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LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS OF THE AMERICAN WESTERN STEAMBOAT c.1811-1861.

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UNIVERSITY OF KENT

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores a variety of literary representations of the American western steamboat during the period 1811-1861. Using works that span a range of literary genres, it analyses western steamboat culture from numerous different perspectives and at different historical moments. In doing so it sets out to locate that culture within the broader cultural history of nineteenth-century America and within representations of society on the westering frontier. As such, attention is directed at, not only the steamboat's day-to-day operations, functions and social activities, but also at the cultural heritage of its dramatic, aesthetic and political deployment: for example, the steamboat as the epitome of the modern, industrial American nation. It begins with a consideration of the western steamboat as a technological object, the context of its design and construction, debates about steam-power, and of its impact on the Mississippi Valley. Secondly, through the recorded observations of travellers, primarily those of Francis Grund, Charles Dickens, Michael Chevalier, Frances Trollope and Harriet Martineau, this thesis examines the social and cultural practices of daily on board society – of public manners and social intercourse. Thirdly, using the narratives of Henry Bibb and William Wells Brown, it explores the role of the steamboat in the internal American slave trade, focusing specifically on the themes of transportation and flight. Fourthly, in a closereading of Herman Melville's satirical novel, The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade, the Mississippi steamboat is shown to represent the stage of America's shifting heterogeneous identity. Finally, in two related pieces devoted largely to the work Mark Twain, this thesis considers the form, status and diversity of his literary representations of the western steamboat. On the one hand, it presents a detailed portrait of the steamboat pilot, his skills and status, and the culture of the larger piloting community. On the other hand, it explores his desire to write the 'standard work' concerning life on the Mississippi and the place of the steamboat in that account.

NOTES ON THE TEXT

The images in the Appendix are duplicated and used without permission from Adam I. Kane's *The Western River Steamboat* and Thomas Ruys Smith's *River of Dreams*. Original type-setting, especially as regards to the work of Mark Twain, and spelling (i.e., American) has been retained in all quotations.

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The Antebellum Pan-Mississippi World

INTRODUCTION

For close to two hundred years the western steamboat has occupied a place in the narrative of American history. From Nicholas Roosevelt's inaugural voyage of the New Orleans in 1811 to the present-day pleasure cruises of the *Natchez*, *American Queen* and *Delta Queen*, the western steamboat has forged an inextricable cultural connection with the rivers of the Trans-Appalachian West. For many people today that connection is personified by the iconic 'floating palaces' of the 1840s and 1850s; a snow-white body, coal-black chimneys and giant red paddlewheels. In that 'golden age' steamboats dominated the rivers, carrying the commercial wealth and cultural diversity of an expanding, modernising America. On board was a 'piebald parliament' of businessman and immigrant, tourist and frontiersman, cotton-planter and Kentucky boatman. On the main deck was a similarly heterogeneous mix of goods and merchandise, of cotton bales, patent medicines, whiskey barrels and a thousand other assorted goods and merchandise. It was an age when the otherwise silent, dormant village came alive to the boisterous cry; 'S-t-e-a-m-boat-a-comin'!' Today that image survives only in cultural representation, in novels, historical accounts, cinema and remodelled touristic tribute, its utility reduced to offering a chance to 'experience history up-close'; a chance to return to 'when cotton was king and life was slow and graceful as the current of the Mississippi.'3

Such popular and frequently elaborated cultural associations, however, conceal an otherwise rich, complex history of diversity and adaptation. Indeed, quite apart from the representations that reflect its cultural evolution, the technological history of the western steamboat is punctuated by change – change in its aesthetic appearance and its everyday

¹ Melville 1990 [1857]: 14.

² Twain 1986 [1883]: 65.

³ The American Queen is reportedly 'the world's largest paddleboat steamer', offering an 'intriguing vacation adventure', advertising the opportunity 'to truly experience the Mississippi River system and Mark Twain's America.' Moreover, the boat is designed 'to give the feeling of a gracious Victorian bedroom complete with patterned wallpaper and carpets and period furnishings', providing the traveller with 'sweeping river views'. Among its luxuries the boat offers a bathing pool and beauty parlour. See, for example, http://www.cruisingholidays.co.uk/river/steamboat/steamboats-nw.htm

function, in its mechanical and structural composition, in its tonnage and motive power. And yet, even as tourist companies appeal to national, iconic literary figures in a bid to attract patronage (the chance to experience 'Mark Twain's America'), and the steamboat popularly stands as a symbol of a mythologized historical West, so scholars, historians and archaeologists, labour to elaborate the full scope of its rich cultural heritage. Nor is there a shortage of documents and eye-witness testimony from which that portrait is to be drawn. In fact, whether it is the Mississippi, Missouri, or Ohio River, there exists a broad and heterogeneous mix of literary and visual signification; a catalogue that includes travel accounts, fictional tales, biographies, personal histories and autobiographies, technical drawings, paintings and photographs.

