; reading it today, one is struck by the slasher-film quality of the violence. Turner describes the axe-murders as taking place by "repeated blows to the head," the murder of a woman as nearly "sever[ing] her head from her body," and Turner's boast that "after repeated blows with a sword, I killed her by a blow on the head, with a fence rail" (Apetheker 140-141). In between these moments of graphic violence, Turner describes white attempts to escape death calmly and dispassionately. Turner explains:

> We started from there for Mrs. Reese's, maintaining the most perfect silence on our march, where finding the door unlocked, we entered, and murdered Mrs. Reese in her bed, while sleeping; her son awoke, but it was only to sleep the sleep of death, he had only time to say who is that, and he was no more. From Mrs. Reese's we went to Mrs. Turner's, a mile distance, which we reached about sunrise, on Monday morning. Henry, Austin, and Sam, went to the still, where, finding Mr. Peebles, Austin shot him, and the rest of us went to the house; as we approached, the family discover us, and shut the door. Vain hope! Will, with one stroke of his axe, opened it, and we entered and found Mrs. Turner and Mrs. Newsome in the middle of a room, almost frightened to death. Will immediately killed Mrs. Turner, with one blow of his axe. I took Mrs. Newsome by the hand, and with the sword I had when I was apprehended, I struck her several blows over the head, but not being able to kill her, as the sword was dull. Will turning around and discovering it, dispatched her also. (Apetheker 140).

There are some striking aspects of this passage: the calm silence of the rebels as they move from house to house, the use of victim's proper names, the defiance in claiming "vain hope!", and perhaps most startlingly, the intimacy of Turner taking the hand of his victim before beating her with a dull sword. The mix of familiar and strange, the horror and dispassion, the methodical manner in which events unfold for the reader do not in themselves make *The Confessions* gothic. The text becomes gothic in the generic mixing of Gray's interpretive frame and Turner's acts of violence. The portrait of Nat Turner we find in *The Confessions* is not sympathetic, but horrific. It is not the inner "hidden truths and acts" (*Troubling Confessions* 2) of Turner which excite feelings in readers, but its use as a violent

spectacle to unite the white nation, a gesture only possible through Thomas Gray's interpretation and publication of *The Confessions*.

Historians and literary critics have long understood that *The Confessions* contain elements of fiction and imagination, though its force as a cultural object rather than a vehicle for a mysterious madman remains under-appreciated. Critics tend to understand the power of Nat Turner as a cultural myth, an anti-hero of abolitionist discourse, whose story animates novels and poetry up through our contemporary moment. Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Dred: A Tale of the Dismal Swamp* (1856), G.P.R. James' *The Old Dominion* (1859); Martin Delaney's *Blake: or The Huts of America* (1859) wherein he explicitly connects Nat Turner to the specter of Haiti, all bespeak Turner's (and Gray's) influence on the American cultural imagination. Critical histories such as Albert E. Stone's *The Return of Nat Turner: History, Literature, and Cultural Politics in Sixties America*, claim that Turner functions "like a villain from nineteenth-century stage melodrama," while William L. Andrews' *To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1760-1866,* argues that the only appropriate generic and cultural placement of Turner's text is within black slave narratives or autobiographies.[230] Possibly the most influential literary study of Nat Turner placed him alongside Frederick Douglass in Eric Sundquist's To *Wake The Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature.* Sundquist sees Turner's *Confessions* as evidence of what he calls "signs of power" which both "spring from and…redeem the vision of liberty" (31). While recognizing the "complex network of cultural-political forces at work in and around his revolt and the written records of it," Sundquist nevertheless seeks to recuperate the Nat Turner of *The Confessions* as a hero, whose "written acts of resistance" provide hope for "readers of the day and generation to follow" (30-31).

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[230] Stone, 77.

To some extent, contemporary responses to Turner's insurrection share a quasi-admiration for the leader of the "servile insurrection." *The Richmond Compiler* published on August 27, 1831 extracts from a letter written by General Eppes to the Lt.Colonel of the Isle of Wight, dated August 24, 1831, just two days after the rebellion began. General Eppes was part of the great military force that was brought to Southampton from all over the state, including Norfolk, which provided heavy artillery support and helped to bring in federal troops. After recounting some of the murkier details of the revolt, such as how many whites were in fact murdered, Eppes writes:

> What an abandoned set of banditti these cut-throats are! Their steps are everywhere marked with the blood of women and children: An astonishing fatality seems to have attended these helpless classes. Neither infancy nor the female sex is spared in their blood-thirsty wrath!... It is astonishing that such a parcel of wretches should have dared the murderous deeds which they have committed. Their ultimate object, as well as the means they took to perpetrate so many murders, whence they came, and whither any of them is going, are circumstances not yet explained.—Were they connected with the desperadoes who harassed N. Carolina last year? Who is this Nat Turner?—Where is he from? (Tragle 48-49)

In addition to the liberal use of graphic violence and dramatic prose, such as "blood-thirsty wrath!" what resonates is the pathos with which the writer seeks to know Nat Turner, the man. A level of desperation and bewilderment is expressed which demonstrates how slave violence punctures the core of white southern ideology. The inheritance of Nat Turner as a mythic hero, anti-hero, or villain continues to overshadow other ways of reading Turner's text, which is regrettable because even the briefest glimpse at *The Confessions* yields one of the most fascinating documents of political and literary early American history.

It is difficult to know whether Turner's leadership in the rebellion is a "sign of power" as Sundquist has suggested or a sign of Gray's awareness of his reader's expectations. When, for example, Nat Turner first encounters a "party of white men" who had "pursued [their] blood-stained track" the description of confrontation between the black rebels and white community suggests civility and decorum, as if the rules of war were

carefully attended to and Turner, as much as any white commander, might be worthy of a purple heart. Turner explains:

> Immediately on discovering the whites, I ordered my men to halt and form, as they appeared to be alarmed—The white men, eighteen in number, approached us in about one hundred yards, when one of them fired, (this was against the positive orders of Captain Alexander P. Peete, who commanded, and who had directed the men to reserve their fire until within thirty paces)—And I discovered about half of them retreating, I then ordered my men to fire and rush on them; the few remaining stood their ground until we approached within fifty yards, when they fired and retreated. (Apetheker 143)

The description of the battlefield grants authority to Nat Turner which parallels that of the Captain, whose name is inserted into the narrative by Gray.[231] The passage points to a central locus of anxiety in the narrative: the simultaneous horror, fascination, and abjection of the black insurrectionary leader.

Gray's own description of Turner in his conclusion illustrates his vacillation between admiration and repulsion. He writes, "[it] is notorious, that he was never known to have a dollar in his life; to swear an oath, or drink a drop of spirits. As to his ignorance, he certainly never had the advantages of education, but he can read and write, (it was taught him by his parents,) and for natural intelligence and quickness of apprehension, is surpassed by few men I have ever seen" (Apatheker 147). Gray's description of Turner resembles that of a "good slave" one whose temperance and loyalty were never doubted but whose ability to read, write, and apprehend made him beyond the average slave. Gray already inscribes what becomes a central feature of slave narratives, such as Frederick Douglass' later in the century, whereby literacy leads to liberation. In order to make sense of Nat Turner's violence, Gray attempts to find the source in his childhood: his mind has been "warped and perverted by the influence of early impressions" (Apetheker 147). These early impressions

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[231] Gray explains in his concluding remarks that all parenthetical asides in *The Confessions* are his own. Apetheker, 146.

include, according to Turner's recollection, the belief of his parents and other slaves that "[he] surely would be a prophet, as the Lord had shewn [sic] [him] things that had happened before [his] birth" (Apetheker 133). Turner concludes: "I was intended for some great purpose" (133). Turner justifies his slave revolt based on his conviction that he had seen God in a vision and that his purpose on earth was a divine one. Like Wieland in Brockden Brown's *Wieland; Or the Transformation: An American Tale* (1798), Turner misreads the signs, "perverts" piety into fanaticism, and reveals the potential destruction of religion in the absence of tempering reason. If we understand Turner's text as an expression of unwieldy religious "enthusiasm," then we can read Gray's text as an attempt to elucidate the obscurity of Turner's narrative through reason and enlightenment. Despite Gray's claim that he "shall not attempt to describe the effect of [Turner's] narrative," Gray proceeds to do just that. He writes,

> [t]he calm, deliberate composure with which he spoke of his late deeds and intentions, the expression of his fiend-like face when excited by enthusiasm, still bearing the stains of the blood of helpless innocence about him; clothed with rags and covered with chains; yet daring to raise his manacled hands to heaven, with a spirit soaring above the attributes of man; I looked on him and my blood curdled in my veins. (Apatheker 147-148)

But Gray's description effects a role reversal: Turner reflects a "calm" and "deliberate composure" while Gray sees only a "fiend," and "stains of blood" which leave his own "blood curdled in [his] veins." The effect, which Gray claims to be avoiding, results from the juxtaposition of a calm and composed Turner with a horrified and dramatic Gray. The tension between enlightenment and romance is precisely what marks *The Confessions* as part of the gothic tradition; as a narrative of slave insurrection, not just conspiracy but actual violence, *The Confessions* becomes a decisive text in a burgeoning, national tale linking blackness, fear, mystery, violence, and representation. As Ian Duncan argues in "Culture of

the Gothic," the gothic is a response to realism as a genre born out of Enlightenment; it is, in fact, what the earlier genre Romance looks like after the Novel.[232]

Henry Irving Tragle's *The Southampton Slave Revolt of 1831: A Compilation of Source Material* brings together all the newspaper accounts of the insurrection, the trial record, *The Confessions*, and correspondence from Virginia Governor John Floyd.[233] What is most striking in this collection is the sheer number of attempts to tell the most accurate story of Turner's insurrection in the newspapers in particular, but also throughout all of the print generated from the event. Tragle publishes 144 pages of newspaper articles, editorials, and re-published letters from southern and northern newspapers; in almost every instance, the article begins by re-telling the plot, including the chronology, actors, setting, and aftermath. Each account also adds a kind of moralizing summary in the end, which vacillates between expressions of terror, anger, sadness, and unabashed confusion. Some also attempt to ascribe some meaning or motivation for the insurrection. For example, *The American Beacon*, out of Norfolk, Virginia, reports on August 29, 1831 that "Broadnax's servants stated their object to be to reach the free states, where they expected to make proselytes and return to assist their brethren" (Tragle 49). Many use the print space to replicate horrific imagery for its readers; in an extract from a volunteer from Norfolk, dated August 26, 1831: "We saw several children whose brains were knocked out" (Tragle 50). *The Richmond Compiler* published a letter on September 3, 1831, which sounds quite a lot like Gray's opening to *The Confessions*. "Anticipating your desire to be correctly informed of the events which have recently occurred in this county—events which have left a fearful and lasting impression upon the minds and imaginations of the people, I commenced a letter to you" (Tragle 59).

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[232] See Ian Duncan's *Modern Romance and Transformations of the Novel.*

[233] First Vintage Books Edition, 1973.

In this same letter, he continues: "If my intelligence was confined to this place, I should say, that there was no general concert—but from examinations which have taken place in other counties, I fear the scheme embraced a wider sphere than I had at first supposed. Only one free negro was in arms with them, and no white persons. Several free negroes, however, have been taken up under strong suspicion of having been engaged in the conspiracy" (61). The article is interesting insofar as it highlights the role of free black men in the insurrection, which to this writer indicates that black violence has the potential to go far beyond the possibilities of local violence perpetrated by enslaved blacks. In other words, if free black men are willing to participate in a slave revolt, what are they capable of on their own, in the far less restricted and policed environs of northern cities? The material impact of Nat Turner's insurrection forced his contemporaries to consider if and to what extent such violence could be contained in the southern plantation states.

The amount of text generated out of Nat Turner's insurrection was, in fact, so vast that it provided space for different kinds of disclosure and critique otherwise absent from the public discourse of Denmark Vesey's conspiracy, less than ten years earlier. A few published pieces in particular are critical of the mass hysteria in white communities throughout the south, not limited to Virginia, wherein large numbers of black people, enslaved and free alike, were indiscriminately killed. The prominent Richmond paper which published the first article of the insurrection, also wrote, "It is with pain we speak of another feature of the Southampton Rebellion…We allude to the slaughter of many blacks, without trial, and under circumstances of great barbarity. How many have thus been put into death (generally by decapitation or shooting) reports vary; probably however some five and twenty and from that to 40; possibly a yet larger number" (*The Constitutional Whig*, "Southampton Affair"). Despite this note, the article states: "Let the fact not be doubted by those whom it

most concerns, that another such insurrection will be the signal for the extermination of the whole black population in the quarter of the state where it occurs." The unsubtle threat of mass genocide gets picked up and heavily criticized by northern newspapers, such as the Boston *Liberator*, the *Worcester Spy* out of Massachusetts, and the *Sentinel* out of New York, New York. A very different tone, however, is struck in the "official" letter from F.M. Boykin's "Command", printed in *The Lynchburg Virginian*, September 8, 1831:

> It is with the most painful sensations that the Commanding Officer has to….upon the conduct of any citizen: acts of cruelty and barbarity are never looked upon but with horror by any but savages. It is equally revolting to the honorable and magnanimous, the brave & humane, that the opposing party, when overpowered, should be long regarded as an enemy. He will not specify all the instances that he is bound to believe have occurred, but pass in silence what has happened, with the expression of the deepest sorrow that any necessity should be supposed to have existed, to justify a single act of atrocity…no excuse will be allowed to any other acts of violence…this course of proceeding dignifies the rebel and the assassin with the sanctity of martyrdom, and confounds the difference that morality and religion make between the ruffian and the brave and honorable.

At stake in the Commander's proclamation is nothing less than a separation of black and white people that goes beyond the stated intention of maintaining a moral high ground. While at base, then, the Commander's statement performs a broad critique of race, his tone remains measured and his claims to moral authority seem proper, at least on the surface level of the text.

Turner's insurrection, unlike Prosser's or Vesey's, not only produced attempts in writing to make sense of the violent event, but simultaneously produced reflective analysis on the quality, quantity, and array of print culture it generated. The event entered into literary discourse analysis almost immediately. For example, *The Constitutional Whig* published the following editorial on the shifting shape of the "servile insurrection":

> We have been astonished since our return from Southampton…in reading over the mass of exchange papers accumulated in our absence, to see the number of false, absurd, and idle rumors, circulated by the Press….Editors seem to have applied themselves to the task of alarming the public mind as much as possible by persuading the slave to entertain a high opinion of their strength and consequences….[these] exaggerations…are calculated to give

the slaves false conceptions of their numbers and capacity, by exhibiting the terror and confusion of the whites, and to induce them to think that practicable, which they see is so much feared by their superiors. (*The Constitutional Whig*, September 3, 1831, "Southampton Affair")

Vastly aware of the rhetorical power of the Turner narrative and the press's role in its reproduction and circulation, *The Constitutional Whig* baldly points out that the majority of print is working at counter-purposes to its white readers. The tension between magnifying the horror and the imperative to sublimate the reality of this horror into symbol and tale is a paradox shared by newspaper accounts of slave violence and American Gothicism.

Included in Tragle's compilation of newspaper articles about or relevant to Nat Turner's insurrection is one entitled "Gabriel's Defeat" published in *The Richmond Enquirer*, October 21, 1831. In it, the writer is responding to an article of the same title published in the *Albany Evening Journal*, which "attempt[s]…to palm off such gross misrepresentations upon the public mind.—It is a silly romance from beginning to end" (Tragle 124). The article spends a few pages refuting errors in the facts of Gabriel's 1800 rebellion and uses Monroe's Letter as its evidence. Of particular importance is the New York paper's assertion that Gabriel intended to sail to "St. Domingo": "a little African came into a grocery store in Richmond, and asked for a quart of rum—The grocer asked him for whom he wanted it—He said for his uncle Gabriel. The grocer asked the boy where his uncle Gabriel was. He replied in the Sally Ann, a vessel at the dock, just ready to sail for St. Domingo…..All romance!" (Tragle 125). Although it seems an incidental reference in a peripheral notice, it is published during the height of panic over the possibility that Nat Turner's insurrection may not have been isolated, but rather a piece in a larger conspiracy to overthrow slavery. In this context, even if only a "silly romance", the link between Gabriel's rebellion and "St. Domingo" raises the specter of slave violence on a mass scale and repositions it in relation to Nat Turner's insurrection. It suggests a relentlessness and resilience of the specter of

Haiti in its travels from an earlier insurrection to the present one, from southern states to northern newspapers, and back to Virginia where, despite its recognizably fictional status, it nevertheless provides a familiar context for Virginians and other southerners in 1831.

