Part I

Places

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In the Eye of the Beholder

In 1967, the famous Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges published *An Introduction to American Literature* – a book that its editors described as providing an "outsider's view" on the "literary achievement of the United States."[1] By the mid-twentieth century, *An Introduction*'s editors, L. Clark Keating and Robert O. Evans, were able to observe with a certain relief that literature written in the United States no longer needed to "defend" itself from challenges to its legitimacy. Be that as it may, there is something powerfully pleasurable and downright gratifying, the editors admit, in seeing "the magnitude of accomplishment so eloquently attested by a scholar from another culture" – in other words, to have none other than "a distinguished Argentine" of Borges' literary fame show "the world how others see us" (vii). Part of this pleasure, of course, is instructive, for, as Evans and Keating admit, Borges "gently restores" to those living within the United States a literary perspective that may have become distorted through an "ethnocentrism and parochialism" born of such close proximity to the genuine article (xxx).

But a larger part of the pleasure comes from seeing how literature produced within the United States looks in the eye of the beholder

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– how a prominent Argentinian author takes US literature as his exclusive focus, delineating the tradition from its "origins" to the twentieth century, detailing how it shapes writers from other literary traditions, and describing how the world's most prominent authors reckon in their own work with key figures like Whitman, Poe, and Faulkner. Much as children relish being told bedtime stories about themselves and people they know, Evans and Keating like to hear the familiar story of American literature told back to them through the eyes of a disinterested observer. And the real icing on the cake is that it's not an in-house job – the author is not a self-promoting US citizen currying favor with local publishers and literati, but a world-renowned Argentinian author unencumbered by the need to ingratiate himself with the Americans.

And Borges takes on the role of host to what was still for many readers in the 1960s a somewhat unorthodox event – US-based American literature – with all the flourish of a seasoned raconteur and veteran events planner. He declares his fundamental purpose at the outset – "to encourage an acquaintance with the literary evolution of the nation which forged the first democratic constitution of modern times" – and to intersperse into this "history of a literature" "an account of the history of the country that produced it" (3). Indeed, Borges charts the cosmic literary order with a flourish as imaginative as it is capacious: he declares in Biblical fashion that "Edgar Allan Poe begat Baudelaire, who begat the symbolists," while the "civic poetry, or poetry of involvement, of our times is descended from Walt Whitman, whose influence is prolonged in Sandburg and Neruda" (5).

But if figures like Poe and Whitman are generative of literary genealogies that extend across nations, forging, Abraham-like, global lines of descent that last generations and connect the world's peoples into the one, true universal literary church, Borges' whimsical fancy to play God doesn't end there. Just as the language of the Old and New Testaments is filled with mystery, parable, and hidden meaning, so too does Borges suggest that faith in one's literary, as well as holy, fathers can be complex, fraught, and the struggle of a lifetime, and therefore in need of an expert's careful exegesis.

Take the case of Philip Freneau, the classic American author with whom Borges ends the first chapter, appropriately entitled "Origins." The close friend of James Madison and Thomas Jefferson, Freneau was active in the revolutionary cause and authored "The British Prison Ship" as well as other anti-British poetry after he was captured and imprisoned on a British vessel for revolutionary privateering.[2] His patriotic poetry was so popular with his countrymen that he was commonly referred to as the "poet of the American Revolution." As author of early prose fiction and arguably the first American novel in 1770 (*Father Bombo's Pilgrimage to Mecca*), he also has a hold on the title the "father of American literature."[3]

And so it is particularly striking that Borges ends the chapter focused on the origins of American literature not by dwelling at length on Freneau's patriotic poetry – poems such as "The Rising Glory of America" (1771),[4] which predicts a time when a united nation will rule the continent and articulates the vision of an ardent revolutionary generation, but by drawing the reader's attention to "The Indian Student."[5] This less familiar poem describes a young Indian who desires to acquire the knowledge of white settlers and so leaves his community for university, where he impresses his professors with his virtuosic acquisition of Latin and English. But the student's assimilation isn't complete – he becomes increasingly upset by the scholarly content and shared assumptions of the Anglo-American tradition he encounters and ultimately throws over a promising academic career to return to his people.

Borges' focus on the Freneau poem that chronicles an indigenous American's unequivocal rejection of the city on the hill and decision to opt out of the nation's liberal democratic dream is one that highlights how ultimately unsettling and downright oppressive it can be to find oneself under the influence of an energetically patriotic American tradition – it delineates how that tradition can appear in the eyes not of those who create it but of those who encounter it for the first time. And Borges' careful choice of this particular Freneau text pointedly suggests that even the most fervent of American literary pundits, in the odd quiet moment, recognizes a founding inconsistency in the literature produced by the nation that

is responsible for generating democracy's urtext – the first democratic constitution of modern times. In the eye of the beholder, the American literature that Borges takes as his subject, in other words, reflects back to Keating, Evans, and all those US readers flattered by the Argentinian's attention a slightly different version of the literary past – a version in which even the most patriotic of authors writes about the contingency of the nation, the persuasive limits of its logic, and the very real possibility that some of its inhabitants will choose or be forced to opt out of its democratic offerings.