Perhaps the most ample supply of early nineteenth-century representations belong to the recorded observations of foreign and domestic travellers lured to the West as a site of societal and cultural interest. More than a means of travel, however, the steamboat was itself a prominent topic of discussion, not just in terms of its technology and its practical application, as a means of knitting the Republic commercially and culturally together, but also with regards to life and social activities on board, whether sociological or anecdotal. Indeed, it was not uncommon for authors to consider these various aspects in the light of America's constitutional ideals of democracy, equality and liberty; for example, how technology was aiding in their fulfilment or how manners reflected their retardation. In fact, as Thomas Ruys Smith observes, onboard society served as the foreign tourist's most 'vivid' contact with America's 'great experiment' of democracy.⁴

As the steamboat became an ever more accepted part of daily life for inhabitants of the Mississippi Valley, so the proliferation of representation grew. Adding almost daily to the quantity, if not necessarily to the quality, variety or scope, were the newspapers that quickly became a vital source of public and commercial information. Here representation assumed the form of articles and editorials. Some editorials would condemn the dangerous practices of racing; others cautioned captains against the hiring of free men and women of

⁴ Smith 2007: 80.

colour.⁵ Then there were those that appraised the arrival of new boats, offering descriptions of their luxuries and entertainment. More frequent, however, were reports of accidents and disasters, of explosions, fires, sinkings and snaggings, of runaway slaves, violence and theft. Finally, there were the daily advertisements that gave details of regular, timetabled sailings, shipping routes and the prices of freight. Read together, such material constitutes not just a public chronicle of steamboat activity, but also a part of steamboat culture itself.⁶

The coming of the steamboat age also registered in the humorous tales that began emerging as early as the 1820s and 30s, and that found a home in periodicals such as the *Spirit of the Times* and the *Crockett Almanacs*. As Michael Allen has shown, these tales were rooted in the folk (tall) tales of the frontiersmen, and relied 'on frontier settings, local color, and the slang of the Old Southwest'. They also 'capitalized on a growing fascination with the vanishing Mississippi Valley frontier.' Such representation was the mythologized world of David Crockett and Mike Fink, consisting of flatboats and keelboats, Kentuckians and frontiersmen, of fighting, drinking, hunting and boasting: it was the world of the 'half horse, half alligator, a touch of the earth-quake with a sprinkling of the steamboat.' In the words of Washington Irving, these river-men represented a 'singularly aquatic race', who 'possessed habits, manners, and almost a language, peculiarly their own.' It was, however, as Smith observes, a short-lived existence, whose 'consequence and characteristics [...] rapidly vanish[ed] before the all-pervading intrusion of steamboats.'

Indeed, as the western frontier grew evermore industrialized so literary emphasis shifted to the steamboat and to the men and society on board. There were, for example, stories such as George P. Burnham's, 'The Steamboat Captain who was Averse to Racing', T. B. Thorpe's 'The Little Steamboats of the Mississippi', and Coddington C. Jackson's, 'A Severe Time on the Mississippi'. In amongst such portraits, and perhaps the pinnacle of this humourist tradition, is Thorpe's remarkable 'The Big Bear of Arkansas' (1841) that

⁵ See Chapter 4 of this thesis.

⁶ See papers such as *The Daily Picayune*, *New Orleans Bee*, *Louisville Journal*, *St. Louis Daily Republican*, *Vicksburg Herald* and *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*.

⁷ Allen 1990: 7-9.

⁸ Smith 2007: 68.

⁹ Smith 2007: 48-49. Smith quotes Washington Irving's Astoria 1836.

¹⁰ Smith 2007: 70.