Of each insurrection narrative I read, only *The Confessions of Nat Turner* has been seriously examined affectively and as something which bares a relationship to fiction rather than to verifiable history. Seymour L. Gross and Eileen Bender write in "History, Politics and Literature: The Myth of Nat Turner," that "as Gray recounts the ghastly details of the massacre he is supplying his readers with the means for removing it from the structure of the slave-master relationship." They conclude: "[t]he white man's self-fulfilling prophesy—his selective inattention to all aspects of slavery save those which reinforced his stereotyped response—has been left intact" (*American Quarterly*, 23: 487). Gross and Bender's astute reading of how *The Confessions* works to strengthen pro-slavery ideology through its vivid images of black violence illustrates the cultural work insurrection narratives were meant to achieve. To other critics, however, this reading poses a fundamental interpretive problem: where is Nat Turner? Stephen Howard Browne, for example, suggests that rendering Turner a textual effect diminishes his agency and that despite Gray's control of the narrative, the "range" of Turner's "voice" is not limited to the "horizon of Gray's intentions" (*Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, 3: 312). Browne ascribes a "dialogic exchange" which leaves *The Confessions* open to multiple interpretive possibilities. While I agree with Browne's imperative to read *The Confessions* as comprised of multiple, competing discourses, ultimately the desire to re-animate and recuperate Nat Turner undermines his argument. Likewise, William Andrews reasons that "[t]he meaning of Nat Turner is perpetually postponed and relative, a function of the innumerable alignments of the two Nat Turners produced by a text that always keeps one partially eclipsed by the other" (qtd in Browne, 312). The attempt to discern individual

strands of discourse and to align them with their original subject—often reading back into these subjects motivation and rhetorical intent—underestimates and misrecognizes the text's scope, influence, and generic features.

Teresa Goddu's argument that slave violence itself actually produces American Gothicism, I want to suggest, resolves the critical impasse between historiography and literary interpretations of *The Confessions*. She writes that "Turner's insurrection actualized the imagined terror of slave rebellion: its bloody reality both fulfilled and generated a gothic narrative of dread retribution" (*Gothic America* 134). Goddu concludes that "gothic conventions gave whites responding to Turner's rebellion a discourse to symbolize and contain this white terror. Once subsumed into symbols, imagined instead of experienced, the event could be read as an effect rather than a reality" (134). Like Gross and Bender, Goddu reads the responses to Turner's rebellion, of which *The Confessions* is a part, as an effect which performs very specific and necessary kinds of cultural work. What Goddu supplies is the object of this cultural work and the way in which it is achieved at the level of form. The development of American Gothicism, according to her logic, cannot be extricated from the imperative to suppress slave violence. The American gothic, as embodied by insurrection literature like *The Confessions*, uses generic features and conventions to relocate terror away from the local and real context of pre-abolition America. My reading of *The Confessions*, then, corresponds with Goddu's; my contribution to her claim is to propose that the specter of Haiti accounts for the gothic as the most horrifying symbolic representation of slave violence in the early republic. That is, Turner's insurrection is not so much an actualization of fear, but rather the actualization of the ultimate actualization—the Haitian Revolution. Turner's insurrection, how it is written about and how it is received, was itself grounded in an earlier slave revolt, one removed from the local space of southern

plantations. Insurrection literature plays a central role in the development of American Gothicism in its dual purpose to negotiate both the representation and suppression of slave violence as it is filtered through the specter of Haiti.

In the *Liberator's* long response to the slave insurrection, Garrison writes, "What we have long predicted,--at the peril of being stigmatized as an alarmist and declaimer,--has commenced its fulfillment…The first drops of blood, which are but the prelude to a deluge from the gathering clouds, have fallen" (62-63). He says,

> Ye accuse the pacific friends of emancipation of instigating the slaves to revolt….The slaves need no incentive at our hands. They will find in their stripes—in their emaciated bodies—in their ceaseless toil—in their ignorant minds—in every field, in every valley, on every hill top and mountain, wherever you and your fathers have fought for liberty—in your speeches and conversations, your celebrations, your pamphlets, your newspapers—voices in the air, sounds from across the ocean, invitations to resistance above, below, around them! What more do they need? Surrounded by such influences, and smarting under the newly made wounds, is it wonderful that they should rise to contend—as other "heroes" have contended—for their lost rights? (*The Liberator*, September 3, 1831)

Garrison makes visible the hidden subtext of all print taken up by the insurrection of Nat Turner; that southern slave holders in particular displace blame and anxiety for slave violence onto a foreign other, rather than recognize the local conditions which produce slave insurrection in the early republic. At the same time, however, Garrison highlights the revolutionary and liberatory rhetoric which was circulating across the globe since the 1790's onset of Saint-Domingue slave revolution. He points out the many heroes of revolutionary violence and is sufficiently abstract in his evocation to suggest a hero like Touissant L'Ovreture as much as George Washington, both of whom were contenders "for their lost rights."

William Wells Brown surely had Nat Turner in mind when he wrote his pamphlet "The History of the Haitian Revolution" (1855). Brown seems to suggest that the host of a violent, revolutionary slave would haunt the nation at least until the "evil" institution was

abolished. The figure of Turner as a bloody hero participates in the mythology of a nation terrified of the consequences of its own violent oppression. Throughout the many apparitions of a revolutionary slave in print culture throughout the nineteenth century, the Haitian Revolution was always already available as the worst yet unavoidable association. Thus, while Gray's *The Confessions of Nat Turner* never mentions Saint-Domingue or its possibility in the United States, the warning of ever-possible slave violence in the future lingers. Gray writes at the conclusion to his introduction, "It will be long remembered in the annals of our country, and many a mother as she presses her infant darling to her bosom, will shudder at the recollection of Nat Turner, and his band of ferocious miscreants" (Apetheker 131). What in the final analysis makes *The Confessions* a gothic text is its utter resistance to closure; Turner's confession is unlike the confessions of romantic literary figures like Rousseau or De Quincey in several ways, perhaps most significantly, in the added mediation of Thomas R. Gray. But also, Turner is unlike any previous romantic hero, battling dark forces to make his interior anguish known to the world.[234] Like Brockden Brown's double-helix found both in his novels and his non-fiction prose, the relation between Gray's narrative and Turner's narrative is troubling, in both senses of the term. Rather than reveal the "origin, progress and consummation" so that readers can "understand the motives which influence its diabolical actors," Turner's words interrupt and render this aim impossible. By describing himself as a martyred prophet, Turner as represented in the narrative adopts the rhetoric of Christian piety as his own, refuses marginalization as the "great bandit" and instead, "writes" himself into one of the dominant master narratives of the Early Republic.

[234] Gray's language here does suggest a romantic figure in the sense of an eighteenth-century bodice ripper, where female virtue is under siege by a dark, mysterious, and violent power. In describing Turner this way, Gray participates in the eroticism of black masculinity—abject and desirous—and always violent.

Chapter IV: 'Temporal Accumulation': John Howison, Edgar Allan Poe, and Herman Melville's Gothic Modernity

In this final chapter, I return to Howison's "The Florida Pirate" and its relationship to the writing of two prominent nineteenth-century American writers, Edgar Allan Poe and Herman Melville. In particular, I read *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1838) and *Benito Cereno* (1855) as exceptional instances of Gothicism and its muse, the specter of Haiti. Both of these haunting tales are extraordinary, I argue, because of the seamlessness of Saint-Dominguan slave violence within the formal features of the genre. That is, terror over slave violence and its origin in the Haitian Revolution, 1791-1804, fuse in ways not realized by previous gothic tales in which "the split running through" remains visible.[235] It is this perfect "blend" in Horace Walpole's sense of the term that the American gothic comes into its modern form. The cultural mythology that began in the 1790s, thus, becomes institutionalized, within and by, the national narratives of the gothic. But the stories of the nation told by Poe and Melville, unlike those of Brockden Brown, offer little hope out of the morass created through the nation's contradictory edicts of freedom and enslavement. While all previous texts I examine in this dissertation hold out the possibility of a future, albeit a potentially terrifying and violent one, Poe and Melville's gothic tales suggest an apocalypse, the utter dissolution of meaning, one in which the practice of proper reading alone cannot resolve. Brown and Cobbett, and the framers of Insurrection Literature, work to mediate between the responsibilities implicit in the new democracy and an under-literate population. But Poe and Melville do not; rather, they obfuscate meaning, create "readers" who themselves cannot read, and while the consequences of such ineptness within their

[235] Chakrabarty's description, 22

stories is grave indeed, the way in which the primary characters accommodate their own illiteracy resists optimism, for the story as much as for the nation.

I return now to John Howison's "The Florida Pirate" as a much earlier and in no way perfectly blended form of the gothic to illustrate how the gothic tales of Poe and Melville structurally suture over the specter of Haiti. Despite this, certain aspects of all three stories, "The Florida Pirate," *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, and *Benito Cereno*, are uncanny: the action for each takes place primarily aboard a ship, each involves former slaves who liberate themselves prior to time of the narrative's setting through violent revolt and threaten each moment in the story to do so again, and most importantly, each relies upon the specter of Haiti to enhance readers' fear. Even, then, in this early transatlantic tale by Howison, the Haitian Revolution is a cultural reference writers could depend upon to achieve a gothic effect of horror and instability. To rehearse briefly what I began in Chapter 1, the narrator finds himself on a beach somewhere in the Bahaman Islands and at the mercy of a black pirate ship, the *Esperanza*, as his only means of survival.[236] He offers his services as a medical attendant, and when pressed by the Captain to reveal the cause of his entreaty, explains his "unfortunate" circumstances. Captain Manuel, who we are meant to sympathize with as the story unfolds, laughs: "'O, you be unfortunate! And seek relief from a black man—from a negro!'" Thus Howison frames the setting onboard the ship immediately as one in which racial hegemony is reversed: at the whim of the black Captain and his unruly crew of former slaves of various origins, the narrator bears witness to those "unspeakable"

[236] The "Esperanza" is translated as hope, desire, or faith.

things conjured by white supremacist ideology, the eroticism of blackness, and the discourse of scientific racism.[237]

For example, the narrator describes his initial impressions of the crew as having "little discipline" and as "insolen[t]" while he also evacuates their intellect: "An expression of disgusting sensuality characterized this part of the crew; and they looked as if they were strangers to retrospection and anticipation, and felt existence only in so far as the passing moment was concerned" (*Blackwood's*, IX, Aug. 1821, p 518). Howison's description of the crew repeats a standard narrative whereby time is used to delimit slavery as a form of childhood. This construction circulates throughout the Atlantic world in the eighteenth century, an exemplar of which is William Beckford Jr.'s *Remarks upon the Situation of the Negroes in Jamaica* (1788) claim that "A slave has no feeling beyond the present hour, no anticipation of what may come, no dejection at what may ensue: these privileges are reserved for the enlightened." [238] The striking allusion to slaves as unable to conjure a future is an oft rehearsed assumption throughout literary discourse from 1790s through the nineteenth-century in America. American gothicism examined in this dissertation *all* highlight the paradox between assuming the slave's infantile intelligence as fixed in a present moment and a belief in the inevitability of slave revolt in the future. That slave conspiracy and revolt

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[237] Scientific racism was espoused by Thomas Jefferson in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* when he writes that blacks, "are inferior in the faculties of reason and imagination" (143); the most important theories, however, were put forward by polygenesis articulated first by Dr. Samuel George Morton who began to study the differences in cranial size and capacity of different races. His first major work was *Crania Americana* (1839) followed by *Crania AEgyptiaca* (1844), and a compendium catalogue in 1849 that seemed to conclusively establish a hierarchical difference between "races" which amounted to a difference in "species." See Dana Nelson's *National Manhood: Capitalist Citizenship and the Imagined Fraternity of White Men* (1998), 109-114; Robert J.C. Young's *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race* (1995), 123. An apologetic of polygenesis is William Stanton's *The Leopard's Spots: Scientific Attitudes toward Race in American 1815-1859* (1960); a corrective to Stanton's pro-slavery historiography is George M. Fredrickson's *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (1971).

[238] William Beckford, Jr., *Remarks upon the Situation of the Negroes in Jamaica.* London: T. and J. Egerton, Military Library, 1788. 84.

could not be realized without a vision of the future and a capacity to alter the course of history is precisely what each of these writers, to varying degrees, constructs as a central ideological tension, one represented through a perfectly distilled symbol of Haitian slave revolt, of the early national period.

Howison's characterization of the crew manning the *Esperanza*, however, is not one-dimensional: "Many were half naked, and I could distinguish the marks of the whip on the shoulders of some of them. The limbs of others had been distorted by the weight and galling of fetters, as was evident from the indentations exhibited by their flesh" (518). The narrator avoids any commentary about these horrific images but its placement alongside the previous criticism of the crew's behavior and appearance offers a more complicated portrait of their conditions and humanity. The marks of slavery are quite literally branded on the bodies of the newly freed slaves, the inclusion of which opens interpretive possibilities which would comprise not only derision, but also sympathetic identification. A similar confluence of derision and sympathy attend the portrait of Captain Manuel, as a faulty leader and an early sentimental hero, a precursor to later nineteenth-century abolitionist novel of Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Captain Manuel's presence, we are told, "did not impose any restraint upon [the crew]," which creates a terrifying mix of confusion for the reader (and the narrator), as well as a sense of misplaced authority whereby the crew seem to possess more power than the established leader. But Captain Manuel's later "confession" to the narrator, again, complicates our dismissal of him as impotent leader, just as we come to sympathize and understand the effeminate leadership of Captain Cereno on-board the San Dominick in Melville's *Benito Cereno*.[239] Captain Manuel and his crew share an enslaved past

[239] I use these gendered terms consciously as each of the authors in this chapter rely on stereotypical descriptions which connect the nation, power, and whiteness to manhood.

escaped only through violent self-assertion, which is a very different relationship than that of Spanish imperial Captain Cereno to his mutinous "crew" in Melville's tale. The histories of Captain Manuel and his crew, we learn, from their own words. Thus, unlike in *Benito Cereno*, where Amasa Delano's unreliable interlocution plays an important role in the dramatic tension of the story, the narrator in "The Florida Pirate" remains almost exclusively a passive observer, complicit in the action insofar as he stands apart from it. For example, on his second morning on the *Esperanza*, the narrator overhears a conversation amongst crew members in which their origins are revealed to signify a certain type of slave.

> Some dispute took place about the distribution of the provisions, and one of the called the other a rascally runaway. 'You lie,' cried the accused person, 'I guess you're something worse yourself, Philip.'—'You had as well be quiet, Antony. Has any body any thing to say against me?'—'Why, that you're a Yankey slave, that's all,' returned Philip.—'Damn you,' cried he, 'I'm a free man—yes, free and independent.' Here they all laughed loudly, and he demanded with fury who would venture to contradict him, or to assert that he had a master. 'Why, we know well enough you ha'n't a master *now*, you pricked him under the ribs,' replied one of the crew. This excited another laugh, and Antony cried, 'Curse you for a niger—belike I'll do the same to you.'—'Don't be calling me a niger,' said Philip, 'I was born in the States.'—'I wouldn't believe it,' said Antony, 'for you know no more than if you was fresh off the coast—You can't roast corn. (518) [240]

Howison's use of dialogue demands that we act as spectators to the crew's performance, alongside the narrator, a performance that is very similar to a minstrel in its caricature of blackness.[241] Antony's adoption of Constitutional rhetoric, he is "free and independent," is ridiculed by the others who make clear that he obtained freedom only because he murdered his Master. Howison here dramatizes the contradiction which grips national public discourse in the States in the early nineteenth century, a nation where independence and democratic principles nevertheless maintain institutional slavery and use violence to enforce

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[240] "Niger" was used by Howison to indicate someone born in Sub-Saharan Africa.

[241] In Eric Lott's *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford UP, 1993), he suggests that minstrelsy revels in racial markers which trouble the prevailing belief that they functioned exclusively to reify blackness and slavery. Howison, Poe, and Melville each play with minstrelsy in provocative and illuminating ways. 111

it. Despite the connection between "Yankey" slavery and violent revolt, being born in the States is superior to being "fresh off the coast" as evidenced through cultural capitol, not political capitol. Indeed, violent overthrow does not occupy the geographic space of sub-Saharan Africa, but rather, the space of Southern plantations. The ability to kill one's master to gain freedom is sutured to one's ability to roast corn. In other words, Howison illustrates the integral nature of slave violence to a native source, here symbolized by American corn, and the inevitable influence it would have on the slave's expectations for freedom and independence. This passage provides a searing indictment of "Yankey" slavery as a fertile ground, quite literally, for slave violence. Unlike abolitionist Frederick Douglass, who connects emancipation to literacy, Howison here suggests a more fundamental and essential source: native soil. Indeed, Howison provocatively and counter-intuitively suggests that slaves' native to the States experience the civilizing enculturation of democratic principles and as a result, are more likely than their African brethren to use violence to gain their freedom. His position as a British subject living in Canada, but traveling in and writing about the States, may have allowed for the complicated ideological link he makes between slavery and nation in "The Florida Pirate." This combination is what marks the *Blackwood's* tale as the ideal representation of the relationship of American Gothicism to its British predecessor. But as it does for Frederick Douglass in *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass,* literacy plays a crucial role in the emancipation of Captain Manuel, a distinction that marks him as simultaneously superior to his crew and yet more vulnerable to white cruelty.