And it doesn't end there, because, as Borges goes on to observe, these very same iconic US authors write their most prototypical literature not in geopolitical isolation – not firmly ensconced within a US literary, cultural, political, or even physical setting that works to ensure that their texts are hermetically sealed documents protected against the distorting perspective of the odd Indian student or Argentinian author who happens to cast an inquiring eye their way. In fact, far from being cordoned off from other traditions, vaccinated against infection from other climes, and thus a pure unadulterated concentration of the nation's democratic ethos, the American literary field seems to be strewn with a patchwork of promiscuous couplings that cross party lines. Washington Irving, as Borges points out, "Americanized legends of other times and places" such that his biography of Christopher Columbus pulls from the writings of the seventeenth-century Spanish missionary and archbishop Domingo Fernández Navarrete.[6] One of the nation's greatest intellectuals and a living symbol of American erudition in his day, William Prescott, just like his correspondent Irving, felt "the peculiar enchantment of the Hispanic world" (16). Even the fame of founding American literary figures, as Borges points out, is often described through reference to other traditions – hence James Fenimore Cooper is widely known and referred to as the "Scott of America." And so, in the eye of the beholder, American literature begins to get blurry – trending, at times, to the near-sighted and, at times, to the far-sighted view of literary proximity. It should come as no surprise, then, that those encountering American literature through the eye of the beholder might find themselves in need

of glasses, optimally with progressive lenses that allow the enthusiast to lock American literature into focus at any distance and from any perspective.

Once we focus on American literature as it is perceived in the eye of the beholder, we can see that it is not so much that literature written in the United States authoritatively represents the nation as a clearly delineated tradition that writers of other nations encounter only once fully formed, but rather that American literature comes into being through cross-pollination. In other words, US writers are constantly importing narrative forms, ideas, and storylines from other places and remixing them in a local setting, and it is this version of a hybrid and upstart American literature that other writers take up, adapt, refute, and repurpose to meet their own particular needs and wants. As a result, American literature in the eye of the beholder becomes harder to place definitively – it becomes something else, something more complex and collaborative than a list of great authors who transport their local settings of Concord or Salem onto the page in order to collectively comprise a cohesive national literary tradition. Less a local cuisine that remains undiscovered for centuries and so is unaffected by far-flung spices and culinary practices, American literature in the eye of the beholder is more of a messy global stew with ingredients from all over the world flung into a literary pot from which hungry passersby the world over grab a quick pick-up meal on the go.

As Giles Gunn observed over a decade ago, "writing in Europe has been in continuous conversation with the emergent literatures of the Americas, and the literatures of the Americas have been in continuous conversation with themselves."[7] American literary scholars have tracked these conversations and collaborations across national lines in a tremendously productive and illuminating fashion, revealing the myriad ways that US authors impact and are impacted by other literary traditions, the transnational literary circuits defining the Americas, and the global shape and texture of US literary culture.[8] But once we pay particular attention to American literature as it is seen through the eyes of authors from elsewhere who variously discover, comment on, translate, and adapt it, we suddenly get

20/20 vision that shows us with remarkable clarity how literature produced in the United States accumulates, adapts, and disperses literary traditions around the world, seeping across all kinds of borders both real and imagined. In the eye of the beholder, in other words, the answer to the question "where is American literature?" is both nowhere and in many places – localized within the nation and diffused well beyond it through various acts of adaptation, appropriation, borrowing without permission, and creative smuggling that defy national borders.

If it seems a trifle odd to ask those who don't live in the neighborhood where American literature might be, it's nonetheless indisputably the case that searching for it in the eye of the beholder has been a defining feature of American literature from the start. In fact, this impulse to see oneself through the eyes of others was a foundational element motivating the earliest writings of the colonists. Even before they disembarked, settlers in the New World worried about how they appeared to those back home. In the sixteenth century, the term "creole" was used in the Americas to designate a person of Old World descent who was either born in the Americas or was transplanted there and hence subject to New World influences. Even in the nineteenth century, as Ralph Bauer and Ruth Hill have ably shown, the term creole denoted place of birth or residence more than racial mixture. And those who met the criteria of this geocultural term were often deeply committed to demonstrating to those at home in England that they were not "going local" or degenerating under the influence of indigenous forces.

Hence, much of the literature produced by early colonists such as Anne Bradstreet was focused on proving and even refining the key attributes of Englishness and English literary style, as much as articulating a divergent American aesthetic. It is this impulse to prove her ongoing Englishness to the home team that motivates Bradstreet to write such poems as "An Elegie upon That Honourable and Renowned Knight, Sir Philip Sidney" (1650, 1678) and not only to take things English as her subject but also to explicitly remind all readers that she shares "the self-same blood" as the

famous English poet.[9] In "A Modell of Christian Charity" (1630), John Winthrop reminded those aboard the *Arbella* that "the eyes of all people are upon us" – that the world's population was watching the Puritan experiment in the New World with intense interest.[10] But if, on the one hand, the early settlers understood themselves to be under extreme surveillance, their every decision and action proof positive or negative of the merits of their social and religious experiment, they were also anxious about how well their Englishness might travel – how they might appear more religious but less English as time went by. Retaining their English identity was, thus, a prevailing imperative governing colonists' literary efforts. This priority, as Leonard Tennenhouse and others have suggested, became increasingly important over time and was the direct result of deep anxieties about how they might appear to those left at home who were all too ready to see the colonists as "barbarians," "savages," or uncouth country folk. And this impulse was still alive and well over a century later when such writers as the African-American poet Phillis Wheatley addressed British monarchs and topics of the day with poems like "To the King's Most Excellent Majesty" (1768).[11]