¹¹ McDermott 1998 [1968].

evokes a typical (archetypal) 'social hall' scene on board 'the well-know "high-pressure-and-beat-everything" steamboat *Invincible*.' His description of the western steamboat is that of a 'heterogeneous' assortment of passengers whose composition it 'can scarcely be imagined by one who has never seen it with his own eyes.' 12

Such literary output unsurprisingly saddled the western steamboat with a variety of potent cultural associations and literary tropes: not all of them favourable, not all of them deserved. Among the most prominent of positive connections saw the western steamboat as a symbol of American progress and industry, of 'haste and dispatch', an instrument of democracy helping to unify and hold the union together. But it equally gained notoriety as an haven for criminal activity, for fighting and gambling, for tricksters and confidence men, for the absence or denigration of table manners and social etiquette (the incessant jettisoning of tobacco was especially odious to European tourists). The steamboat was also regarded as a dangerous mode of travel with countless lives lost to fires or sudden, violent explosions. In short, for the unsympathetic (typically foreign) tourist, it was host to the worst aspects of America's 'great experiment', with narratives typically following an itinerary of observations and grievances, whether their aim was to condemn or repudiate.

Perhaps the most intriguing of all antebellum representations of the Mississippi steamboat, passing largely unnoticed at the time, is Herman Melville's satiric novel *The Confidence-Man*: *His Masquerade* (1857). Set onboard the allegorical steamboat *Fidèle* it not only makes use of popular, 'imaginative' and 'historical' cultural associations of both steamboat and river frontier, but dramatizes many of America's societal values, attitudes and cultural preoccupations, parading them as a masquerade of vivid personages bound for the Southern port of New Orleans. At the centre of its polyphonic cast is the iconic figure of the 'confidence man' and his labours to extract through conversation a monetary show of confidence.

Not all early representations were literary of course. Nestled among the pages of the many magazines, journals and travel books then flooding the antebellum market were numerous illustrations, sketches and woodcuts. Some, for example, would simply depict

¹² For a brief consideration of the tale see Smith 2007: 72-76.

the steamer on which the author had travelled, others perhaps a dramatic scene from the narrative. Sketches by Arrowsmith (*Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (December 1858)), meanwhile, recorded the moment of a steamboat's destruction, grounding, going over the Falls of Ohio, or wrecked on a large protruding sawyer. Harper's likewise published the illustrations of Jacob A. Dallas that comprised a variety of river scenes, characterised by tranquillity, danger or general merriment. Thus, there were dramatic night-time scenes of a steamboat wooding-up; of a crowded, industrious levee at New Orleans; a flatboat in peril of being crushed at night by a steamboat; or a 'Negro' camp that shows a steamboat being loaded with cotton behind. Some sketches even hint at the societal life and activities of the passengers on board. Some sketches even hint at the societal life and activities of the

It was in fact the visual arts and not literature that introduced the American West to arguably the largest pre-war, pre-photographic audience. ¹⁶ The most popular and celebrated representations were the moving canvas panoramas of John Banvard and John Rowson Smith and the river paintings of artists like George Caleb Bingham. ¹⁷ According to Smith, Bingham is most famous for his sentimentalised portraits of a pre-industrial river; typically showing jolly flatboatmen engaged in either dancing or playing cards. With the arrival of the steamboat, however, these idealised pictures were given 'an ambiguous component' – an ambiguity never clearer than in two well known paintings of the mid-1840s. The first, *Boatmen on the Missouri*, sees the steamboat as either a portent of the future, its ominous black smoke appearing in the background, or as occupying a crucial role in the prosperity of the frontiersmen whose livelihood is now founded on their supplying the boat with fuel. Similarly equivocal is, *Lighter Relieving a Steamboat Aground*, that, while seeming to contrast 'fallible technology and resolute frontiersmen', can simultaneously serve as an argument for the importance of clearing the rivers of debris (snags / sawyers). ¹⁸

¹³ See, for example, Trollope's *Domestic Manners* and Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* respectively. See Appendix, 1 and 2.

¹⁴ See Appendix, 3.

¹⁵ See McDermott 1998 [1968].

¹⁶ Smith 2007: 111.

¹⁷ See Appendix, 4.

¹⁸ Smith 2007: 115. The first of these works was reproduced as a black and white engraving, ten thousand of which were distributed to the membership of the Art-Union.

Reaching an even greater audience by playing to untold numbers in Eastern cities and European metropols was the performative spectacle of the moving Mississippi River panorama. Among those competing for the mantle of accuracy, artistic ability and (most importantly) size, the art and showmanship of Banvard stands above the rest. Although none of his canvases survive, documents attest to what a typical performance may have entailed. As Smith describes: 'As the huge painting slowly unwound from one roller to the other, visitors to Banvard's exhibition saw the banks of the Mississippi, the Missouri, and the Ohio roll past as if they were on board a western steamer. They passed ancient settlements and pioneering towns, fellow steamers, flatboats and keelboats, swamps and snags. "Mississippi Waltzes" were played in the background (often by Banvard's wife), while Banvard, on a platform at the side of his canvas, provided a didactic narration filled with local colour.