The "rustling of fields of Indian corn" provides the backdrop against which the narrator "receives" Captain Manuel's confession of his origins and history, one which the narrator describes as taking place through his own "state of passiveness." Captain Manuel tells the narrator that he was born of his African mother and South Carolinian, white slave

master, who employed "more than one hundred negroes" (519). As a result, Captain Manuel was raised as a domestic slave, a privileged status gained only through his mother's "capability of ministering to the voluptuousness of Mr. Sexton" (519). It is through this daily intimacy with his Master that the Captain comes to understand "what a degrading thing slavery" is. Captain Manuel relates, "Had I been forced to work in the fields, like the other negroes, I might not perhaps have repined at my condition, because I would have known nothing better, and the same time believed that my condition was irremediable, and consistent with the laws of nature" (519-520). He further concludes that only "knowledge" separated the black and white race, this and that "[the whites] sometimes feared we would assert our rights, and overpower them by numbers" (520). Knowledge and the possibility of mass violence posed the greatest possible threat to institutional slavery and Captain Manuel's narrative employs both to achieve his own liberation. As Howison hints at through the crew's banter, "St. Domingo" symbolizes the inevitability and intensity of this mass violence, both for the white plantation owners and the black slaves.

First, Captain Manuel comes under the influence of "an old free negro" whose travels, particularly to places like New York, provide great stories of independence which he contrasts with "the abject sate of our race everywhere else"(520). Moved by the possibility of a better existence, Captain Manuel learns to read and write through instruction by the "old negro" and is often caught reading the New York Post in his Master's bedroom. At such times, he is severely punished: "'If you ever look at a printed paper again, I'll put out your eyes with a red-hot poker" (520). Realizing that whites were well aware of the threat posed by the slave's ability to read, Captain Manuel exclaims, "'What excuse is there for the oppressor, when he is conscious of being guilty of oppression!'" (520).

Throughout his tale, Captain Manuel emphasizes the extreme conditions of slavery in South Carolina and uses this state to embody the violence perpetrated on the slave's body by white citizens. He relates that while serving his Master and guests,

> [A]nd listening to their disgusting opinions, I have [often] been called forward by one of them, and struck severely on the face, for some trivial mistake I committed in serving him with food or wine. In South Carolina, the guests do not hesitate to chastise their entertainer's servants, whenever they feel inclined; and a party of white people there, often make the cursing and beating of the slaves in attendance their chief employment during dinner. (520)

But it is a personal betrayal which leads ultimately to Captain Manuel's freedom. He falls in love with a slave on a neighboring plantation, one in which it so happens his Master's daughter also has an intimate connection. She enlists Manuel to relay love letters for them, promising to cover for his absence should her father (his Master) discover it. Upon returning from one such errand, he is confronted with his Master's rage, but "Miss Sexton" denies any hand in his travels between plantations and accuses him of lying about her involvement. As a result, an exchange takes place in which Manuel strikes his Master. Mr. Sexton cries "'Struck by a slave! Struck by a slave!—It is impossible! Am I dreaming?—Does god Almighty really permit this?—A slave! A black! A negro!—Strike me—a noble Carolinian! Is there a law to punish this? Law—nonsense—Tortures, death, eternal curses!" (522). Manuel is thrown into a dark cell and has his right hand cut off as punishment for striking his Master. To this point, Captain Manuel's tale fits neatly within the generic markers of Victorian sentimentalism and nineteenth-century slave narratives: the reader feels sympathy for the plight of the oppressed slave through his experience of random violence, personal loss of love, and betrayal of a mutual, social contract whereby the mistress and the slave are aligned in subversion of the patriarchal authority of the Master.[242] But unlike more

[242] Jane Tompkins writes of Victorian sentimentalism in relation to the persistent misreading of little Eva's death in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) as nothing "but a sob story" when in fact, she argues,

traditional sentimental novels, like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, redemption for Captain Manuel does not come through death or God, but rather, through violent revenge. Moreover, the sentimental tale is framed by gothic features of mutiny, a horrifying and unknown future, violent slaves, and perhaps most indicative, its setting on a ship. Howison's inter-mixing of generic conventions announces the tale's participation in a gothic tradition but also complicates its critical placement. The deployment of two sentimental incidents (the second features later in the story) within a gothic structure forces reader's to interrogate the relationship between the two genres and the cultural work each is meant to perform.

Integral to the temporal structure of the story, however, the moment in which Captain Manuel has his hand cut off provides a threshold whereby the sentimental crosses into the gothic. The violence of slavery is teleological: Captain Manuel exclaims, "'Oh! That every negro in the Southern States would risk the loss of his right hand by doing what I have done!" (522). Not only, then, are the actions of the Captain and his slave-crew justifiable on the basis of violent oppression, but also desirable: Captain Manuel calls forth more of his black compatriots, especially those in the Southern States, to overcome their fear of bodily harm and rise up against their Masters. He imagines a world in which all black slaves "would risk" themselves in such a way, and of course, there existed already in the Atlantic World such a beacon of collective revolt and individual sacrifice in the Haitian Revolution.

Captain Manuel contrasts his own position with that of his crew; in the conclusion of his story of violent liberation, gained ultimately by burning his Master's house down, the Captain chastises his crew for imagining themselves as his equal: "I would consider it an insult to be classed with such desperados" (523). The Captain's attempt to align himself with the white doctor is met only with silence—"I did not venture to make many comments

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Stowe uses a sentimental trope to indict slavery and reveal death to be the ultimate act of heroism. In *Sensational Designs*, 127. "Sentimental Power"122-147.

upon his story, and we sat in silence"—an act which suggests the narrator's refusal to sympathize with the plight of the Captain (523). The pairing of these two gestures—the Captain's claim for distinction from that of his crew and the narrator's silence—illustrates the interpretive disjuncture which foreshadows the tale's resolution. Despite the doctor's material dependence upon the black Captain for his survival, there is never any doubt in his mind (nor the minds of Howison's nineteenth-century readers) regarding their relative positions in society. The micro sociopolitical world of the ship is one in which subject positions can be tested, however, within the very clear ideological and juridical boundaries of the nation, no such flexibility is allowed. The narrator's passive observance, thus, relegates the Captain's tale to that of mere performance rather than structural or stable sociopolitical intervention. Howison's ingenious manipulation of genre—the sentimental within the gothic—provides the ideal vehicle through which to critique the ideology of slavery. The only source of redemption in the tale comes through slave violence, the means through which—if only for a moment—the black slave in the southern states achieves equal status with his white Master.[243]

My understanding of how ships function in Howison, Poe, and Melville relies in part on Paul Gilroy's early articulation of the theoretical possibilities made available through such an interpretive shift. He writes:

> The image of the ship—a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion—is especially important for historical and theoretical reasons…[they] immediately focus attention on the middle passage, on the various projects for redemptive return to an African homeland, on the circulation of ideas and activism as well the movement of key cultural and political artifacts: tracts, books, gramophone records, and choirs. (*The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* 4)

[243] See Gilroy's chapter from *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, "The Black Atlantic as a Counterculture of Modernity." 1-40; see also Maggie Montesinos Sale's *The Slumbering Volcano: American Slave Ship Revoluts and the Production of Rebellious Masculinity*. 28, 58-59.

Howison and Melville, much more so than Poe, stage the possibility of a "redemptive return to an African homeland," but each ultimately argues for the impossibility of such a return. As I suggest in Chapter 1, the historiography of the slave is one of "violence and idealism" and remains a story central to "narratives of citizenship and modernity" (Chakrabarty 45). The micro-cultural setting of the ship powerfully resists neat placement within any national narrative and as such provides the ideal space within which to rehearse the relationship between violence, idealism, and a redemptive return to Africa. Howison's "The Florida Pirate" attends to the historiography of slave violence within an Atlantic World frame and explicitly connects it to slavery in the early republic. And as is often the case in narratives of slavery throughout the Atlantic world between 1789-1855, Saint-Domingue figures as the key symbolic representation of both a redemptive return for black slaves, and of violent horror and political upheaval which waits just over the horizon should slavery continue unchecked within the early republic.

Howison's reference to "St. Domingo" takes place within the context of a conversation amongst the crew, a move which forecloses both its redemptive and violent possibilities. And again, the conversation is overheard by the passive and silent witness, the white narrator. In relaying a tale of a fellow slave who recently had "been hanged in Baltimore" two of the crew (Mendez and Mark) discuss the source of provocation for such a punishment. One asks, "'Did he look sulky at his master, break a wine-glass, or bring him a knife when he wanted a fork?'" But the reason for his execution, it turns out, is stealing petty cash and rum from a docked ship in port, and thus he is found guilty of "piracy." The first crew-member concludes, "'We negers have a pretty time of it. They won't let us live by land or by water. I wonder if we could please our masters by flying in the air?'" (524). The question posed is simultaneously comedic and astute, recognizing as it does the increasingly

limited ideological and topographical space in which a black man can survive (much less thrive) apart from chattel slavery. Mendez wonders aloud why "'the Yankees don't know better than to hang us for being pirates. They can't suppose that we'll be so soft *now* as to let away the people who fall into our hands, and so give them a chance of informing against us. I'll bet you we'll kill five whites for every negro that is hanged" (524 Howison's emphasis). Howison, through the self-conscious and ironic dialog between the crew-members, seems to suggest that black collectivity is impotent against white hegemony, and that this in turn produces a desire to escape the slave system altogether. For the crew, then, Saint-Domingue as a nation where rebellious slaves become full citizens functions as a utopia. Mark concludes, "'Faith, I'm getting tired of a sea-life. If I could but scrape together four hundred dollars, I would give up cruising [sic], and go to St. Domingo"' (524). Mendez as the realistic counterpart to Mark's dreaming points out that he could have cashed in on the bounty placed on his own head in Charleston, a conversation which ends with the image of Mark's decapitated body. The promised-land of "St. Domingo" as a nation of liberty and peace for American blacks, then, is constructed as unlikely as the possibility of rebel slaves "flying in the air." It is only within the economy of slavery that four hundred dollars could be acquired—only the slave's body could ever provide enough capital to live the good life as a free, black citizen in the first, black nation state of Haiti. Howison never allows the tension between Saint-Dominuge as a redemptive return to Africa and the violence of slavery in the Southern states of the new republic slip out of view: only sacrifice of life in order to circulate in the Atlantic world slave economy would allow for such a native return to the utopist free-black nation state of Haiti.

The fictional tale told of Saint-Domingue as a genuine harbinger of future violence or welcoming homeland is, perhaps, Howison's most powerful contribution to the trans-

Atlantic romantic tale and the development of American gothicism. By invoking "St. Domingo" in the context of a failed insurrectionary attempt to remain free, through the mouths of the inferior crew, Howison makes transparent just how symbolic, not actual, is the threat of replicating the West Indian slave revolt in the very different conditions of plantation slavery in the southern states. Howison reveals the power of its imaginative function as both horrifying specter and utopia for black slaves. Thus, "The Florida Pirate" is an early and remarkable example of the joint constitutive threads of British romanticism and the slave revolution in Haiti for a new world Gothicism.

As I have argued in each previous chapter, a gothic effect is most often achieved through a pairing, one which is never completely sealed over. The gap between the two sides of the pair provides enough ambiguity to create anxiety and in the space of this disjuncture the writer makes use of the most horrific cultural crises of the moment. From Walpole, Lewis, and Godwin to each of the American writers studied in this dissertation, the fundamentally ambivalent form of the gothic provides the ideal space within which to highlight, complicate, or repress the most pressing cultural and political catastrophes. While scholarship on the gothic has tended to understand this doubling in terms of the doppelganger or the uncanny, gothic doubling, I want to suggest, works more like genetic code: each element in the pair seems to also suggest another pairing and so on, until the entire story is taken up by this seemingly endless stream of pairs, while the gaps between them and the choice between combinations work to befuddle and terrify the reader. In short, the gothic requires its readers to make choices, but these choices only lead to more choices, never resolution. Despite this lack of resolution, the agency granted to readers as implied by the gothic marks the genre as vitally bound up with the new anxieties of the early

republic insofar its citizens are faced with both unprecedented levels of access to and participation with their government and the attending stakes of that participation.

Howison's tale is no exception to this rule: the doublings in "The Florida Pirate," are multiple and work to complicate the reader's ability to decode it possible meanings. And as I have suggested, the possible combinations and pairs are seemingly endless: Master and slave, Africa and America, white and black, Captain and crew, banter and silence, aggressor and victim, life and death, and writer and reader, to name but the most obvious. As is the case in *The Confessions of Nat Turner* in the tension between Thomas Gray and Nat Turner's threads, the gothic effect of "The Florida Pirate" is most apparent in the juxtaposition of the white narrator and the black Captain Manuel. For example, when one morning the *Esperanza* views an oncoming vessel and prepares itself for battle, the narrator reflects on his position:

> I alone remained unoccupied and unattended to amidst the general activity. The quiescent and monotonous life I had led since I came on board the schooner had lulled me into a forgetfulness of my real situation, all the horror of which now burst upon my mind, with appalling force. I had outlawed myself from society. I was surrounded with wretches, with whom I could have no community of feeling. I was soon to become, as it were, an accomplice in the work of rapine and bloodshed. We might, perhaps, be overpowered by those whom we proposed to attack, and I should be seized and classed with pirates. There was no one to testify my innocence, to prove that I had no connection with the guilty, or to save me from an ignominious death. (525)

This passage is striking in some important ways: first, it foregrounds the gothic by compelling the reader to interpret all subsequent action in the story through "all the horror" which the "real situation" requires. Equally remarkable is the narrator's unabashed disavowal of any similarity between the Captain, the crew, and himself which forestalls any "community of feeling" which might connect them to each other. Despite the narrator's utter dependence upon the Captain and his crew of the *Esperanza* for his survival, the narrator rejects sympathetic identification and instead focuses on how his presence on the

pirate ship might be perceived by the civilization of which he remains a member. He describes his circumstances within legal discourse, fearing his indictment as an "accomplice," most concerned over who might "testify" to his innocence. Howison, thus, strips the early sentimentalism illustrated by Captain Manuel's historical narrative of its power, and raises instead the specter of violence and horror from which the narrator feels threatened. The narrator's path from a desperate and grateful "doctor" at the mercy of the Captain and his crew, to the silent witness to the horrors of slavery, and finally to imaginary victim of piracy and violence, cleverly impeaches his denial of and participation in the slave economy. Moreover, Howison suggests that both the denial and the complicity are too often erased *by* narrative. The narrator's collusion in the horror is revealed most in the second of the sentimental scenes and in the conclusion of Howison's tale.

To briefly sum up, the vessel overtaken by Captain Manuel and his crew in order to pillage its supplies becomes the vehicle through which Howison brings together the parallel plots, both sentimental and gothic. Here, the *Esperanza* is faced with a white woman and her father, accompanied by a "mullato woman." The daughter, whose name we later discover is Elizabeth, appears wearing a "beautiful Indian shawl," which one of Manuel's crew promptly removes from her body. This action is perceived as a sexual threat by her father and serves to represent a violation of the female body, the most pure symbol of white civilization in the tale, until the end. The violation against his daughter induces the father to attack, and as a result, he is stabbed and later dies onboard the *Esperanza*. Upon discovering the actions of his wayward crewmember, Captain Manuel "disciplines" by shooting the man, who promptly dies. These events are important because they provide the catalyst which turns Captain Manuel's crew to mutiny: perceived as overly sympathetic to the white passengers—a perception reinforced when the Captain agrees not only to rescue the entire crew of the

pillaged vessel but also to allow most of them to leave in *Esperanza* boats while harboring Elizabeth and her father—the crew threaten and taunt the Captain. Eventually, the rescued crew from the looted vessel returns in an "American man-of-war" in order to capture the *Esperanza*. This causes the crew initially to attack Captain Manuel, but when he urges them to show "real spirit," they unite in collective resistance against the American vessel. All to no avail: Captain Manuel and his crew are tried within weeks of their arrival back in Charleston and all are sentenced to death. The narrator, while imprisoned briefly and questioned, is ultimately released and declared innocent. The story ends with the death of Captain Manuel and the marriage of the narrator and Elizabeth, thus their "mutual happiness was soon as great as [their] individual misery had been, when fate first brought [them] together" (531). Captain Manuel's rejection of his crew in favor of an alliance with both the narrator and the two white passengers has devastating consequences for all of the black pirates. In the end, the tale performs a stunning critique not simply of slavery, but specifically of slavery as it is practiced in the southern states.

Within a year of its 1821 publication in *Blackwood's*, New Hampshire printer Sylvester T. Goss advertised his own edition of the story as the *Life and Adventures of Manuel, the Florida Pirate*. The next year saw the publication of three separate editions, published by a New York printer, under the title *The Florida Pirate or An Account of a Cruise in the Schooner Esparanza* in 1823. Two new editions were published in 1828, again in New York, followed by its final 1834 edition by two Pittsburgh printers, under the title *The Florida Pirate*. Clearly, the tale resonated with its nineteenth-century American readership so much so that printers were able to compete for their attention by marketing slightly different representations of the tale on the literary market. In total, "The Florida Pirate" went through nine separate editions on both sides of the Atlantic. There are, no doubt, several reasons for its popularity: for one,

Howison's tale mimics the intensely popular historical novel by Walter Scott, *Waverly* (1814). Scott's hero is Waverly, who unlike Scottish Highlander Fergus with whom he fights for the Jacobite cause and who is ultimately executed for his actions, escapes sanction by society. Howison, on the other hand, writes "The Florida Pirate"—the black rebel slave turned pirate Captain is the hero of this tale, even while he ultimately suffers imprisonment and death. As Claire Lamont suggests in her "Introduction" to Scott's novel, we fairly "despise Waverly with his paintings and his furniture. He has done a lot of forgetting," she writes, "which we all have to do to go on living, but he has done it too quickly and easily for his character to retain our respect" (xiv).[244] The white narrator of Howison's tale too does a lot of forgetting, a fact Howison accentuates through Captain Manuel's final gesture to the narrator.