But colonial and early national poets weren't the only ones to shape their words with an eye to how they would appear to those who read them back home or from a vast distance. The nation's early founders and political spokesmen – men such as Daniel Webster and Thomas Jefferson – explicitly aligned the US political tradition with other experiments in self-government ongoing across the Americas in order to further strengthen the nation's alliances throughout the hemisphere and thereby fend off what they perceived to be Europe's increasingly covetous designs on the Americas. As early as 1808 President Jefferson declared that the interests of Cuban and Mexican independence movements and the United States were "the same, and the object of both must be to exclude all European influence from the hemisphere."[12] In his 1825 Bunker Hill address and related essays, Webster likewise described how, since the battle of Bunker Hill, the "thirteen little colonies of North America" had been joined by the momentous "revolution of South

America" – a revolution that had resulted in "a new creation" in which the "southern hemisphere emerges" as a powerful political force.[13] By 1825 this force proved so powerful that Webster advocated hemispheric alliances, spoke explicitly in favor of Bolivar's Congress of Panama, and formally invited Bolivar to join the Bunker Hill Monument society.

To drive home the interlocking nature of American nations' shared commitment to Atlantic world republicanism, Webster asked US listeners to cast their own eyes not toward the motherland that alternately frowned on and seemed to be keenly observing America but to the other inchoate and struggling American nations that looked to the United States to find models worth emulating. He described how his nation's patriotism appeared in the eyes of those throughout the Americas who beheld it as a model for their own independence movements thus: "in the progress and establishment of South American liberty our own example has been among the most stimulating causes." And so, those struggles for liberty "have remembered the fields which have been consecrated by the blood of our own fathers and when they have fallen, they have wished only to be remembered with them as men who had acted their parts bravely for the cause of liberty in the Western World."[14] It is by looking at the United States through the eyes of those who, Webster imagined, beheld, venerated, and desired to affiliate with it that the nation could strengthen the ties that would enable the US to successfully fend off the increasingly avaricious glances being cast at the Americas by nations on the other side of the Atlantic. Cuban poet José María Heredia's Spanish translation of Webster's Bunker Hill oration and that version's subsequent circulation throughout the Americas suggest that Webster's strategy hit a resonant chord not only within the United States but well beyond its borders.[15]

As Heredia's translation more generally suggests, throughout nineteenth-century America national borders proved to be sufficiently fluid to encourage all kinds of literary circulation and cross-pollination – texts often criss-crossing so frequently as to raise the question of the chicken and egg: which came first, the original or

its offspring? Nowhere can we see this more clearly than in the path that Washington Irving's popular story "Rip Van Winkle" (1819) traveled through the Americas.[16] Written while he lived in Birmingham, England and before he had ever set eyes on the New York Catskill Mountains that are the story's setting, Irving's narrative is a vision of the United States that he dreamt up across a vast distance and adapted from numerous earlier versions ranging from the German folktale *Peter Klaus*, to the ancient Jewish story of Honi M'agel, and the third-century Chinese tale of Ranka. But once it is let loose in an American setting, "Rip Van Winkle" takes on a life of its own. Jorge S. (George Washington) Montgomery adapted Irving's story and published his version as "El Serrano de las Alpujarras" in 1829.[17] This version was then published in a Spanish-language story collection that Henry Wadsworth Longfellow happened upon and liked so much that he re-edited Montgomery's version, along with other stories from the collection. Longfellow titled his collection *Novelas Españolas* (1830) and assigned it to students studying Spanish at Harvard.[18] So in the eyes of the Cambridge Massachusetts undergrads who encountered it in Spanish 101, this classic American tale now looked to be Spanish – a gateway text, prototypical of the foreign culture and language that these youngsters associated with things south of the border.

It is no accident that it was Longfellow who imported this well-traveled Irving tale, marketing it as indicative of all things Spanish. As the author of wildly popular poems recounting the story of the early US nation – poems such as "The Song of Hiawatha"[19] and "Paul Revere's Ride"[20] – Longfellow was the most venerated and well-recognized American poet during his lifetime and known worldwide as a master chronicler of the nation's patriotic past. And yet, even as readers the world over looked within the pages of this particular fireside poet's *Ballads and Other Poems* (1841)[21] and *Voices of the Night* (1839)[22] to find foundational stories of the US nation, Longfellow was reaching beyond US borders into Latin America for poetic inspiration. Beginning his career as a Spanish and French translator, Longfellow quickly developed a fascination for Latin America and Hispanic tradition that he imported into his own

writing. And so when Latin American readers looked at Longfellow's work they saw themselves as if through a funhouse mirror – traces of their own literary traditions and strands of their stories staring back at them in altered form.