In the conclusion of "The Florida Pirate," the narrator claims, "I was filled with sorrow when I heard that Manuel was condemned to death, aware that he deserved a better fate" (530). Compelled to visit him in jail, the narrator is received warmly. Captain Manuel says, "'Ah, is it you, sir?...you are the person I most wished to see. How kind it is in your to visit a poor negro!...I am glad to be treated as a rational creature by at least one white man'"(531). The repetition of the Captain's self-reference as "a poor negro," the first of which takes place when the narrator requests to board the *Esperanza*, makes clear not only the sameness of his position throughout the story, but also the Captain's awareness of it. As in Scott's novel evidenced by Waverly fighting alongside Fergus, if there is any redemptive feature of the narrator, it is through acknowledging the Captain as a "rational creature." When the narrator tells him that he does not deserve to die, the Captain responds: "Oh, perhaps not…but law—law—law, you know—However, 'tis better I should. I had a weary

[244] Sir Walter Scott, *Waverly; or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since.* Ed, Claire Lamont. Oxford UP: 1986. "Introduction" vii-xx.

life of it. I was chased from the land, and took refuge upon the sea; but, notwithstanding that, I could not escape the blood-hounds of the Southern States of America"(531). Captain Manuel's stress on the "law" paired with his indictment of the "blood-hounds" in the south highlights the relationship between the institution of slavery as law and the violence perpetrated by white, southern slaveholders onto black subjects. By shifting Scott's formula, making the black slave the hero rather than the narrator, Howison's story offers a powerful critique of slavery throughout the Atlantic world but specifically as it is practiced in the early republic. Unlike for Waverly, the narrator's complicity in the violent system is fleshed out for readers. Captain Manuel gives the narrator a letter to bring to his friend "Gustavus H—, [to] accept what he gives you in return, as a remembrance of me" (531). Howison's use of "Gustavus H" suggests the earlier slave narrative of Gustavus Vassa, or Olaudah Equiano, who records his experiences as a slave in South Carolina and the West Indies in *Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa the African* (1789). What "Gustavas H" gives the narrator, we discover, is a bag of "doubloons" or Spanish gold coins, which allows the narrator to marry Elizabeth and "return to [his] native country" (531). Piracy and slavery, thus, are inextricably linked through the exchange of money, one from which the narrator benefits and ultimately enforces through his alliance with Elizabeth, departure from the southern states, and his re-entry into white civilization.

It seems remarkable, then, given its publication in the prominent *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* and its thematic focus on race, slavery, and piracy, that only one scholarly treatment of "The Florida Pirate[245] is in print. Here, Daniel Williams' "Refuge Upon the Sea," argues that while piracy and its narratives were perceived to be in critical remission

[245] Daniel Williams, "Refuge Upon the Sea: Captivity and Liberty in The Florida Pirate." *Early American Literature*, 2001; 36 (1): 71-88.

since the beheading of Blackbeard in 1718, in reality they were a far greater threat throughout the nineteenth century. He sites that between 1790 and 1815, "hundreds of American seamen were held captive in North Africa, and their plight resulted not only in a national crisis but also in a popular new literary genre, the Barbary captivity narratives" (*Early American Literature*, 36 (1), 74).[246] The popularity of the pirate narrative genre may in part be the result of the legislative link between piracy and slavery in 1820, just one year prior to the publication of Howison's tale. In addition, the ongoing importation of African slaves even after the 1807 law which made such activity illegal in the early republic, must have contributed to the overwhelming sense that the sea and its inhabitants could only be pirates. The eruption of debates over westward expansion of slavery during the Missouri Compromise in 1819 created a level of antagonism over the institution heretofore not experienced, so much so that talk of Civil War ensued. Subsequent legislation was introduced by Congress which would allow the executive branch to send armed naval ships to Africa in an attempt to forestall the transportation of human cargo back to America. Amidst the swirling Missouri crisis and international attempts to enforce the cessation of slave trading, the Congress made official the connection between slavery and piracy in its decree that from 1820 forward, any slave trading would be defined as an act of piracy and be punished accordingly.[247] Nevertheless, Williams' claim that "The Florida Pirate' was used to close the distance between politics and printing presses in the public sphere" lacks critical teeth. (*EAL*, Vol 36, Num 1, 72). What Howison did achieve, however, consciously or not, was to bring the British gothic tale and its *Blackwood's* readership into an early republican

[246] See also Paul Baepler's "The Barbary Captivity Narrative in Early America." *Early American Literature*, 1995; 30 (2): 95-120.

[247] See Williams, 73-74.

context, one in which southern slave violence, the Atlantic world, and "St. Domingo" would resonate.

Piracy like slave trading was quite difficult to trace much less enforce as criminal. According to *Wheaton's Elements of International Law*, piracy is defined as "the offense of depredating on the seas without being authorized by any sovereign States, or with commissions from different sovereigns at war with each other" (113).[248] As Maggie Montesinos Sale suggests in her examination of the "Amistad Affair" (1839), "pirates are outlaws not only, and perhaps not even primarily, because they attack and plunder ships, but because they do not recognize a single national affiliation" (*The Slumbering Volcano* 99). Operating outside of any one nation's ideological and juridical boundaries, rebel slaves found in piracy not only the means for survival but also a quasi-utopian world whereby the black man had as much possibility of becoming the Captain as the white man. The shifting and fluid power structure aboard the ship, then, utterly defies race and class hierarchy, one strictly policed within the borders of the nation-state in the early republic.[249] There is, however, a striking disjuncture between the definition of piracy and how Howison deploys it in his gothic tale. The law makes criminal the slave-trade which would seem to jeopardize white slave holders, but the image of piracy as Howison links it to slavery is of the *black* rebel slave, not the white trader. Howison's exploitation of recent legislation which attempted to connect slave-trade to piracy highlights its potential to reinforce the institution, one dependent upon the Atlantic slave trade, by policing what had previously remained beyond

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[248] See also Maggie Montesinos Sale's *The Slumbering Volcano: American Slave ship Revolts and the Production of Rebellious Masculinity*. 99-100.

[249] As Sale argues, the ship is a locus of "rebellious masculinity" and does serve to reinforce traditional conceptions of gender. Each of the author's I focus on in this chapter illustrate the limited function of women and femininity on board the ship, and in the case of Poe and Melville, there is no place for women or femininity other than through feminized male figures.

the control of the nation: black slaves traveling on ships throughout the Atlantic world. Although attempts were made throughout the southern states to delineate which black people could enter and remain in the early republic, legislation criminalizing the waters would have far-extended the reach of white supremacist ideology, particularly desirable given that the black slaves in Saint-Domingue illustrated their ability to outwit their white masters.

At stake in the slip between criminalization of the white slaver trader and the black rebel slave, beyond the quite obviously literal threat to the life of the black "pirate" on the sea, is control over what Mark Simpson names "the scene of traffic," one implicitly linked to slave violence and insurrection. [250] Through the clever manipulation of slave trading and the black pirate, Howison's "The Florida Pirate" challenges readers to comprehend "mobility not as a naturally occurring phenomenon but much more rigorously as a mode of social contest decisive in the manufacture of subjectivity and the determination of belonging" (xiii). Simpson refers to this as the "politics of mobility" by which he means "the contestatory processes that produce different forms of movement, and that invest these forms with social value, cultural purchase, and discriminatory power" (xiii-xiv).[251] As I have suggested, and which both Gilroy and C.L.R. James articulate convincingly, the ship becomes the most useful micro-history through which to explore the different investments at stake in the Atlantic slave trade. James' suggestion that Melville's intention in *Moby Dick* is to make the crew the hero of the story rather than Captain Ahab seems to parallel to some extent Howison's attempt at making the rebel slave, rather than the narrator, the hero of "The

[250] Mark Simpson, *Trafficking Subjects: The Politics of Mobility in Nineteenth-Century America.* University of Minnesota Press, 2005.

[251] See also Doreen Massey's "A Global Sense of Place," in her book *Place, Space, and Gender.* Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994.

Florida Pirate."[252] But what happens when the hero is both the violent rebel slave and the Captain of the ship? In this slip, Howison's pirate hero begins to resemble the violent rebel slave turned General of the revolution in Saint-Domingue, Toussaint L'Ouverture.

Howison's tale of a black rebel slave turned pirate is a remarkable example of how the British gothic is influenced, thematically and thus formally, once it travels across the Atlantic to the early republic. In it, we find the specter of slave violence at odds with the civilizing force of Victorian domesticity and sentimentalism.[253] Here too we find the direct engagement with "St. Domingo" a concrete nation state wherein rebel slaves could be free citizens. More powerful, however, is Howison's implication that the specter of Haiti functions as an *imaginary* threat and an *imaginary* refuge, horror for white slaveholders, but redemptive for black slaves and abolitionists like Frederick Douglass and William Wells Brown in the second half of the nineteenth century.[254] That is, the specter of Haiti for Howison seems more spectral than actual; this haunting becomes a feature of his later and more recognizably gothic "tales of terror" as featured in his *Tales From the Colonies* (1830).

The gothic tales of Edgar Allan Poe and Herman Melville, however, make no attempt to hide their engagement with a larger history, and in the case of Poe's *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, this history is structured as meta-fictional with himself as the editor of Pym's travel narratives. The magazine form, such as *Blackwood's* where Howison

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[252] See *Mariners, Renegades & Castaways: The Story of Herman Melville and the World We Live In.* Originally published by C.L.R. James in New York, 1953. This edition edited by Donald Pease is published by University Press of New England, Dartmouth College, 2001.

[253] In Fiedler's first chapter, he offers that "Sentimentalism yields quickly to the full Romantic revolt," which is a useful way of describing what Howison's tale charts. In *Love and Death in the American Novel*, 34.

[254] See William Wells Brown's "The History of the Haitian Revolution." (1855), in *Pamphlets of Protest.* Eds Richard Newman, Patrick Rael, Phillip Lapsansky. 240-253 and Frederick Douglass' "Haiti and the Haitian People: An Address Delivered in Chicago, Illinois, on 2 January 1893," in *Papers*, 5:552. See also Robert S. Levine's *Martin Delany Frederick Douglass And the Politics of Representative Identity.* University of North Carolina Press, 1997. "Epilogue"224-238.

and later Poe published extensively, is ideally suited for "tales of terror" but also for the pastiche of generic forms of both writers. The magazine insured too that such tales would be met with a wide and diverse readership. Finally, the magazine form seems to rely upon in some measure its explicit engagement with its contemporary political and cultural subject matter. In contrast, in Poe and Melville and particularly the tales I focus on here—*The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* and *Benito Cereno*—we find a thoroughly modern gothic, one in which the structural apparatus is revealed while the political and cultural anxiety which make it potent is repressed. And it is to these authors I turn as my final instantiation of how the specter of Haiti gives rise to the American gothic tale.

Edgar Allan Poe, like Howison, became most admired for his "tales of terror" or what Poe referred to as *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* (1840); but his role as editor of the *Southern Monthly Messenger* and later of *Graham's* did at least as much to influence the literary scene of the mid-nineteenth century on both sides of the Atlantic. "*'Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, more than any of the other foreign periodicals intensely interested" Poe. (qtd. in *Poe and The British Magazine Tradition* 16).[255] He was an avid reader of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* and labored to recreate its popularity and "personality" in America. In his early years of writing, Poe seems to have been in agreement with Samuel Coleridge, who wrote in an 1832 letter to its editor, William Blackwood, that "*'Blackwood's Magazine*' is an unprecedented Phenomenon in the world of letters," praising its "irony, variety, and 'sustained wisdom'," (*Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* vi 912).[256] Only later, when he writes his scathing satire of the literary industry in general and the magazine tradition in

[255] In Michael Allen's foundational study of Poe and his particular affection for *Blackwood's*, he here cites K.L. Daughrity's 1930 "Notes, Poe and *Blackwood's*," *American Literature*, II. 289.

[256] See also the "Introduction" of *Tales of Terror From Blackwood's Magazine*, written and edited by Robert Morrison and Chris Baldick. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995. viii-xxiii.

particular, "How To Write a Blackwood's Article" (1838), does Poe begin to echo the sentiments of Leigh Hunt: "A man who does not contribute his quota of grim stories now-a-days seems hardly to be free of the republic of letters. He is bound to wear a death's head, as part of his insignia. If he does not frighten every body, he is nobody" ("A Tale for a Chimney Corner," *The Indicator*, 10, 73).[257]

Following the popularity of the gothic tale beginning in the late eighteenth century, its peak in 1795 at the height of revolutionary violence and widespread fear of foreign invasion, racial violence, and conspiracy theories, the "tales of terror" seemed to writers like Poe and Hunt an unnecessary burden of a prior history which should be discarded. The popularity of the genre, as Poe suggests in "How To Write a *Blackwood's* Article," itself suggests a lack of literary taste, one which by the late 1830s served to oppress Poe's aim to be a serious literary figure. As Michael Allen argues, however, in *Poe and the British Magazine Tradition*, Poe simultaneously wrote his tales of terror patterned upon the Blackwoodian tale alongside his burlesques and satire, including "Loss of Breath" (1832) and "The Predicament" (1838) which expressed "very critical attitudes to the same fiction" (114). Poe was acutely aware of this duality as evidenced by his 1835 attempt to convince T. W. White, the editor of the *Southern Literary Messenger*, that publishing his fiction would catapult the journal into celebrity: "You ask me in what does this nature consist? In the ludicrous heightened into the grotesque: the fearful coloured into the horrible: the witty exaggerated into the burlesque: the singular wrought out into the strange and mystical" (qtd. in Allen 30). The playfulness expressed by the "ludicrous" and the "witty" is, perhaps, the most notable difference between the gothic sensibility of Charles Brockden Brown's novels, the trial reports and conspiracy narratives of Prosser, Vesey, and Turner, the gravity of Cobbett's

[257] Leigh Hunt's statement appears as the epigraph to Morrison and Baldick's "Introduction."

barbs in his political pamphlets and editorials, and Poe's work. In each of the former cases, there is a complete lack of humor and quickness; instead, we find ponderous and philosophical tracts that prod steadily forward. The quickness comes through sensation and horror rather than wit. But modeling his fiction on *Blackwood's*, which commonly featured satire, political dogma, and gothic tales, Poe's tales grappled with serious contemporary political and philosophical issues in a style much more inviting to the growing middle-class reader than say *Wieland; or the Transformation, An American Tale.*[258]

Poe also grasped the power and immediacy of the magazine form, an immediacy which made it so popular in Britain and which he sought to replicate through his own writing. While some critics of Poe have suggested that his generic, philosophic, and stylistic inconsistencies were the expected by-product of journalistic prose on the one hand and serious financial constraints on the other, I am more inclined to agree with critics like Allen who offer that Poe's style was less the result of journalistic deadline and more likely a conscious formal choice. That Poe's fiction lacked generic conventions which neatly fit into any one category highlights his position as an early American writer who sought to mimic a British literary tradition. In other words, his work provides a modern instance of this translation across the Atlantic, one that gets altered by the specific social, political, and literary conditions of the still young nation. And without question, the mode of fiction he principally produced most nearly resembles the gothic tale.

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[258] Allen writes of *Blackwood's* that its success depended at least in part on "an ethos which represents something of the inner desires of an audience and their idea of themselves, an ethos which draws them together into an imagined intimacy with the writers of the magazine, assimilating writers and readers to a common image and setting them apart from the uninitiated" (22). Indeed, Poe seems to draw on this same ethos; however he also, as I will argue, is keenly aware of the "style" so important to the "impersonality of the public text" in the nineteenth century. "Style," continues Jon Klancher, "becomes a sign, a marker of the (always inferred) relation of the audience to the writer hidden behind the corporate text" (*The Making of English Reading Audiences, 1790-1832* 51).

There may be no more difficult and strange text in Poe's oeuvre than his only novel *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*. First issued in two installments in the *Southern Literary Messenger* in January and February of 1837, *Pym* was published in its contemporary novel form in 1838 by *Harper's*. The novel was Poe's response to *Harper's* request for a single, longer work and for him to "lower himself a little to the ordinary comprehension of the generality of readers" (Meyers, "Introduction" viv).[259] The result was *Pym*. It seems unlikely that the novel was one "the generality of readers" would comprehend—in it, the reader is faced with disaster after horrific disaster, grotesque and confusing imagery, revolt and mutiny, cannibalism, drowning, ships manned by the dead, captivity, hieroglyphs, and a final "white" abyss. The story lacks a conclusion in any conventional sense (it drops off without relaying how or if Pym survives); instead, Poe leaves Pym and the reader stranded in the "Southern Ocean" facing an unknown hole and equally unknown future.[260] Perhaps most confusing for Poe's contemporary readers, however, is the novel's meta-fictional structure: the tale is framed as if A.G. Pym were a real man, one whose travels struck a "gentlemen" and "lately editor of the *Southern Literary Messenger*…Mr. Poe" as marvelous and who convinced Pym that the narrative's "uncouthness, if there were any, would give it all the better chance of being received as truth" (*Preface* 4). Pym continues to explain that the two initial installments of his tale were the product of Mr. Poe: Pym encourages Poe to "draw up, in his own words, a narrative of the earlier portion of my adventures, from facts afforded by myself, publishing it in the *Southern Messenger* under the *garb of fiction*" (*Preface* 4, his emphasis). This clever "ruse" thus established the narrative proceeds as if it were an

[259] All citations from Poe's novel come from the Modern Library edition, 2002, with an introduction by Jeffrey Meyers and notes by Stephen Rachman.

[260] The note to this reference explains that Poe referred to the United States Exploring Expedition of 1838-42, led by Charles Wilkes, and was also known as the Wilkes Expedition. In it, Americans were sent to the Pacific Ocean and the South Seas to aid "commerce and navigation" and to "extend the bounds of science and promote knowledge" (Poe 190).

autobiographical travel narrative of adventure and horror in the Pacific Ocean. And Pym even announces that the reader will have no problem knowing where Mr. Poe's writing ceases and his own picks up, as the "difference in point of style will be readily perceived" (*Preface* 5). But of course, the difference in style was not detected, which became the first focal point for negative reviews, producing as it did confusion and anger in the novel's contemporary critical responses.

One of the harshest reviews came from William Burton, publisher of *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine* and future employer of Poe, who vilified the novel for its "rapid succession of improbabilities" and concluded that "a more impudent attempt at humbugging the public has never been exercised….Arthur Gordon Pym puts forth a series of travels outraging possibility, and coolly requires his insulted readers to believe his account…we regret to find Mr. Poe's name in connexion [sic] with such a mass of ignorance and affrontery [sic]" (qtd. in Meyers, xiii-xiv). In this same review, Burton takes aim at Poe's brand of harsh critique, which he performs in imitation of the criticism known as "personalities" made famous by John Wilson and J.G. Lockhart in the pages of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 1817-1834. Here, Wilson and Lockhart regularly dished out a "highly marketable blend of slander, sensationalism, erudition, buffoonery, and truculent High Toryism" (Morrison and Baldick).

But despite Poe's conscious emulation of the British magazine and its uniquely playful, yet harsh review style, American critics of Poe seemed determined to re-cast his style, fictional and critical, as "savage" and a "Tommy Hawk."[261] As critic Leon Jackson

[261] "Mr. Tommy Hawk" is a character from Poe's own semi-autobiographical satire "The Literary Life of Thingum Bob, Esq.," *Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. Thomas Olive Mabbott (Cambridge: Harvard UP, Belknap Press, 1978), 3:1140. In it, Tommy Hawk is engaged in "scalping, brow-beating and otherwise using-up" the authors whose work he reviews.

argues, "Poe's (American) critical compatriots in the mid-1830s did have a definite cultural agenda in mind: they were implicitly engaged in a debate over the politics of national identity, casting Poe, for better or worse, as the antithesis of everything associated with English refinement" ("Poe, Literary Nationalism, and 'Indianation'", *ESQ*, Vol48, 2002, 97-133). Jackson suggests that the attempt to disassociate Poe from the British magazine tradition through metaphors of violence at the hands of Native Americans functioned paradoxically, as critics worked to remove the stain of Blackwoodian "personality" criticism through an equally derogatory, though native, assignation. We find this strange tension in the rest of Burton's review of *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* and as such, is worth quoting at length:

> An Indian warrior pursuing a flying tory, seized his foe by the tail of his peruke, and drew his scalping knife for the purpose of consummating his victory, but the artificial head-covering of the British soldier came off in the struggle, and the bald-headed owner ran away unhurt, leaving the surprised Indian in possession of the easily acquired trophy. After gazing at the singular and apparently unnatural formation, he dashed it to the ground in disdain, and quietly exclaimed "a d___d lie!" We find ourselves in the same predicament with the volume before us; we imagined…that we had met a proper subject for our critical scalping knife—but a steady perusal of the whole book compelled us to throw it away in contempt, with an exclamation very similar to the natural phrase of the Indian. (*Burton's Gentlemen's Magazine 3*, September 1838, 210-211)[262]

As Jackson points out, the exploitation of the "Native…connoted both the familiar and the alien, the noble and the ignoble" (109) and here, Burton skillfully deployed its ambiguity to take down both Poe and his novel, *Pym*. Two aspects of this review are striking: first, the image of the Native pursuing a "flying tory" that turns out to be one only in disguise; and second, that Poe's novel would be—could be—dismissed on the grounds of its hoax. Little of Poe's work could be considered mimetic or within the generic bounds of realism, for example, or to have ever *not* depended upon the shifting appearances and ambiguity of

[262] Reprinted in *Edgar Allan Poe: The Critical Heritage*, ed. I.M. Walker (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), 95-96.

realty. But in *Pym*, not only do appearances shift, but nineteenth-century American readers' conception of history, the mythological time of American nationhood, like the borders of the nation, is stretched to its outer limits. Poe's novel moves beyond his earlier gothic tales, employing narrative strategies which far more resemble the gothic romances of Mathew Lewis, William Godwin, and Charles Brockden Brown than anything he published prior to or after *Pym*. The novel challenged even Poe's own sense of the gothic; he referred to it as a "very silly book" (Meyers xiii).

I turn to Jackson's astute and admittedly "tortured" literary genealogy of the critic as "Literary Mohawk" to highlight the position of the Native American in the American gothic.[263] While images of the Indian circulate in and around the genre, it is *not* the engine which drives the American gothic. This is in part, I want to suggest, because the Native American is so effectively managed and removed, and despite ongoing violent conflict, already relegated to the mythological past of the nation. As Susan Sheckel has shown, the "War of 1812 marked a turning point in the U.S. attitudes toward American Indians…it became difficult…to imagine Indians uniting (as they had when they formed an alliance with the British) to pose a serious military or political threat to the United States" (*The Insistence of the Indian* 4).[264] Even so, the Native American could have posed a significant *imaginary* threat were it not for the catastrophic revolutionary violence in France and in Saint-Domingue, and on a smaller scale but no less violent, the insurrections throughout the Caribbean. These revolutions occupied an overwhelming presence throughout nineteenth-century print culture and thus also the attention of early Americans. This threat, as I have argued throughout,

[263] Though it doesn't belong here, Jackson's trace of the "Native" and "scalping" as metaphors for literary criticism is dazzling and worth looking at as he illustrates its origin in Britain and the ridiculous attempts by American critics to reinvent the wheel. 108-109.

[264] See Chapter 1, "The 'Indian Problem' And The Question of National Identity" where Sheckel argues that nineteenth-century American identity was constructed largely against the question of how to handle Native Americans. 3-14.

posed limitless possibility for violence in the *future* of the nation, while the "Indian Problem" was already more or less neutralized, consigned and very quickly re-imagined as part of the nation's *past*.

Teresa Goddu's reads John Neal's *Logan* (1822) as an example of Neal's attempt to forge an American literary tradition by writing "a brave, hearty, original book, brimful of descriptive truth—a historical and familiar truth; crowded with real American character; alive with American peculiarities; got up after no model, however excellent; woven to no pattern, however beautiful; in imitation of nobody, however great" (*American Writers*, 205, qtd. in *American Gothic* 53). But Neal did choose a model, that of the British gothic, and in the process he "discloses that national identity is founded on the gothic" (Goddu 53). Goddu's discussion of the novel exposes the ways in which the hero Logan—a white man posing as an Indian—embodies the Anglo-American inheritance of Native American attributes necessarily achieved through colonization. Moreover, she argues, "in its excessiveness and lack of control" the novel fails to maintain any distinction between white man and Indian—"instead of policing the boundaries between Indian and American, the novel collapses them" (63). Goddu's point is to highlight how the gothic always already complicates neat national narratives through its structural and thematic excesses; however, there is another, more important effect of her critical gesture. That is, Goddu (and Neal) reveal the ways in which the Native American is already written of in terms which function to accommodate and assimilate the Indian into white colonial power. This is not anything like what we find with images of black slave violence through the antebellum period—even through images of the mulatto or in texts which revolve around miscegenation, rather than a collapse, we find parallel lines—two threads, two bloodlines, reinforced segregation through such legislation as the one-drop rule and through the violent force of plantation slavery. The obsessive

concerns over the violation of the female white body by the black male occurs *after* emancipation—prior, the black body poses the biggest threat to a white body politic through violence and collective uprising, such as the Haitian Revolution.[265]

In Poe's novel, then, it is unsurprising to find Dirk Peters, the "Indian half-breed," or as Pym calls him at first, the "hybrid," as the most loyal and fleshed out character in the novel. And while Pym often treats him as if he were his master, Peters is with Pym staring into the black abyss in the final scene.[266] Though critics like Justin Edwards, Teresa Goddu, and Leslie Fiedler each rely on a reading of Peters as either the "terror" in the novel or as evidence of the ambiguous relationship between "Indians[s] and Negro[es]," the image of Dirk Peter side-by-side with Pym suggests something far less sinister: another kind of relationship between the white Anglo-American and the Native American Indian has by the 1830s emerged, one of fraternity and collectivity, and a sense of joined destiny or fate. In short, I want to argue that in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, the Indian—despite his mixed-race presence in the tale and his early threat to Pym and Augustus—is not the problem and in *no* way functions as the engine which drives its gothic anxieties.[267] There is no doubt that Peters is described in grotesque terms—he was "short…his limbs were of the most Herculean mold…his hands, especially, were so enormously thick and broad as hardly to retain a human shape….his head was equally deformed, being an immense size,

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[265] Throughout Reconstruction and the twentieth century, many novels and stories grapple with the abject image of the while woman sexually threatened through violence by the black man—James Baldwin's *Going to Meet the Man* (1964) brilliantly dramatizes this threat and its internalization by his story set in the south during the Jim Crow Laws.

[266] See John Carlos Rowe's "Poe, Antebellum Slavery, and Modern Criticism" for a reading of how Peters functions as Pym's slave. In *Poe's Pym: Critical Explorations*. Ed. Richard Kopely. Durham NC: Duke UP, 1992. 117-138.

[267] See Teresa Goddu's chapter in *Gothic America* "The Ghost of Race: Edgar Allan Poe and the Southern Gothic" 73-93; Justin Edward's chapter in *Gothic Passages*, "Hybrid Bodies and Gothic Narratives in Poe's Pym" 3-17; and Leslie Fiedler's "The Novel in America" in *Love and Death in the American Novel*, 23-38.

with an indentation on the crown" (*Pym* 85). But Poe seems to make clear through the plot—Peters is the instrument of salvation for Pym throughout the story, for example—that his monstrous appearance masks a comrade, one whose deformities serve ultimately to protect the white protagonist, not to abuse him. Thus, Poe illustrates that fear of the Indian is already something of the nation's past; and more forebodingly, that focusing on this past serves only to veil the impending horror of the future, one in which the violent, black slave features prominently.

There are two significant aspects of Poe's novel which encourage a reading of its gothic effect in relation to the specter of black slave revolt in Haiti: the first is figured through the character of the mutinous "black cook" and the second is through the "treacherous black savages" whom Peters and Pym encounter on the island of Tsalal. In the first, Pym remains asleep by the toxic fumes of fish-oil, hidden in a "casket" below deck, where his friend Augustus has established as his bed until they could no longer see the shores of Nantucket. Here, Pym sleeps for three days and nights, which nearly kills him from lack of food and water, but ultimately saves him from the slaves' revolt and mutiny occurring at the same time up on the deck of the ship. Pym wakes to find a horrifyingly cryptic "manuscript" which he assumes comes from Augustus and later discovers is scrawled in blood. The note reads, "blood—your life depends upon lying close" (33). Through a sequence of impossible escapes from death, including a rabid dog, toxic air, lack of food and water, cramped space, and complete darkness—all made more terrifying by Augustus' indecipherable note—Pym eventually makes it out of the hold and into the fresh air and hiding place on deck where Augustus, with the help of Peters, provides for him. Pym's survival, however, is immediately threatened once more by the violent circumstances on

deck.[268] Here, "seven of the crew (among whom was the cook, a negro)" overtake the Captain and revolt (4). Described as "a perfect demon" (41), the cook "butchers" most of the crew with an axe and is unmoved by those who plead for mercy. When "an Englishman" begs for his life and is subsequently axed to death, "the poor fellow fell to the deck without a groan, and the black cook lifted him up in his arms as he would a child, and tossed him deliberately into the sea" (40). This is rapidly followed by "a scene of the most horrible butchery." Once the entire crew is standing in front of the mutineers, "the bound seamen were dragged to the gangway. Here the cook stood with an axe, striking each victim on the head as he was forced over the side of the vessel by the other mutineers" (41). Finally, with only four members remaining, one of which includes Pym's friend Augustus, a few mutineers tired from the carnage argue for their release—one which the black cook ultimately denies.

The portrait of the black cook bears a striking resemblance to the ways in which Nat Turner was described in *The Confessions of Nat Turner*. Not only does each use an axe to kill their victims—which affords a particularly gruesome display of blood and death—but each also remain utterly unmoved by the exhortations of their white victims to spare their lives. That Nat Turner's rebellion occurred in Poe's home state of Virginia and a mere seven years prior to the novel's publication suggests that Poe consciously constructed the character of the black cook as the specter of Nat Turner, a demonic figure throughout the early republic by the late 1830s. As I have illustrated throughout this dissertation, fear of slave revolt and its connections both to debates over the future of the institution and to the example of the most bloody slave revolt in history in Saint-Domingue, were to be found everywhere

[268] I want to note here that Pym's life has already been threatened by several terrifying events: the night sail with Augustus, the lack of food, water, and air in the hold, and the rabid dog. The novel replicates trauma after trauma until the end.

throughout the early republic. David Faflik claims in his discussion of the critical contestation of Poe as a Southerner that, "Poe employs recurring image patterns of black and white not to conjure up slavery per se but to reproduce the conversation surrounding it" (*Mississippi Quarterly*, "South of the 'Border,' or Poe's *Pym*: A Case Study in Region, Race, and American Literary History" 272). This critical gesture, I want to suggest, overlooks Poe's crucial contribution to representations of slave violence and the American gothic that his novel achieves. To begin with, in the 1830s it is not possible to remove "slavery" from "race" in the early republic, regardless of one's regional affiliation. It does seem, however, clear that Poe as an educated and avid reader was well aware of the debates surrounding race and slavery during the writing of his novel, and as such, consciously reproduced the conversations surrounding it in his fiction. Stories of the revolutionary violence in Saint-Domingue, then, would have played a crucial role in replicating the fear and violence perpetrated by the black cook onboard the *Grampus*.

Finally, the representation of black savagery on the island of Tsalal leaves little doubt over the presence of the specter of the Haitian Revolution in Poe's novel. Upon arrival on the islands, Pym accompanied by Peters and "Captain Guy" encounter "a hundred and ten savages" (135). Pym describes them as of "ordinary stature of Europeans, but of a more muscular and brawny frame. Their complexion a jet black, with thick and long woolly hair" (135). As many critics have pointed out, Poe's description of the native as exclusively black seems to, on the one hand, reinforce traditional categories of race. This interpretation resonates with Poe's persistent use of "black" and "white" which is repeatedly symbolized as opposites throughout the end of the story. Pym explains upon first contact with the natives of Tsalal that, "it was evident that they had never before seen any of the white race—from whose complexion, indeed, they appeared to recoil" (137). Too, Pym explains, all things

white seemed to create a sense of terror: "we could not get them to approach several very harmless objects—such as the schooner's sails, an egg, an open book, or a pan of flour" (138). In short, it is the surface of things as well as people which creates horror, a clever indictment of how racist ideology functions in the early republic. Despite these traces of allegory, the novel relentlessly undermines the reader's ability to neatly sum up its (much less Poe's) racial politics. Nothing is ever as it seems at first and most illustrative of this tenet is the figure of Peters, who at first participates in the original mutiny, although is slightly "less-blood thirsty" than the black cook; but immediately following the reclamation of the *Grampas*, Peters' becomes Pym's constant companion for the duration of the story. Peters' is by Pym's side when he nearly drowns, is eaten, is buried alive in the interior of the island, and finally, when he faces the abyss or "hole" in the sea.

In addition, what is commonly unaccounted for in readings that claim the novel as a straightforward allegory of race by a southern writer, however, is how the sheer quantity of black natives works to terrify Pym and Peters, and how these numbers create a relentless, implicit threat of *violence*.[269] It is in the unequal representation of white and black, I want to suggest, coupled with the narrative structural pattern of paranoia followed by actual horror (much like Lewis' gothic strategy in *The Monk*), where the violence of black revolt becomes the engine driving the gothic effects of the novel.

For example, when Peters and Pym arrive at the home of Too-wit, a native who had been accompanying them into the interior of the island, they are followed by "as many of the natives" as could fit in the hut with them. But despite being Too-wit's invited guests, Pym writes that they found themselves in a situation "peculiarly uncomfortable, if not indeed critical" (144). He continues,

[269] As is often the case in discussion of race throughout literature in the early republic, violence is sutured over, its relationship to black subjectivity taken as inextricably linked.