Not surprisingly, Longfellow's poetry quickly became the object of enthusiastic translation and reappropriation throughout Latin America – authors ranging from José Martí to Pedro II, Emperor of Brazil, tried their hand at reincorporating Longfellow's words into Latin American literary culture. So effective was the Mexican poet and politician Juan de Dios Peza at capturing the feel of Longfellow's tone and style that he was dubbed for a time "the Mexican Longfellow." With its themes of invasion and displacement, the most popular Longfellow poem with Spanish Americans was his epic "Evangeline, a Tale of Acadie" (1847).[23] Over twelve translations quickly appeared in Latin America, the most popular being *Evangelina* (1871) by the Chilean diplomat, writer, and poet Carlos Morla Vicuña.[24] Spanish Americans' appetite for this edition – and for most of the editions produced by the almost 100 Spanish translators of Longfellow – was voracious, the result of readers seeing themselves through the reflective mirror of Longfellow's literary lens. And so, just as Longfellow's enthusiasm for the Spanish rendition of Irving's most American tale motivated him to import it into the Harvard undergraduate curriculum as exemplary of Spanish language and culture, so too did Spanish Americans' enthusiasm for Longfellow result in various renditions of his poetry that relocated it within Latin American literary traditions.

Of course, not all Spanish Americans who looked at the literature written in the United States saw themselves as they already were reflected back with only slight alterations – some saw what they would like themselves and their countries to become. While the Argentinian writer, educational reformer, and finally seventh President of Argentina (1868–74) joked that his features, like those of his idol Abraham Lincoln, were rugged and homely, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento turned to Benjamin Franklin's autobiography to find both political and literary inspiration. Declaring that no other book did him more good than Franklin's, Sarmiento found

models for his own literary and political contributions in the literature of the democratic United States that he admired. So powerful was the identification that Sarmiento admitted he "felt [that he] was Franklin," justifying that feeling as follows: "and why not? I was very poor, just like he was, a diligent student like he was." By following in Franklin's footsteps, Sarmiento concluded that he could "one day become as accomplished . . . and make a name for myself in American literature and politics."[25] The lifelong inspiration that he derived from figures like Franklin and Lincoln was powerfully evident in his accumulation of plaster busts of these figures – busts which he kept in his home throughout his life to serve as daily inspiration and reminders of the core values that he sought to foster in himself and his country.

If Sarmiento looked into the mirror provided by Franklin and Lincoln to find an airbrushed and aspirant version of his future political self, these figures' influence, as well as James Fenimore Cooper's, was readily apparent in Sarmiento's major literary contribution – *Civilization and Barbarism: or, the Life of Juan Facundo Quiroga* (1845).[26] *Facundo*, as the text is commonly known, immediately became and continues to be a foundational contribution to Latin American literature – a contribution that the Cuban-born critic and endowed professor in Hispanic and Comparative Literature at Yale Roberto González Echevarría identified as the most important book written by a Latin American in any genre or time. But if *Facundo* was initially published in installments in the Chilean newspaper *El Progresso* in 1845 and then as a complete book by a Chilean publisher in 1851, its first translator was Mary Mann, wife of the US politician and educational reformer Horace Mann. Sarmiento met the Manns – along with Emerson, Longfellow, and the editor William Ticknor of Ticknor and Fields – on a visit to the United States in the 1860s, and he became close correspondent with Mary, who subsequently translated *Facundo* into English under the title *Life in the Argentine Republic in the Days of the Tyrants; or, Civilization and Barbarism* (1868).[27] In order to help her friend's bid for presidential election in Argentina, Mann gave him a bit of a makeover, emphasizing his veneration for US political and literary

traditions and buffing out those dimensions of *Facundo* that complicated that stance or indicated Sarmiento as anything other than an Argentinian emissary of US ideals. In so doing, this first English translation turned Sarmiento, for US readers, into the kind of Argentinian Lincoln that he had hoped to personify – Mann's re-envisioning of *Facundo* working to solidify trans-American political cohesion and uniformity at the expense of key differences between Argentinian and US national traditions.

Despite their prevalence, it was not only authors throughout the Americas who cast their eyes with interest on the work of US authors, recognizing in it eerie reflections of themselves as they were and wanted to become. A powerful case in point is the French poet and essayist Charles Baudelaire who found in Edgar Allan Poe not only rich material for translation into French but a fertile imagination that bore an uncanny resemblance to his own. Baudelaire's translations of subsequently popular Poe poems and stories appeared in France as early as 1847 and immediately brought Poe recognition throughout Europe long before he became well known in the United States. In fact, many argue that without Baudelaire's French translations and his frequently reprinted 1856 study of Poe, both of which jumpstarted a Poe craze in the Americas as well as in Europe, Poe would have been forever lost in obscurity.