> We were on the ground, twelve in number, with the savages, as many as forty, sitting on their hams so closely around us that, if any disturbance had arisen, we should have found it impossible to make use of our arms, or indeed to have risen on our feet. The pressure was not only inside the tent, but outside, where probably was every individual on the whole island, the crowd being prevented from trampling us to death only by the incessant exertions and vociferaions [sic] of Too-wit. (144)

What is striking about this scene is the notable absence of an actual violent threat; however, Poe is able to capitalize on a generalized fear of black uprising to amazing effect by the mere presence of black collectivity and unequal representations of white and black subjects. This interpretation is reinforced at the end of the chapter when Pym claims that, "In the whole of this adventure we saw nothing in the demeanour [sic] of the natives calculated to create suspicion, with the single exception of the systematic manner in which their party was strengthened during our route from the schooner to the village" (145). Poe here quite brilliantly exploits the fear of black collectivity—constructing it as both "systematic" and unimpeachable (they saw nothing that could justify suspicion)—and yet, this precisely echoes the historiography of slave insurrection and violent revolt throughout American popular, legislative, and literary discourse since the inception of Saint-Domingue slave violence in 1791. That Poe does not highlight this reference does not preclude its importance in reading the gothic terror of the narrative; on the contrary, it suggests that this terror has reached an epoch wherein in no longer needs to be named. The codes are stable, already raising associations in readers of violent slave revolt, such as Nat Turner's rebellion, fears of foreign contamination, and the terrifying unknown future symbolized by the "blackness" and "abyss" in the final scene of the novel. In short, in Poe's *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, the specter of Haiti is a seamless feature of the American gothic tale.

This is not meant to perform an exhaustive reading of Poe's novel. Notoriously baffling to his contemporary critics, and richly complex in its themes, images, and settings, the novel remains strongly contested to our current critical moment. As a result, aspects of

the novel remain unaccounted for and most especially by flattening out "race" as allegorical. When we understand the novel as participating in the contested and uncertain future of the nation, and especially when we read this future as intimately bound up with anxieties which compulsively rehearse instances of black violence and collective revolt, its incessant concern with appearances and reality have a much richer resonance. As has been my thesis throughout, no literary genre is better equipped to handle this ambiguous and anxious fixation than the gothic tale.

I want to conclude this dissertation by way of a brief reading of Herman Melville's *Benito Cereno* as the first truly modern embodiment of American gothicism. My conclusion here will be brief because I have only a small contribution to Eric Sundquist's brilliant interpretation in which he claims that the story does not so much "prophesy a civil war but rather anticipates, just as plausibly, an explosive heightening of the conflict between American democracy, Old World despotism, and Caribbean New World revolution" (*To Wake the Nations* 143). What Sundquist does not fully articulate, however, but which nevertheless is obviously a central focus of his own analysis is how this "conflict" is perfectly "blended," in Walpole's terms, with the American gothic. He writes, "Its pervasive aura of paralysis, its revolutionary gestures held in perilous suspension, replicates in narrative form a crisis in temporality in which past, present, and future, as in Delano's moment of lucid perception, seem one" (143). Melville's story was serialized in three editions of *Putnam's Monthly Magazine of American Literature, Science and Art* in 1855. Written during the height of political, cultural, racial, and regional tensions on the eve of Civil War in the early republic, the story re-imagines the true account of American Captain Amasa Delano's confrontation with a Spanish slave ship off the coast of Chile in 1805. Melville resituates the narrative back in time to 1799, a period in the throes of both the Haitian and French Revolutions, and thus

encourages readers' to understand the story against the backdrop of these violent cultural events.

Like both Howison and Poe's gothic tales, *Benito Cereno* is almost entirely set on a ship, a setting at once familiar by its sheer repetition in literature by the mid-nineteenth century, but alien insofar as the ship allows for shifting conceptions of collective identification through nation and individual identification through race. Sundquist refers to Melville's ship as "the perfect chronotrope…operating simultaneously within the historical and the narratological registers, Melville maintains his text, like the progress of New World slavery, poised in a barely suppressed revolutionary gesture, one that seems to duplicate the prior navigation, the prior history, of the doomed *San Dominick*" (143) the thinly veiled reference to Saint-Domingue.[270] The collapse of space and time into one "concrete whole" is, it seems, another way of talking about the "temporal accumulation" of postcoloniality articulated by Ian Baucom in *Specters of the Atlantic*. In each, history is fused with literary representation in ways that work to highlight the dramatic tensions of the political moment. For each of the stories I read in this chapter, violent slave revolt in its most terrifying instantiation, the Haitian Revolution, becomes entwined in the very "narratological" structure of the story. It is a small leap to suggest that there is a pattern, one we can recognize as genre, to this fusion.

In Melville's tale, the character of the American Captain reveals his complacent reliance on racial stereotypes which undermine his ability to see and comprehend the events which have already occurred in the past: the crew's mutiny and take over of Don Benito's

[270] Sundquist cites M.M. Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination*, for his definition of the chronotrope—"In the literary artistic chronotrope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot, and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotrope" (Bakhtin, 84). Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

Spanish slave ship. Unable to recognize Babo, the insurgent slave-leader, as the authority onboard the *San Dominick*, Delano personifies American racist ideology and replicates the blindness of white planters who historically viewed their chattel as variously uncontrollable, violent, and content. Melville's description of Babo, the black rebel leader who masquerades as the loyal servant to the Spanish Captain is, perhaps, Melville's greatest invention. Performing the precise expectations of the American Captain while maintaining complete dominance over Benito Cereno and the entire slave crew on the ship, Babo defies Melville's contemporary conceptions of the slave. Rather than the one-dimensional characterization of Poe's "black cook" in *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, one whose uncanny resemblance to Thomas Gray's portrait of Nat Turner illustrates no humanity or remorse for his murders; Melville's Babo is a complex composite of abolitionist discourse, white supremacist ideology, and public paranoia about the possibility of slave violence in the early republic. Babo's "good conduct" is seen as crucial for sustaining Don Benito, who Amasa Delano views only as a "skeleton" with "small yellow hands" and whose "gloomy disdain" makes the American Captain suspicious.[271] Captain Delano's misreading of every detail onboard the *San Dominick* is foreshadowed in his panoramic early view of the ship and its occupants. Melville writes:

> Always upon first boarding a large and populous ship at sea, especially a foreign one, with a nondescript crew such as Lascars or Manilla men, the impression varies in a peculiar way from that produced by first entering a strange house with strange inmates in a strange land. Both house and ship, the one by its walls and blinds, the other by its high bulwarks like ramparts, hoard from view their interiors till the last moment; but in the case of the ship there is this addition; that the living spectacle it contains, upon its sudden and complete disclosure, has, in contrast with the blank ocean which zones it, something of the effect of enchantment. The ship seems unreal; these strange costumes, gestures, and faces, but a shadowy tableau just emerged from the deep, which directly must receive back what it gave. (38)

[271] All quotations come from the Norton Critical Edition, *Melville's Short Novels*, ed. Dan McCall. New York and London: Norton, 2002. *Benito Cereno*, 34-102. (40-41)

Melville's famous opening description of the *San Dominick* establishes the most crucial thematic threads which connect the confusing pieces of the tale. The ship unites a "foreign" land with something criminal through his use of "inmates" to describe the crew; through his analogy between the ship and the house, Melville establishes the gothic effect reminiscent of Poe's *Fall of the House of Usher* while he also makes use of a common gothic strategy—making strange something familiar and making familiar something strange; too, Melville leaves little doubt of the generic features when he refers to the ship as "unreal" and enchanted, something difficult to describes because of its "shadowy tableau." What is most remarkable about this opening scene, however, is how concisely Melville critiques the Atlantic slave trade and implicates Delano, as well as his readers, in misunderstanding the grave stakes involved in the transportation of human cargo. The slaves become, paradoxically, "a living spectacle" and seeing it in such terms renders the entire slave economy of the ship "seem unreal" to early republicans, the most ignorant of which Captain Delano is meant to represent. This misreading also, unsurprisingly, understands the ocean as a "blank zone"—which takes as many lives through the slave trade as it produces in the southern plantations upon its arrival there. This "blank zone" also provides the dramatic space on which Melville can stage the confusing appearance of power, performance of imperial and slave identities, and the "living spectacle" that slave revolution has become by the mid-nineteenth century.

What ultimately masks the reality of events on board the *San Dominick* is the racism of Captain Delano; unable to see beyond Babo's masterful performance of the docile, happy companion to the ailing Don Benito, the American Captain fails to recognize that a slave revolt had already taken place, which Melville brilliantly reveals at the end when the Captain finally learns of the murder and display of Don Benito's friend, Aranda's bleached, figure-head at the front the vessel and just above the chalky command: "Follow your leader" (86).

The horrifying image of the skeleton leading the slave ship echoes Poe's scene of the Dutch ship manned entirely by the dead, itself an homage to Samuel Coleridge "Rime of the Ancient Mariner"(1798, 1817)—thus the romantic genealogy is carefully constructed through Melville's gothic tale.[272] Moreover, the image of a bird eating around the rotting flesh of the eye socket reaches back to Lewis' *The Monk* at the scene of Ambrosio's death. When in fabricating the tall tale of the ship's takeover off the coast of Cape Horn, Don Benito explains to Captain Delano that his preservation is entirely the result of Babo's dutiful care, as is the "pacific[ation] [of] his more ignorant brethren" (45). Captain Delano responds predictably: "'Faithful fellow!...Don Benito, I envy you such a friend; slave I cannot call him'" (45). The scene portrays the double narrative structure brilliantly, one of the many such examples that serve to maintain the genetic code of Melville's modern gothic.

What ultimately serves as the searing critique of slavery is the collapse of time and its attendant collapse of the past slave revolution in Saint-Domingue, the white, American Captain's inability to decode any of the clear warnings of potential unrest amongst the slaves, and the inevitable repetition of slave violence in the southern states of the early republic. This collapse in time, figured as the "temporal accumulation" fleshed out by Ian Baucom, becomes gothic in both the interior and deteriorating state of Captain Delano's mind and the disintegration of the performance by the crew as docile slaves. The merging of these two narrative threads gives rise to the ultimate revelation which finally allows Captain Delano and Melville's readers to fully grasp the implications of their own violent history, one they continue to ignore. As Sundquist argues, "the narrative voice performs an act of ritual control, regulating and containing acts of near revolt in which the ceremonial may at any

[272] In Poe's novel, Pym and his companions think they are to be saved by a "large hermaphrodite brig, of a Dutch build, and painted black, with a tawdry gilt figurehead" (83). As the ship bears down on them, however, Pym discovers it is entirely occupied by dead, rotting corpses.

moment give way to the actual, in which roles threaten to be reversed, and the figurative revolt contained in the liminal realm of Delano's consciousness threatens to be forced into the realm of the literal" (Sundquist 144). But an additional and ultimately crucial valence of Melville's novel is its purposeful manipulation of "actual" history by way of a real and violent event. Melville recasts the real story of Spanish ship *Tyral*, which he borrows from Amasa Delano's *Narrative of Voyages and Travels, in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres* (1817), to 1799 at the height of Haitian slave violence, and changes the ship's name to the San Dominick. On the eve of Civil War and in the throes of violent debates over the institution of slavery in the early republic, Melville's haunting novel performs a searing critique of white Americans' inability to read their own history, break free from white supremacist ideology, and heed the warning of violent slave revolt in Saint-Domingue. Captain Delano, "a man of such native simplicity as to be incapable of satire of irony" stands in for the simple white American blind to his own racism. Melville's reveals the fissures in a democracy thus far unable to reconcile slavery, or even to recognize slave violence as symptomatic of the horrors intrinsic to the institution. Delano inability to read Babo's threatening gestures toward Don Benito outside of a benevolent master-slave relationship leads to a misrecognition of the controlled Captain as a "trickster;" his "black-letter text" indecipherable. The collapse of "past, present, and future" aboard the San Dominick allows Melville to mobilize the specter of Haiti within the space of American slave debates and fears of slave violence. The perfectly realized chronotropic novel, then, represents the marriage of the specter of Haiti as a seamless feature of Melville's novel within a narrative structure which collapses history into the fully-fleshed out present, the "living spectacle" on the slave ship. Poised on the "blank zone" of the Atlantic, Melville joins the anxieties of the late eighteenth century which threaten to destroy the nation at the moment of publication of

Benito Cereno, and a flawlessly "blended" gothic romance, one in which the horrors of past and subsequent generations must be dealt with immediately, before the "single spark" of which Jefferson warns ignites the nation.

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Appendix A: James Monroe's Report to the General Assembly, December 5, 1800

Transcribed James Monroe's papers—this is from *A Letter to the General Assembly*, December 5, 1800. Found in *The Executive Letter Box*.

The Speaker of the General Assembly

Richmond, December 5, 1800

Sir,

An important incident has occurred (since) your last session, which I consider it my duty to fully and accurately, in all its details (submit) to the General Assembly.

On The 30th of August about…noon, Mr. Mosby (Mosely) Shepherd a report…this county called and informed…advise from two slaves that the…night, kill their masters, and …where they would be joined by the…that they would then take protection (possession) of the communication, and the town. He added he had long (known) these two slaves and had no doubt of the truth of the information they gave him, and that he communicated it to me that the proposed insurrection might be defeated if possible.

This communication was very interesting, and the source from whence derived calculated to inspire a belief it was true. The day was far advanced when I received it, so that if any provision was to be made to avert the danger, not a moment was to be lost. I immediately called in the officers commanding the regiment of militia and (?) of cavalry in town, and made the best (disposition) of such an emergency the time would…

The same precautions were observed against the threatened insurrection and (?) made the next day by the officers on duty. (what comes next sounds like he was on the point of concluding there was no need for alarm when he found out that the insurrectionaries still intended to carry out their plans. Then he says something like, after hearing "stated facts and gave details" that "this period the affair affirmed a more [important point?] It did not seem probable the slaves in the neighbourhood would undertake so bold a (?) without support from the slaves in the (greater part?) of the state.

…crisis according to its magnitude…and systematic measures to avert the…In consequence I issued a summons to…council at ten the next day, and in the interim advised the gentlemen who gave me the information, to apprehend and commit to prison without delay all the slaves in the county whose guilt they had good cause to suspect. I also gave a like (instruction?) to the Mayor of the city, which…(he attended) to.

When the ….September, I laid before it the ….of the meditated insurrection of….its advice as to the measures necessary to…such an emergency. The council concluded in (its) opinion that such a project existed and ought to be guarded against with peculiar care. But as the content of the danger was not yet known it was thought sufficient at the time to confine our measures of …to those objects which it was understood….first assailed, the Penetentiary[sic], the capitol,…Magazine in this city; and the arsenal…It was natural to conclude the…insurgents would be directed in the…and requesting that vigilant attention be paid to police of the county by ordering out suitable…patroles[sic] in every county.

In the evening of the same day, about (?) of the conspirators were brought to town from…and the neighbouring[sic] estates, and as the jail (could) contain them, they were

lodged in the Penetentiary[sic]…were not to be found. Some of the (arms) (that they prepared) for the occasion, formed of…for execution were, likewise bought (brought?) with the information now received as by former…it appeared that the inhabitants of that neighbourhood…in a particular degree, exposed to danger,…commenced with their slaves, and they were (taken) Victims. It was therefore deemed proper with (respect?) to their safety, by advice of council, to order (?) thirty third Regiment a guard of a Captain and …men to take post near Watons/Wathers/Watsons Tavern in the center of that neighbourhood. By like advice the troop of the city was at the same time subjected to such (safety?) should be required of it.

Every day men…increased the…advice of council…of the powder(power) from the Magazine to the…the distribution of the arms which were…prepared for the several counties according…the last session, was suspended; the whole…the city was armed, its guard increased from…to an hundred men, and a…

in his judgment the emergency might require.

The trials had now commenced whereby the nature and extent of the conspiracy became better understood. It was satisfactorily proven that a general insurrection of the slaves was contemplated by those who took the lead in the affair. A species of organization had taken place among them. At a meeting held for that purpose, they had appointed a commander, to whom they gave the title of General, and had also appointed some other officers. They contemplated a force of cavalry as well as infantry and had formed a plan of attack on the city which was to commence by setting fire to the tower and of the town where the houses consisted chiefly of wood, in expectation of drawing the people to that quarter, while they assailed the Penetentiary, magazine, and Capitol, intending after achieving these, and getting protection of the arms, to meet the people unarmed on their return. The account of the number of those who were to commence the movement varied. Some made it…It was distinctly seen, that it embraced…in this city and neighbourhood, and that…active…to several of the adjacent counties, (?) Chesterfield, and to the….of the …of York; and there was good cause to believe…the (had?) knowledge of such a project…

The number of slaves in this city and its neighbourhood comprising those at work on the Pulick building, the canal, and the Coalpits, was considerable. These might be assembled in a few hours, and could only be (stopped)…by a respectable force, which force of…could not be collected in a short…was if their first effort succeeded…town in flames, its inhabitants…of horror extending through the country…it is true would be momentary only for as…body of militia could be formed the insurrection would be suppressed. The superiority in point of (numbers, and) the knowledge and use of arms, and indeed every other species of knowledge which the whites have over the blacks in this Commonwealth is so decisive, that the latter could only sustain themselves for a momentary rebellion against the former. Still it was a crisis to be avoided so far as prudent precautions could accomplish it. There was one other consideration which engaged the mind in the commencement…strange that the slave should embark in this novel and unexampled enterprise of their own accord. Their treatment has been more favorable since the revolution, and as the importation was prohibited among the first acts of our independence, their number has not increased in proportion with that of the Whites. It was natural to suspect they were prompted to it by others who were invisible, but whose agency might be powerful. And if this was the case, it became…proportionally more difficult to estimate the extent of the combination and the consequent real importance of the crisis. On

consideration of all these circumstances it was decreed necessary to call out such a force as might be fully appropriate to the emergency; such an one as would be likely to (overcome) and keep down the spirit of insurrection, or sufficient to suppress it in case it broke out. On that principle I called into service on the 9th the 19th and 23rd regiments, and a detachment of fifty men, additional, from the 33rd, which detachment with the whole of the 19th regiment and one-hundred men of the 23rd, were ordered to take post in this city. The residue of the 23rd were stationed in the town of Manchester.

While there was a hope the report of the conspiracy was unfounded, or a possibility of (keeping) it in silence, that object was…..But as its existence had become known to the publick[sic] it only remained to make the incident as harmless in other respects as circumstances would…. It was paraded daily on the capitol square (/) trained as well that it might be prepared for action if occasion required, as that our strength might be known to the Conspirators. The affect which this reassurance produced was easily and soon perceived. It was evident that the collection and display of this force inspired the citizens with confidence, and depressed the spirits of the slaves. The former saw in it a (?) from the danger which menaced them; the latter a defeat of their nefarious projects.

On the 12th of September five, and on the fifteenth following five others were executed. On those men the whole force in service in the city(?) attended the execution.

On the 27th Gabriel, one of the chiefs of the conspiracy, for whom a reward had been offered and who had been apprehended at Norfolk, was delivered up and committed to Jail.

As these executions were carried into office without any movement of the slaves, and their chief apprehended, it was fair to presume the danger of the crisis had passed. It became from that period the object of the Executive to diminish the force with a view to lessen the expense, which object was …with undeviating attention. On the 13th it…to 650 men, including those at the Point of …the 15th to 225, occasional reduction was a official…as circumstances permitted, until finally…October, it was reduced to a …which illustrate this transaction…from the auditor of the expenses attending it to which is added a letter from the Treasurer, communicating an a opinion of the Attorney General respecting payment for some of the slaves who were executed.

I cannot too much commend the conduct of the militia on this occasion. They were obedient to order, exact in their discipline, and prompt in the execution of every duty that was enjoined on them. Their improvement was rapid and far exceeded any thing I had ever witnessed. Nor can it be doubted, had a crisis occurred they would have proved as firm and decisive in action as they were patient and perservering[sic] in the discharge of every other duty. Their example teaches an useful lesson to our country. It tends to confirm the favorable idea before entertained of their competence to every (repose) (restore) of publick safety.

It belongs to the Legislature to weigh with profound attention this unpleasant incident in our history. What has happened may occur again at any time with more fatal consequences unless suitable measures be taken to prevent it. Unhappily while this class of people exists among us we can never count with certainty on its tranquil submission. The fortunate issue of the late attempts should not lull us into repose. It ought rather to stimulate us to the adoption of a system, which if it does not prevent the like in future, may secure the Country from any calamitory consequences,

With great respect I have the honor to be,
James Monroe

Appendix B: Governor Thomas Bennett Letter to the Assembly, November 28, 1822.

From South Carolina Department of Archives and History
Governor's Messages, 1822 (Record #1328)

1328-01

Message No. 2
Executive Department
Columbia Nov 28 1822

T0 the Senate and House of Representative of the State of South Carolina
Fellow Citizens,

A brief narrative of the principal circumstances which developed, and attended the investigation of a Plot, lately formed within the Parishes of St. Philips and St. Michaels, by a number of evil disposed Negroes, will be found in the accompanying document marked A. The proceedings of the Court, and the testimony received on the trials of those charged as principals or accomplices, are also transmitted and marked B.

A scheme for organizing an Insurrection in those parishes had been several months covertly agitated, and was eventually discovered and communicated by a servant…city* of Mr. Prioleau; to which he had been counseled with great earnestness and decision, by a *Free man of Color, to that communication, although detailing very distinctly, some immaterial circumstances, and referring to but one individual, we are without a doubt particularly indebted for the full development, which eventually followed. The recompense of such service has hitherto been so liberally awarded by the Legislature, that it would be an act of supererogation, to urge it here. I would nonetheless distinctly state, that independent of the policy, which suggests a liberal reward of such deeds, they are entitled to commendation, for the promptitude and fidelity, which characterized their conduct.

The person accused, a slave of Mr. Paul, was apprehended with two other fellows the property of the same gentleman, and although the investigation of these persons was unattended with the results which were anticipated, many of the conspirators experienced all the apprehension evident to detection. One of them, who subsequently acknowledged a participation in their scheme, at the suggestion of another, revealed many of the circumstances, to a servant of Mr. Wilson, who with praiseworthy promptitude, made a full disclosure to his master. The fellow of Mr. Wilson, is also entitled to the liberality of the legislature. This statement, which was immediately communicated to the Hon. James Hamilton, Indendant of Charleston, exaggerated the means of the conspirators, as gave an extnent to the plot, calculated to deprive it of credibility. He repeated that a majority of the slaves in Charleston had concurred; that 4,000 from James Island, and great many other within several miles of the city had…, and under various arrangements, would arrive within the city on Saturday night, and the ensuing Sunday the 16th of June; that the boats ordinarily used by neighboring planters, would be employed to affect their descent, and continue during that period actively employed, in transporting the disaffected. At 9 o'clock on

Thursday night the 13th of June, the Intendant and Mr. Wilson informed on of these particulars, and at 10 on the same night, the

[note at bottom of page]
I would refer to several honorable members of your house for the names of these persons.

Field Officers of the Charleston Regiment were convened by my order, at the Intendant's. Although doubts were entertained generally by the Board, of the magnitude of this conspiracy, the reality of some design of that character, was fully assented to. After several private consultation, it was resolved, to watch the development of the plot, and to detach for that night, a military guard adequate to the emergency. Whatever opinions I privately entertained, my duty suggested a line of conduct, which was not equivocal. The information on which I was called to act, and admitted to a certain extent, it may have been wholly true, and the responsibility which rested on me, required the organization of a force, not only sufficient to defeat the enterprise in its declared extent, but to give entire security and confidence to the citizens. The order No. 1 was therefore issued on Saturday, and the Quarter Master General directed to place in the Charleston arsenal, 20,000 Ball Cartridges, and have ready for delivery, 300 muskets, in addition to those on the hands of the militia, for the use of Rifle Corps, and other who required them; the inspection of the muskets having been previously confided to a skilful gunsmith, and the cartridges which were made during the war, subjected to such tests, as satisfied one that they were not unpaired. My personal attention was given to these arrangements.

Having from sources entitled to implicit confidence, as well as from personal observation, established the falsity of the part of the statement, which referred to the use of Boats, for the transportation of the conspirators; I issued on Sunday morning a Counter Order, also submitted and marked No.2. By this order, the Guard being reduced to less than a Regiment, it was at my particular instance, that Col. Hayne took command; all the arrangements having been previously made, in concert with that officer. The companies embraced the last order, repaired at the hour appointed, with extreme punctuality, to their respective places of Rendezvous. Measures had been previously taken, to remove some arms from the United States arsenal, to a place of more security, the other military depots were efficiently guarded, and at every assailable point, the city was amply protected. The utmost tranquility prevailed. An extraordinary nightly guard was immediately after adjourned, pursuant to the order No.3 which was occasionally augmented and continued during the investigation. Simultaneously with this order, a Board of Field officers was convened, for the purpose of organizing permanently, that part of the 4th Bridge, comprehended within the two parishes; no measures having been previously adopted, to regulate the conduct of the (slaves), or give alarms in cases of an extraordinary character. The Board concurred in my suggestions generally, but as the public mind was excessively agitated, and as the means already employed were efficient, it was deemed prudent to delay issuing the order, until it could be published, without producing further excitement. This was effected on the 8th of July (order No. 4) but not without some of the consequences deprecated. These arrangements were severally communicated to the Intendant.

As the City Council of Charleston, were deeply interested in the result of this investigation, as a course of proceeding variant from that, which usually regulated judicial endeavors, would from the nature of the transaction, become expedient; I suggest to an influential member of the body, the propriety of appointing a select number of judicious persons, to precede the state courts, as a Court of Investigation. Such a Court, untrammeled by the usual forms, could pursue fearlessly the maze of the labyrinth [sic], dissipate the

obscurity which concealed alike all the conspirators, and their wicked machinations, and every irregularity on the proceedings of the Court of Magistrates, prevailed. The suggestions appeared to be favorable received, and when the names of the gentlemen were communicated, I was gratified in the selection of the council, which has so happily drawn into the public service, distinguished talent and great decision of character. It was not until a day or two after, that I was informed that the Corporate Authorities had organized a Court of alternate jurisdiction. In every sense, this was an usurpation of authority, and a violation of the Law. It was in vain to justify it, on the ground of expediency, or to urge the celebrity of the gentlemen, composing that Court. The lives of individuals, and the property of the Citizens, were subjected to a tribunal illegally constituted, and however definite the line which separated the Executive and Judiciary, I felt imperatively the obligations, which required that I should not obey the mandate of a Court, which did not derive its existence and authority from Legislative sanction. The Council, I believe, were governed by the purest motives, the error was accidental, but its effect as related to…officially, was to be deprecated. The situation in which I was unhappily placed, was excessively Delicate; a majority of those subjected to this tribunal, were my property, and the confidence I felt in the Court, induced me to wave the objection, until they were disposed of. Immediately after which, I communicated to Thomas Parker, Esq., one of the presiding Magistrates, that objection to the Court, with two other to their proceedings, on which I subsequently consulted the attorney general; distinctly stating to the gentlemen, that they were not designed to…to the cases adjudicated. The court was organized on the 1st of July immediately after this communication. See proceedings page 9…marked D & E, are those referred to. In these it will appear, that the evils at first anticipated, had actually occurred. That it should be seemed expedient, in a Court exercising criminal jurisdiction, to close its doors from the community, to shut out those accidental rays, which occasionally illuminated the obscurity in which innocence and guilt are indistinguishable, was to be deeply lamented. At a moment too, when the highest exercise of human intelligence, minds elevated above the ordinary standard, and beyond the reach of prejudice, were requisite, in the multiplied an d intricate cases which admitted no testimony, but such as was equivocal, the offspring of treachery or revenge, and the hope of immunity. This course of proceeding, incidentally produced other consequences, peculiarly affecting. The public mind has been raised to a pitch of excitement, which sought relief on an exhibition of truth, but unhappily it was increased in many, to little less than a prostration of Law and authority, by idle and weak suggestions, indistinct details of testimony, or direct assertions or an alarmingly extensive and deeply concerted plan, and voluntary compacts to enforce the laws, these admitted of no restraint. Nor was it less a sources of embarrassment and concern, that testimony should be received, under pledges of inviolable secrecy; and that the accused should be convicted, and sentenced to death without seeing the persons, or hearing the voices of those, who testified to their guilt. On the ground of expediency the first was unnecessary, as subsequent accounts have fully demonstrated. The person who discovered the plot, and others to whom this pledge was given, pass unmolested, though distinctly and generally known; with the exceptions of trifling insults, which have been punished. Besides, the State was competent to protect those, who administered to her welfare; and that protection was the only shield, which could be effectually interposed, when danger menaced. The rules which universally attain among civilized nations, in the judicial investigation of a crime, are not merely hypothesized, or simply matter of opinions, but the result of the highest intelligence, instructed and matured by experience. They are given as guides, to assist the imperfections of human reason, and to enable it to combine and compare the various circumstances and

probabilities, which occur in every case. Few minds are competent without these aids, to develop the intricate affections of the heart. The presence of the innocent, will sometimes fetter the language of guilt, and dissolve the best concerted schemes of falsehood. The profound intelligence of that Court may be urged, as the best security against the occurrences of evil—it may be so--, but it must be recollected, that at the moment of which I speak, rumour has extended the plot, to all the adjacent parishes. Other courts were to be organized, and while the example of this, would…with dangerous influence, the corrective which emanated from the luminous understandings of those gentlemen, could not in every instance be applied to any interrogatories embracing those objections. The Attorney General gave an elaborate opinion; in which with sentiments honorable alike to his understand and benevolence has sought to remove the embarrassments, to which this courses of proceeding had given birth. From this, it would appear, that these persons had no civil rights, not derived from the Statutes; and that the Executive was not bound to correct errors in judicial proceedings. If a reluctant acquiescence was yielded to the opinions of this enlightened jurist, it was because if these persons have no civil rights, not deducible from the law, I conceived it my duty, in the exercise of a constitutional prerogative, to test the extent of their guilt, by principles familiar to the commonest understanding. Deprived of these by the act of the Court, the authority of the Executive could not be exercised, wither for the protection of the life of the individual, or the property of the Citizen, without involving his decisions, in all the uncertainty of chance; for a rigid adherence to rule, governed as essentially the decision of the Executive as of the Court. He is bound to correct their aberration as they affect individuals, where they manifestly appear; or the constitutional power of pardon, is erroneously founded on the range of uncertainties, which usually attend the investigation of crime.

If the disquietude, which had arisen from these cases, rendered my official duties painful and perplexing, it is difficult to pourtray[sic] the effect, which was produced by the knowledge, that three of the conspirators, on whom sentences of death had already been pronounced, were used as witnesses, while they were under the impression, that they would ultimately have their lives spared. Under this impression, their testimony was not only regarded important, in the questions of the general plan of the conspiracy, but enabled the Court to convict a number of the principle offenders (see document F); add to this that two of these were sometimes closeted together, and it will not be difficult to imagine that when the testimony of one alone, (see the case of Saby Gaillard) was deemed sufficient, and actually produced conviction; my situation in regards to the persons thus implicated, because excessively distressing, of the court itself any opinions were in unison with the great majority of the citizens. To one of the gentlemen, long before I had the pleasure of a personal acquaintance. Those sentiments of respect and admiration were elicited, which are called forth by extraordinary endowments. I was with painful reluctance, that these objections forced upon me, the course of conduct which I was officially bound to pursue, in extricating several thus implicated from the effects of their sentence.

The Court having used these persons, Monday Gell, Charles Drayton and Harry Haig as witnesses, recommended that a pardon should be conditionally extended. This, under the previously taken of their guilt, was wholly incompatible with that line of conduct. I had invariably pursued Monday, the servant of Mr. Gell, was if not the projector of the plot (which was doubtful), the most active partisan[sic]. He had seduced a greater number than any other; his shop was the depot of their offensive preparations, and he alone…these. The others, though less conspicuously, were equally decisive. It was admitted by the Court, that their only claim to mercy, was founded on their confessions and testimony. But

Bacchus, the servant of Mr. Hammett, had the same claims; Smart, the servant of Mr. Anderson, and Charo (?), the servant of Mrs. Thompson, but little inferior. The two first confessed generally, and all of them were used as witnesses, and subsequently executed. Impartial justice urged the rejection of the claim besides, what was an act of spontaneity in others, and extorted from Monday, stratagem had been employed, and confessions of Perault, the servant of Mr. Strohecker; enabled the Committee of Vigilance to relate to him, a tissue (?) of facts, which were assented to and eventually produced his confession. The recommendation of the Court was not concurred in; and the embarrassment occasioned by a refusal to comply with the desire of so enlightened a tribunal, was wholly obviated by the knowledge that they originally possessed full authority to carry their recommendation into effect (see Doc F). Nor could I comply with their desire to commute the punishments of nine others; as the removal of the sentence of death pronounced against them, would have prevented me from carrying into effect, the ulterior measure of transportation, to which their owners could be coerced only while I could exercise the alternative. Subsequent to this, the Court having commuted the punishment of the first mentioned convicts, delegated to the Corporate authority of Charleston, the care and superintendance of carrying their sentences of transportation into effect; which as related to one individual, (Prince Graham) had been exercised, in the commutation of his punishment. The remainder of these persons twenty in number, are still in the custody of the City officers, and the interference of the Legislature, (which is respectfully recommended) will be requisite, to enforce the mandate of the Court. Those who were submitted to my discretion have left this United Sates, with the exception of three who will shortly be removed and an old and very inform man, whose union with the conspirators, being (as I conceived) equivocal, was pardoned and his master requested to send him from the States; to which he consented. Saby Gaillard had been sentenced to be hung; the Court recommended a commutation of punishment, to transportation from the United States, which has been complied with; although an examination of his case (Monday being the only evidence against him, and wholly unsupported by circumstances, or the knowledge of any others), had induced a commutation to banishment from the States.

The punishment of William, the slave of Mr. Prioleau, was changed from death to banishment from the United States. The man having been convicted exclusively, on the testimony of two of the personas under sentence of death; his solemn declarations of innocence, made under circumstances of peculiar terror; no evidence of his attendance at their meetings, or personal exertions to promote the general object; and his previous unexceptionable character, induced a short respite. Availing myself of the intervention of him; and examination of the witnesses fully satisfied me that he was distinctly an object of mercy. Independent of a tissue of contradiction, in the statement of these men, it was obvious to me, that Charles Drayton had predicated his claims of escape, on the number of convictions he could make. Nothing could exceed the chilling depravity of this man. William has been sent from the United States.