But it is not only that Poe became better known through Baudelaire, but that Baudelaire became more himself through Poe. Baudelaire is on record as having claimed that when he first read Poe's work he felt a shock of recognition – he saw all of the stories and ideas that were bubbling around in his own brain staring back at him on someone else's page. And so, through translating Poe, Baudelaire not only promoted a favorite author but practiced speaking in his voice, living in his literary head, and writing with his hand. Many suggest that Baudelaire attempted to become the Poe of Europe – to occupy and transport Poe's imagination to a European setting and act as a kind of ventriloquist, channeling Poe and pulling from his literary corpus those strands that he recognized as most reflecting the innate musings of his own mind. So when the French writer looked across the Atlantic to find Poe on the page,

he found his own creative mind hard at work and one step ahead of him, and the literary collaboration he started propelled both into the literary firmament. Many years later, Argentinian letters benefitted from Poe's salvation at the hands of Baudelaire and the subsequent Poe craze throughout Latin America – Borges admitting, much like Baudelaire, to an ongoing fear that "some day I would be found out, that people would see that everything in my work is borrowed from someone else, from Poe."[28]

While Poe attracted the fascinated attention of a stray writer or two, authors the world over immediately saw in Hawthorne and Whitman major forces to be reckoned with – these two US authors immediately becoming touchstones against which writers, particularly those across the Americas, tested, refined, and developed their own craft. José Martí paid tribute to Hawthorne as early as 1884 in an article for *La America* in which he described the New Englander as an author able to paint what a man carries in his spirit. Such a gift – the gift of peeking into the invisible – was unique in literature, and, in Martí's estimation, no one else had known how to discover and reveal the inner workings of the human heart like Hawthorne. Over six decades later Borges concurred with Martí's assessment. At the March 1949 lecture he gave on Nathaniel Hawthorne at the Colegio Libre de Estudios Superiores, Borges began by tracing the history of American literature to Hawthorne. Sure, there were other writers before him, Borges admitted – "Fenimore Cooper, a sort of Eduardo Gutiérrez infinitely inferior to Eduardo Gutiérrez [and] Washington Irving, a contriver of pleasant Spanish fantasies – but we can skip over them without any consequence" Borges concludes.[29] It was only with Hawthorne that American literature and, more to the point, the American literature that was worth talking about at institutions of higher learning throughout the Americas, began.

If Hawthorne, with the intricate portraits of the human heart that he vividly painted in stories like "Wakefield," was the beginning of this American literature, he is also its culmination in a global twentieth-century literary tradition.[30] Even though Borges stated that Hawthorne "continued to live in his Puritan town of Salem,"

never leaving his birthplace behind even when in London or Rome, Borges also credited Hawthorne with what was for him the defining attribute of greatness – the ability to create global circuits of literary collaboration that extend forward and backward in time and across traditions.[31] And so, according to Borges, writers like Kafka not only find in stories like "Wakefield" inspiration for their own writing, they, in turn and counter-intuitively, shape how we read and understand "Wakefield." Like a two-way mirror moving across time and space, Kafka and Hawthorne shine illuminating light on each other's prose, " 'Wakefield' prefigur[ing] Franz Kafka" and "Kafka modify[ing] and refin[ing] our reading of 'Wakefield.' "[32]

Such movement across time and space seems to be what attracts twentieth-century Mexican writer and Nobel laureate Octavio Paz to Hawthorne as well. Collaborating with Hawthorne much as Borges suggests Kafka does, Paz rewrites the Hawthorne short story "Rappaccini's Daughter"[33] – a story whose origin Paz identifies as lying in India. The theme of a lovely young woman becoming literally venomous due to the conditions of her environment was not only popular in Indian literature but moved from India to the West and was evident in the thirteenth-century Latin collection of tales *Gesta Romanorum*. From there it resurfaced in Robert Burton's seventeenth-century *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, most particularly when Burton recognized its historical roots in India with a description of the Indian king Porus sending Alexander the Great a girl who is literally oozing poison. By the time, then, that Paz repurposes Hawthorne's story – this time as a play *La hija de Rappaccini* (1956) representing key features of Mexican nationalism – it refracts light across centuries, traditions, and every corner of the globe.[34]

But if Hawthorne and Poe captured the approving glances of the likes of Borges, Martí, and Baudelaire, Whitman was nothing less than hounded by the literary paparazzi, eliciting high praise and intense critique from Whitman-watchers the world over. At one end of the spectrum, Pablo Neruda, bemoaning dominant European literary influences, claimed that it was Whitman "in the persona of a specific geography, who for the first time in history

brought honor to the American name." "Greatness [may have many] faces," but Neruda asserts that, as "a poet who writes in Spanish," he learned "more from Walt Whitman than from Cervantes."[35] At the other end of the spectrum, the Mexican journalist and writer Mauricio González de la Garza called Whitman racist, imperialist, and anti-Mexican.[36] Whitman-watching began with the publication of Martí's 1887 essay "El Poeta Walt Whitman,"[37] in which Martí hailed Whitman as a prophet. But if publication of this essay in *El Partido Liberal* in April 1887 and republication of it in Buenos Aires' newspaper *La Nación* two months later kicked off the Whitman craze in Latin America, Whitman was neither universally embraced, understood, nor often even read.