Jack, the slave of Mr. Purcell, would from the causes of being convicted in this testimony of Monday Gell and Charles Drayton only, have shared the executive clemency. But his confession evidenced an early participation in the plot, a particular association with Vesey, and a zealous effort to promote its successful accomplishment; this confession forbade it. The trial of Jack, the slave of Mr. Glenn, will fully exemplify this reasons why his punishment was not commuted. These three men would not have been brought to your view, were it not forced on me, by the remarks of the Corporate authority of Charleston, in relation to them.

The punishment of John Vincent, was commuted from the same cause, and Billy Robinson from collision of testimony. In addition, to which, all the executions were closed, and I conceived that I consulted the best feelings of my fellow-citizens in arresting these dreadful punishments which were become but too familiar, ceased to produce a salutary terror, no longer serves for example, and at which humanity wept.

From a very early period after the discovery of the plot, I held communication with the surrounding country. The fearful tranquility [sic] which every where prevailed, was the strongest evidence of their having no participation with the disaffected of the metropolis. The Patrols were nonetheless with the exception of one or two parishes, very active. Col. Lawton, Thompson, & Stallan discharged their respective duties with great zeal and fidelity. The first named officer incurred some offense with two detachments of his Regiment; should he present his claim for renumeration, permit me to request your liberal attention to it.*

[Note on separate un-paginated page between p 10& 11] In executing the Health Laws of the State, I acquired in the early part of the summer correct information of the number of United States troops stationed near Charleston, and discovering the inability of their Commander to detach a sufficient number of men to enforce the Quarantine regulations, I availed myself of this emergency to request its augmentation from the Secretary of war. A prompt compliance was accorded by Mr. Calhoun and the garrison and created by the addition of another company.

It would be expected that a minute account of the particular circumstances which led to, and the class of persons among whom the plot originated, should be laid before you; but I could procure no documentary evidence of these facts. Having informed myself of many particulars touching the rise and progress of this conspiracy, the clue was furnished to several respectable Gentlemen, with a request that they would prosecute the inquiry; but they were arrested in the attainment of their object by an order emanating from the City Council interdicting any communication with the prisoners, by my authority (see Doc G). Nor is it practicable to impart correct information of the number concerned. Beyond the city of Charleston, with the exception of a single plantation (Mr. Ferguson's), it does not appear that any were engaged. This Gentleman waited on one and with obvious anxiety stated his information that the slaves on his Plantation were infected and while he deprecated the ruinous consequences to himself, with great propriety offered to surrender the whole number, and personally aid in delivering them into the hands of Justice. He required to know whether as Chief Magistrate I could cause their arrest. To his remarks I replied generally that the responsibility of arresting persons charged with crimes did not devolve on me but on the Justices of Peace in the respective parishes; that should he deem it requisite a military detachment would aid in the execution of the warrant which should issue, but advised a careful investigation of the charges alleged, previous to the adoption of a measure so pregnant with evil and consequences to himself. He appeared to be solicitous that it should be distinctly known, that he had made this proposition and in avoiding the course suggested he was activated by a desire, that the Court organized in Charleston should try his negroes. A compliance with this requisition would have been attended with serious loss to this gentleman and excessive distress and alarm to the inhabitants of that and the contiguous parishes; great discretion was requisite. Subsequent events have happily illustrated the propriety of the course pursued; but the motive by which I was particularly influenced,

emanated from my own and the general confidence in the Court. They were charged with the investigation, had extended their jurisdiction to slaves in the surrounding parishes and would as was presumed, not act with partiality; and as they had incidentally closed every avenue through which I could derive a knowledge of the facts submitted, were bound to communicate to me, every point of information which they might receive, that should immediately or eventually involve the peace or security of the State.

Admitting the guilt of all who were convicted in the City, the number may a little exceed 80. Of that number from an attentive perusal of the evidence it would appear that several were not conspirators in the sense here implied, but had united for the purpose of self-preservation. With other arts of seduction,, the fears of such were assailed; the tale often repeated if an intention on the part of the white to create a false alarm & in the general consternation to attack and destroy them eventually gained confidence and they yielded to suggestions which promised protection. The most conspicuous actors in this drama were deceived or affected to believe that their resources were adequate to the object—that Gullah Jack had enlisted 6000 men—Mingo Harth 4000—Frank Ferguson, four plantations—Peter Poyas, a great number—and that there was within the city a French Band of 100 men trained, armed and impatient for the conflict—this argument was addressed to the disaffected. The influence of several wicked men who professed religion and were leaders of religious associations was exerted with some effect. They referred to the sacred oracles to justify their sanguinary intentions; and to evidence the protecting care of Heaven, asserted that they had been four years engaged in the project. The standing and respectability of character of a few who countenanced the plan, gave an imposing effect to the enterprise. Such were the materials and delusions brought into action against a weak and inconsiderate multitude, under adventitious circumstances peculiarly favorable in promoting such an object—unrestrained intercourse—a perfect acquaintance wit the tempest and defection of each—and opportunities and time to consummate their wicked purposes by the most artful and insinuating address. F our months appear to have been sedulously devoted by men lauded for some particular trait of character in selecting from Thousands, all whom they could corrupt or delude, by persuasion and artifice, and appeals to passion and affection; no less than one Hundred (100) are found in their ranks; a great majority of whom are declared by an intelligent Court to have done little if any more than acquiesce in the proposal to join in the plot, and this established upon proof peculiarly unfavorable to the accused. It is scarcely possible to compare the means with the result without admiring that fidelity which successfully resisted the artful insinuations of the conspirators, or awed them into cautious silence.

It is concomitant on such event, that we are unhappily forced from that equanimity of temper; by means of which alone the lessons of misfortune are of inestimable value. The circumstances of this plot taken in connection, furnish many useful hints on which I am persuaded you will calmly deliberate, and judiciously act, and in adopting measures of prevention, attentively guard against those which may produce excessive coercion. It has been said, had the attempt been made by the small number who had confederate, thousands would have joined in the revolt. This is at the least problematical, and opposed by the weight of circumstances; the conspirators had no confidence in such a contingency; they had refused to communicate their secret but with the most jealous caution; whole classes were the objects of suspicious vigilance; they saw in a thousand a fidelity, which they dared not tamper with, and in units only could discover a suitable defection. To that fidelity we are indebted for the present and all previous discoveries; it should not be rebuked or destroyed by unnecessary rigour. In the total absence of that genius and intelligence which is fitted for

such enterprises, and which was palpable in the details of this plot, we may safely predicate ulterior arrangements. It is scarcely possible to imagine one more crude or imperfect. They were unprovided with arms, and if we except a few cents occasionally subscribed to pay the wages of a blacksmith who is said to have furnished six pikes, no effort whatever was used to procure them. Yet several of the conspirators were represented to possess propriety, which they were unwilling to adventure in so hazardous a project. They exhibit no confidence in each other. A debt was incurred in promoting the plan and the crediting conspirator required ample security for future payment. Their leaders were not appointed, no definite plan of attach concerted, nor place of rendezvous fixed; yet the whole plot is represented as mature and within a few hours consummation. The conspirators were in many instances unknown to each other; their enterprise was predicated as was generally asserted on a force enlisted in the surrounding parishes; yet without any communication with their main body, or devising the means of collecting this force, scattered over a great extent of territory or directing their…to the scene of action, they resolve on the night. Their prime mover Vesey has been represented as a man of intrigue and fitted for command; yet it does not appear, that he ever tested the truth of those assertions on which mainly depended the successful result of the enterprise. For on the day of the contemplated attack, he appears to have discovered that he was himself the victim of deception; and that the host engaged by his sanguine associates, were the creation of an ardent fancy. Such implicit confidence had been placed on these assertions, that he directed a servant of Mr. Blackwood to repair to the plantation of Mr. Ferguson and hasten down the men of France (the servant of that Gentleman). This incapacity is strikingly exemplified in this act, this boy is represented as extremely simple, has assured him that neither knows the place or the people, yet Vesey enjoins the duty and as an outfit supplied him with two dollars. He is to travel a distance of twenty two miles from the city and without any evidence of his mission to deliver a message to two personas, who are at his bidding to assemble the males of four plantations and march them to the city by 12 O'Clock that night; the suspicion to be excited by the movement, or the vigilance of patrols form no part of his care. At 11O'Clock on Sunday this boy is seen in the streets of Charleston; alledging [sic] to one that he did not intend to go, and to another that the Patrols were too strict. But it does not appear that Vesey subsequently evinced the slightest solicitude for his success; for on Sunday he is represented shivering with fear, and in a paroxysm of phrenzy [sic] accusing Gullah Jack as his destroyer. It was in vain that this conspirator sought to encourage and pacify his panic struck leader, with the assurance that he had 250 men in the adjacent woods; Vesey and his associates doubt the adequacy of this force. It is therefore not only probable that the attempt would not have been made with 72, but obvious that they do not possess the requisites for an extensive and deeply concerted scheme of insurrection.

This detail is submitted with a view to furnish the information requested in a revision of the Laws governing that class of our population. It is an event which will necessarily attract your attention to the subject; of much importance that your deliberations should be guided not only by a knowledge of the leading incidents, but unbiased by those views of the extent and danger which have unhappily existed in the public mind. Another motive arises from an earnest desire which had influenced any official conduct, throughout the transaction, of opposing the weak and dangerous proceeding, of exciting the public apprehension, and exhibiting to these people a distrustful and agitated community. The interference this forced on them, is not sanctioned by a wise or sound policy, and is to be deprecated as an indiscretion, inviting to more serious ills. It may be ascribed to the force of early prejudice; but the most deliberate convictions of any mind lead to the conclusion, that

successful rebellion(s) cannot occur in this State. The liberal and enlightened humanity of our Fellow-Citizens produce many attachments, that operate as tricks on the spirit of insubordination. Their habitual respect for and obedience to the authority of their owners, their natural indolence, and want of means and opportunities to form combinations; their characteristic cowardice and treachery, excited by a knowledge of the positive ability of the State, to crush in an instant their boldest enterprises, are insurmountable obstacles to the completion of any general effort. Yet late occurrences clearly demonstrate that such principles are latent in the minds of some of them, and we must admit that evils limited in their extent and duration would result from the best concerted schemes, if consummated. To guard against every such attempt, is the peculiar province of Legislation.

In making this communication, I am also activated by the necessity, which exists for a more distinct expression of your will, in relation to the trial of the Negroes. If it be your object in the organization of Magistrates' Courts, to establish tribunals which shall exercise the power of life and death, and the most absolute controul [sic], over an immense and valuable property, unlimited by those rules which ordinarily govern judicial enquiry; unrestrained by any regulations, but such as those Courts may adopt or reject, and guide solely by the dictates of conscience; an unequivocal and full avowal, should distinctly manifest that will. It is essential to curb the asperities which such a course of proceeding is apt to engender, and requisite, to guide the Executive decision. The argument will not always apply correctly to these Courts, that the Executive is not bound to supervise judicial proceedings; a recurrence to the palpable errors committed by them, during the short period of my administration, will evince the necessity. Humanity not less than the solemn obligations of his high appointment, imperiously require the interposition of Executive authority; where it is manifest that the sentence of death has been pronounced under the misapplication of a term, or the misconstruction of a law; and particularly, as time is seldom allowed in such cases, to suggest causes of prohibition, a course of proceeding not generally countenanced. The indistinctness of the provisions of that Law, is also manifest in the construction recently obtained of the words "Corporal Punishment." If they include banishment from the State and the United States, that property is held under a very precarious tenure; as the whole class of offenses not extending to life are thus punished; and for minor offenses the owner and not the offending slave under this construction may incur the heaviest penalty. It is also dubious whether the clause providing for the punishment of slaves changed with insurrection, includes Free Negroes. It cannot admit of doubt that such was the intention of the Legislature, and should have been the provision of the Law, but the construction is forced, which extends it to them.

In reviewing generally the Laws, which relegate to the government of Negroes, we are disposed to admire the penetration and intelligence, which produced a system so wisely adapted to the object. In these, although crimes are imperfectly defined (which is perhaps the most conspicuous defect), they are with much propriety subjected to a summary and expeditious adjudication; when abroad, or separated from the superintending care of their respective owners, the most rigorous yet salutary provisions restrain their conduct. Sumputary regulations curb dispositions to licentiousness, and forcibly inculcate suitable views of their conditions; they cannot under its provisions assemble beyond a very limited number, for any purpose, without the presence of a white person; nor are they permitted to use offensive weapons or receive instruction, beyond what is requisite for their spiritual and eternal welfare. Under such regulations rigidly observed, it would appear wholly impossible that dangerous combinations could exist. The fault is chargeable therefore rather on the mal-administration that the insufficiency of the Law; further to it has been regarded the duty

of every individual in society to enforce its mandate. Without infringing the general privilege, it is worthy of your consideration, whether it may not be more distinctly made the duty of the State Officers. It is appurtenant to the office of conservator of the Public peace and to render it obligatory, should be incorporated in the oath of office. To constitute a Guard in each Parish, in aid of the duties this required of Justices, under special Legislative provisions, with authority to inspect generally, the conduct and dwellings of these persons, and the economy of each plantation would induce the general security. Indolence the bane of society, acts with pernicious influence over the minds of these persons; the effect is obvious on those plantation which seldom partake of the superintending care of the proprietor; or when his presence is withdrawn and either through prejudice or neglect, he refuses or omits to employ overseers. This in a peculiar manner deserves Legislative attention; for while it tends to depopulate such districts, by exiling the less fortunate, it deprives them of the vigilance essential to the preservation of order. The rule hitherto adopted, is partial in its effect, and easily evaded;…it is partial, because the planter of ten Negroes or of five hundred, is required to have one overseer; and easily evaded, as informers are contemned by the community. No planting interest should be deemed too small, to remain wholly without the superintending care of a white person; and those embodying a greater number of Negroes should be required to provide an overseer for fifty workers. The Planter in making his Tax Return should testify to his compliance with such requisition or be subjected to a penalty, proportioned to the danger the State incurred such delinquency. The wisdom of the Law regulating traffic with slaves, would be conspicuous of enforced by the means first mentioned; but it is submitted for your consideration, whether it should extend to authorize slaves to trade generally under an License. The convenience to the farmer and the community, of this vending the produce of his farm, or the fisherman the result of his pursuit are not designed to be embraced; but there is an immediate class, who prey upon every community, which they are permitted to infest, by a monopoly of the necessaries of life. This severely affects the necessitous procured time and means for exciting discontent; and presents an example of mischievous [sic] tendency; those I conceive should be wholly interdicted, even under Corporate pursuit, under and circumstances of character of favour. In the City of Charleston, the encouragement given to these persons, has impoverished or excited a great many of that class of our Fellow-Citizens. It would in general be a salutary provision, to prevent the owners of slaves, from suffering them to work abroad, but under a particular controul [sic] with a white person. To subject the owners of Runaway slaves and other, who are absent for more than one week to person the slave liable for the amount this allowed, and to forfeit every such slave after an absence of one year, unless redeemed by the owner; who shall pay four Hundred Dollars for the recovery of such runaway, would be highly beneficial, in every district. The convenience or profit to the planter, or permitting his slave the use of a gun, is not consummate with the risk which the State incurs, by the privilege this extended and knowledge thus acquired; to interdict them wholly the use of fore arms, and embrace in this inhibition all persons of color, would be productive of salutary effects. I would also recommend that each proprietor of a public bridge or ferry, be subjected to a penalty for every slave he permits to pass without a ticket or license from his owner or employer. These in addition to the regulations heretofore adopted, would tend to render the system more perfect; but the most perfect system of Laws will be ineffectual, if they are not enforced by wise regulations, resulting from the provident care of the Legislature.

The rapid increase of the Free Colored proprietors of Charleston has been the subject of serious reflection and great anxiety; and in ascertaining the proper remedy, it will

doubtless attract your profound consideration. The accumulation complained of has been the result of those Laws which the States contiguous to us have seen proper to enforce rather than the effect of natural increase or the family with which the slave could heretofore obtain manumission. The course dictated by obvious policy will lead you to throw off that part of the free colored population, which the prohibitory Laws of other communities or their own vices have forced on us. The native of that description and those who have accepted their freedom under the guarantee of our own Laws may then with safety by protected in their persons and property. From them little danger may be apprehended as their members will be greatly reduced; while the property they hold and the privileges they enjoy afford the best guarantee for their proper demeanor.

Slavery abstractly considered will perhaps lead every mind to the same conclusion; but the period has long passed when a corrective many have been applied. The treasures of learning, the gifts of ingenuity, and the stores of experience have been exhausted in the fruitless search of a practicable remedy. The institution is established, the evil is entailed, and we can now do no more than steadily pursue that course indicated by stern necessity, and not less imperious policy. The energy of the State must be exerted; we should frown indignantly on every project of partial and general emancipation as destructive of their happiness and subversive of our own. We must be true to ourselves and just to them; watch over their welfare with kind solicitude, but tenaciously protect our own; rigourously [sic] enforce the salutary restraints of the Law, without permitting its inhibitions to diverge into cruelty or wanton infliction. Such a course of conduct will afford the best answer to the uncharitable rebukes heaped on us by those who cannot appreciate our motives or estimate the difficulties which surround us; check the vituperative spirit which tends to the discussion of our happy compact and discern our unkindest enemy of every reproach. The world will cease to chide us to evils we did not originate and cannot remedy, and the reflecting and virtuous of every community will sympathize with us.

Tho. Bennett