With French and Italian translations of *Leaves of Grass* being the most common versions circulating in the Americas, Whitman already came to Latin America as through a glass darkly, filtered through translations that rerouted his most democratic vistas of US futurity through the European languages still dominant in literary circles. It was not until 1912, in fact, with Uruguayan poet Alvaro Armando Vasseur's *Walt Whitman: Poemas* that Whitman's work appeared in Spanish.[38] But even this edition circuited the globe, rerouting Whitman like a plane in bad weather. Because Vasseur did not speak or read English, he translated Italian versions of *Leaves of Grass*, and so *Poemas* gave Spanish audiences the American bard at two linguistic removes. Biographies like that by the French writer Léon Bazalgette entitled *Walt Whitman: L'homme et l'oeuvre* (1908),[39] particularly when coupled with his 1909 translation of *Leaves*, *Feuilles d'herbe*,[40] tended to reinforce an imagined and heavily manipulated Whitman – a Whitman who lived in the minds of those around the globe more as a manifestation of their own local wishes, desires, and expectations than as a direct US import, with "made in America" tags still intact. As Fernando Alegría observed in his book-length analysis *Walt Whitman en Hispanoamérica* (1954),[41] the poet at the center of the Latin American Whitman craze was one who was transformed into different realities – an icon not so much of US literary values as of the principles, linguistic assumptions, and national habits of thought abiding in his Latin American

audiences, many of whom invoked Whitman without having read any of his poetry at all, regardless of language.

In particular, the prominent Latin American poets and writers who identified Whitman as an important touchstone and literary predecessor – people like Neruda, Borges, Paz, and Martí – often did so to further their own particular political, professional, and artistic objectives, transforming Whitman in the process into an extension of their own goals and desires rather than fashioning their work on his model. As Alegría observes, these writers "did not intimately know the content of *Leaves of Grass* nor did they understand to its full extent the meaning of Whitman's poetic reform, nor were they in a position to join in his social and political crusade" (*Hispanoamérica*, 13).[42] Broadly understood as the poet of American democracy and the common man, Whitman became a literary brand that covered an ever-increasing host of particular agendas. Much like the word "liberal," "Whitman" summoned up in the general literate public's mind certain broad and somewhat ill-defined political priorities and moral commitments. Borges pinpointed Whitman's particular innovation and achievement as the result of his commitment to make his hero "all men" rather than a "single hero," as the poets of previous eras had done.[43] It was this ability to represent the everyman that led Borges to think of "Whitman not only as a great poet but as the only poet" such that not to imitate him was proof of ignorance. Known to keep a large number of Whitman books in his library, Neruda claimed Whitman as a "constant companion" – even though he admitted to not following Whitman's writing style, he declared himself "profoundly Whitmanian as regards his vital message, his acceptance, his way of embracing the world, life, human beings, nature."[44] Though bitten by the Whitman bug, Paz was probably most able to identify the sleight of hand by which the Whitman effect gained such force. In "Whitman, Poet of America" he concluded that it was only because utopia and reality are confused in America that Whitman can chant democratic with such force. As Paz acerbically concluded: "America dreams itself in Whitman's poetry because America itself is a dream."

But Whitman was not the only US author who became so powerfully altered by the corrective lenses through which other nations' writers encountered him as to be in danger of changing shape or vanishing entirely. If Paz and Borges incorporated the tone, themes, language, and feel of writers like Poe and Hawthorne into their own writing, Fuentes went one step further with the mysterious Civil War-era author Ambrose Bierce – he made him into a character in one of his own stories. Fuentes described in a 1992 interview the genesis and development of *Gringo Viejo*[45] – how he began reading Bierce when he was 17 and immediately had the idea of transforming him from an author in his own right into a character of his (Fuentes') own making. *Gringo Viejo* was one of Fuentes' first literary efforts – begun when he was 18, returned to periodically, but not finished until decades later. Bierce, the character as well as the author, was therefore a career-long companion, his acerbic wit and creative talent operating as a kind of litmus test and touchstone for Fuentes' own literary development. Author of numerous stories based on his Civil War experience – stories like "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" which Kurt Vonnegut identified as the greatest American short story and a "flawless example of American genius"[46] – Bierce remained a shadowy literary figure throughout his life, both deeply troubled and creatively inspired by the violence he personally experienced in war.

Bierce's life was complex and contradictory, but it was his death that has remained most shrouded in mystery. Heading to Mexico in 1913 to get a first-hand perspective on the Mexican Revolution, Bierce literally walked off the literary map, disappearing never to be heard from again. It was a comment attributed to Bierce – his supposed statement at the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution that "to be a gringo in Mexico: ah, that is euthanasia" – that Fuentes identified as the inspiration for his own novel. Thus, the prospect of one author's possible suicide inspired, and became the substance of, another author's fiction – a novel that helped to immortalize Bierce even as it helped to establish Fuentes. Loosely following the story line of Bierce's life, *Gringo Viejo* scripts Bierce's death – puts

it back on the literary map via a search and rescue mission that imagines Bierce as an elderly journalist for the Hearst empire seeking a glorious death in the Mexican Revolution. What Bierce would have made of this literary obituary of sorts – not to mention of the 1989 film rendition in which he was played by an aging Gregory Peck – of course, is impossible to know. What is clear is that if Bierce refused to leave a narrative trace at the end of the story of his own life, Fuentes didn't let him have the last word, but happily stepped into the narrative breach, making his literary name through the traces left by his literary forebear.

Bierce was not the only US author whose Civil War stories attracted the attention of those around the world who watched with great interest as the US sectional conflict unfolded. If Bierce was alive at the end of the war to write about it, Harriet Beecher Stowe, more particularly her anti-slavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), was generally understood to have given the war effort a crucial nudge.[47] And while Stowe's novel sold 300,000 copies at home during its first year of publication, over the next few years it sold many more copies abroad – over 1.5 million in Britain alone, including pirated editions. Within the first five years of publication, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was read and recognized worldwide as a founding fiction of all things American – it had been translated into twenty different languages, including two different Slovene versions in the first year of its publication. Pirated copies circulated covertly in countries where the book had been officially banned – countries like slave-holding Brazil – and visitors reported seeing the locals reading Mrs. Stowe's novel disguised by grocery paper.[48] As late as 1930 an Amharic translation was published with the goal of creating support for efforts to end the suffering of Ethiopian blacks.

While Stowe's novel inspired a wide range of reactions from literati the world over, how the book was perceived in the eyes of the mother country was particularly revealing, illuminating that nation's vexed perspective on its rebellious offspring. While British anti-slavery proponents hailed the book as a tour de force and the general British response was so enthusiastic that the country spontaneously collected a halfpenny offering to compensate Mrs. Stowe

for the royalties she did not receive on international publication of her book, the prominent British writer and political economist Nassau Senior put his finger on a major reason for Mrs. Stowe's popularity. Summing up the situation with the particular acumen of a political commentator, he observed that "the evil passions which *Uncle Tom* gratified in England were not hatred or vengeance [of slavery], but national jealousy and national vanity. We have long been smarting under the conceit of America – we are tired of hearing her boast that she is the freest and most enlightened country the world has ever seen." And so all England "hailed Mrs. Stowe as a revolter from the enemy."[49] In other words, in the eyes of her British readers, Stowe was nothing other than the literary whistle-blower who, with the stroke of her pen, punctured American bravado and the irritating holier than thou attitude that rubbed the parent country and its authors the wrong way.

Britain's fascination with all literature related to American slavery is nowhere more evident than in that country's fixed attention to African-American men and women of letters such as William Wells Brown and Frank and Mary Webb. Mary Webb's highly popular dramatic readings included passages from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* – passages that Stowe adapted explicitly to be publicly performed by her – and the British tour the Webbs undertook with letters of introduction from Stowe and Longfellow brought both acclaim. While Mary's dramatic readings entranced British nobles, Frank's novel depicting African-American life in the North and the violent racism of the "free" states was equally popular – *The Garies and Their Friends* (1857) being first published by a London firm, complete with an introduction by Lord Brougham and a preface by Stowe.

But the Webbs were a minor literary sensation when compared to William Wells Brown. Taking up residence in England for five years during which time he delivered more than a thousand lectures, traveled over twenty-five thousand miles through Great Britain, and financially maintained himself and his family through what is described in the preface to his *The American Fugitive in Europe: Sketches of Places and People Abroad* (1855) as "literary labors and the honorable profession of public lecturer," Brown embodied for

British readers and audiences the American slave as literary figure, and they just couldn't get enough of him.[50] It's one thing to gloat and say "I told you so" over Mrs. Stowe impugning her southern slave-owning neighbors, but it is another thing entirely to have a real live "American fugitive" in one's midst, describing how African-Americans live in the United States even while picking up the refinements of the homeland with unquenchable enthusiasm. *The Glasgow Examiner* put its finger on the thrill of Brown's book for its British readers as follows: "the author of it is not a man in America, but a chattel, a thing to be bought, and sold, and whipped: but in Europe he is an author, and a successful one too."[51]

In the eye of the beholder, American literature is literally made possible in ways unimaginable in the United States – African-American writing flourishes in a British setting and under the encouraging eyes of British abolitionists who have a seemingly insatiable appetite for Brown. It's no surprise, then, that Brown's five-year residency was a tremendously generative one for his literary career: he described writing three books and lecturing "in every town of note in England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales" (27). And, even more to the point, he described his reluctance to return to the United States, even when war loomed. Like the British who valued him, the further Brown was from his homeland, the more he saw it in the rear-view mirror. Brown insisted that he, just like the influential English abolitionists who invited him to England, could and did see his native land at a remove – beginning *The American Fugitive*, in fact, by describing the mixed feelings with which he "looked back upon the receding land" that was his home (36). But the prospect of returning "to the land of my nativity, not to be a spectator but a soldier" in what he describes as the "glorious battle against slavery" is even less appealing (315). After all, why would he, as he put it, leave "a country where my manhood was never denied" to join a fight where neither side formally recognized his equality (314) – why would he jump headlong into the fray after being a spectator at a safe distance?

Stowe and Brown may have attracted the interested scrutiny of those around the world but this interest in American authors' cri-

tique of their homeland did not end with the Civil War – authors like Mark Twain fascinated writers from France to China to Latin America with his searing depictions of social injustice at the dawn of US empire. José Martí saw Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889),[52] for example, not as a humorous burlesque of romantic notions of chivalry, as those at home tended to read it, but rather as a book driven by profound indignation at the privileged classes who were beginning to rise on the backs of the poor. In Martí's estimation, the mote in the eye of US readers was that love of Twain as a literary representative of all things folksy and American kept them from seeing him as other than a humorist, whereas, in Martí's eyes, Twain was producing the most pungent political critique of any living US writer. The French writer, music critic, and first husband of Colette, Henry Gauthier-Villars, otherwise known as Willy, agreed wholeheartedly and in his *Mark Twain* (1884) – the first book on Mark Twain published anywhere in the world – he enjoined writers everywhere to adopt Twain's courageous critique of materialism and social hypocrisy.[53] But it was with mid-twentieth-century Chinese and Soviet writers like Lao She, Yan Bereznitsky, and Abel Startsev, as Shelley Fisher Fishkin has pointed out, that Twain was most celebrated as a satirist of the first order – as THE American author whose powerful critiques of his homeland were worth understanding and emulating. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, Twain was a literary poster-child for anti-imperialism and was one of the very few American authors whose works were translated and published in China.[54]

While Twain's attention to US race relations, the lure of empire, and regional prejudice resonated both East and West, William Faulkner's retrospective portraits of the Old South replete with all of its racism, social rigidity, and paranoia – like so many imperfections that just won't get photo-shopped out of the final copy – resonated with twentieth-century Latin American authors who heard echoes of their own countries' struggles with race, slavery, and the trauma of colonization in masterpieces like *Absalom, Absalom!*[55] and *The Sound and the Fury*.[56] Faulkner's popularity in

Latin America has been well documented – his impact on the Boom writers receiving particularly thorough attention. His own trips to Latin America and efforts to generate interest in Latin American authors, most notably through his Ibero-American Novel Project – a competition to find the best Latin American novel written in each country between 1945 and 1961 and to publish those novels in English – have done much to shape our understanding of literary exchange throughout the mid-century Americas. But his immense popularity with contemporary French authors is the real surprise – a 2009 poll showing that Faulkner is second in French authors' affections only to Marcel Proust.[57] Beating out Flaubert, Stendhal, Camus, and Baudelaire, Faulkner seems an unlikely choice for veneration and yet his popularity is as enduring as it is unlikely, going back to the 1940s and 1950s. Camus adapted *Requiem for a Nun* for the stage;[58] Sartre is on record as saying that Faulkner is nothing less than a god and wrote essays on Faulkner's style. That French authors continue to place him right beneath Proust on their literary favorite list suggests the circuitous and highly unlikely pathways of authors' affections, alliances, and associations.

And so, from Stowe to Poe, Longfellow to Whitman, when we go to find American literature in the eye of the beholder we see that it is always already between spaces institutional, physical, geopolitical, and conceptual – that it is always circuiting the globe, in motion and on the go, transforming literary material that it poaches and being transformed by those around the world who look at it with skepticism or curiosity but rarely with complete disinterest. We see that it is formed out of composite literary materials and that when we refer to Twain, Emerson, or Whitman we are actually referring to a much messier whole – a literary network that extends out and beyond comfortable containers geographic, political, and subjective.

In such a network, Irving's "Rip Van Winkle" never really comes back home to the United States, even after its origin in England and journeys through Spanish America – it never returns to Harvard to safely take up its studies again after its "transformative" junior year abroad. Rather, it becomes fodder for the likes of

the award-winning Puerto Rican writer and activist Ana Lydia Vega, who even as she signed a petition supporting Puerto Rico's independence from the United States rewrote "Rip Van Winkle" from the perspective of a Puerto Rican drug addict on a bad trip – a trip through a celebration of Puerto Rico's inclusion as the fifty-first state of the Union. "Cránero de una noche de verano" (1982) thus transplants the Irving tale to the Caribbean to describe Puerto Rican ambivalence toward the United States and to further a critique of US imperialism. But "Rip Van Winkle" will, no doubt, only set down temporary stakes beach-side – only until the next creative thinker takes up the tale as raw material for some new literary iteration.

As the famous historian Herbert E. Bolton argued in his influential 1932 essay "The Epic of Greater America," each national story has a "clearer meaning when studied in the light of the others" and therefore much of what has been written about individual nations is actually "a thread out of a larger strand."[59] If this is true of nations' histories, it is even more true of their literatures, and writers consistently acknowledge this fact, even as they generate the prose that will come to represent and epitomize their unique homelands' cultural traditions. Thus the iconic German poet and philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche would write that he felt himself so close to Emerson that he did not dare to praise him because it would be like praising himself. And, closer to home, the African-American writer Martin Delany – an author whose writings critiqued US racial policies – identified Latin American populations as "our brethren – because they are precisely the same people as ourselves and share the same fate with us."[60] As these examples suggest, when you look through the eye of the beholder to answer the question "where is American literature?," you suddenly see that geographic distinctions don't hold – that US, American, and European writers form a highly integrated network that makes follow-up questions like "do you mean US or American literature more generally?" largely irrelevant.

Just like the literature it takes as its focus, the field of American literary studies has tended to see US literary forms through the

refracted light of other nations. Most notably, F.O. Matthiessen's famous *The American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (1941) – the single book that the *New York Times* identified in 2009 as "virtually creat[ing] the field of American literature" – found American literature through recourse to Italy and the Renaissance.[61] If the period 1850–55 was foundational for the creation of a distinctive American literature, Matthiessen understood that flowering within the context of the *Rinascimento* that began in Italy in the fourteenth century and spread over the next three hundred years throughout Europe. The durability and ongoing dominance of the term "American Renaissance" in American literary studies suggests the deep affinities that continue to exist between the study of American literature and the global networks it travels to get back home. And it is these affinities that catch the light and, as if through a prism, show American literature's refracted dispersal, when we ask the seemingly simple question: "Where is American literature?"

Notes

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