If antebellum representation is a medley of voices then post-war (re)production is arguably dominated by the voice of a single author: the one time steamboat pilot Samuel Clemens. There was, of course, no shortage of representations as steamboats experienced a short-lived resurgence in popularity and commercial activity – some of the largest and most elaborate boats ever to navigate the rivers were conceived and built within a decade of the war's end. Indeed, adding to the continued output of advertisements, editorials and articles that appeared in newspapers and journals, to the developments in technology and changes in visual aesthetics, there is the continued production of travel narratives and the newly emerging photographic records. Literary representation, however, truly belongs to the antebellum portraits of Clemens's *nom de plume* Mark Twain who seized upon the western steamboat as a yet unexplored (or rather fully realised) part of American culture.

Centre stage in the author's literary oeuvre and a quintessential homage to river life is the 1883 work *Life on the Mississippi*. Written after a six month return to the river, and incorporating the earlier *Atlantic Monthly* sketches, 'Old Times on the Mississippi' (1874), the work's more than four hundred pages sees Clemens plundering the repository

¹⁹ Smith 2007: 125.

²⁰ Smith 2007: 127.

of his own experiences, the myriad books of Mississippi lore and the lives of the men he knew and the people he encountered on board. The effect of this polyphony is a veritable encyclopaedia of information and anecdote: for one contemporary reviewer it contained 'the only realistic history of piloting on the Mississippi in existence.' Since then, the name Mark Twain has become synonymous with the Mississippi River, the antebellum American South, and western steamboat culture in particular, not just for the American reading public, but for a global cultural imagination.

As the fate of the western steamboat became evermore ominous so representation became largely an historical affair, with more and more former steamboatmen making use of personal knowledge and experiences. In the realm of fiction (and echoing the old folk tales of the Southern humourists) is the work of John Henton Carter. Popularly known as Commodore Rollingpin, his oeuvre includes a collection of sketches entitled The Man at the Wheel (1898), featuring tales such as, 'Mark Twain' and the 'Explosion of the Blue Goose', and the novel, Mississippi Argonauts: A Tale of the South (1903). Alternatively, there is the autobiographical work of George Bryon Merrick, who published his pre-war experiences as Old Times on the Upper Mississippi - Recollections of a Steamboat Pilot from 1854 to 1863 (1909). ²² More systematic than Clemens (his indebtedness however, visible inside and out), Merrick chronicles his path from cabin boy to cub pilot, offering details of life 'In the Engine-room', 'The Pilots and Their Work', 'Bars and Barkeepers' and 'Gamblers and Gambling'. Other notable works include Joseph Mills Hanson's The Conquest of the Missouri (1909), being, 'The Story of the Life and Exploits of Captain Grant Marsh' and Hiram Martin Chittenden's History of Early Steamboat Navigation on the Missouri River (1903). More encompassing however, is the work of renown captain Emerson W. Gould and his 1889, Fifty Years on the Mississippi; or Gould's History of River Navigation. Comprising a cornucopia of information, Gould charts the rise and fall of steamboat transportation, providing, amongst other historical details, descriptions of

²¹ Budd 1999: 237-238. Lafcadio Hearn in the New Orleans Times-Democrat on 20 May 1883.

²² See Chapter 6 of this thesis.

steamboats and early types of water craft, the effects of the steamboat upon settlement of the Mississippi Valley, and a series of biographies of prominent captains.

Many of the works listed above are readily available either in libraries, on microfilm or as inexpensive paperback reprints, and together illustrate the scope of nineteenth-century material concerned with the western steamboat and western steamboat culture.²³ As research continues so more and more representations are added to the list – whether political, technological, commercial, legal, fictional or personal (diaries and letters). It is not, however, simply a matter of new discoveries, of searching out buried or overlooked details, for interest in the western steamboat and western steamboat culture has given rise to a substantial amount of cultural activity. Indeed, such has been the output over the past six decades that the modern reader can not only learn about everything from steamboat technology, construction, commerce, operations and practice, to river life and society, but similarly indulge their historical imagination in newly written, recreated tales; for example, John Brunner's *The Great Steamboat Race* (1983), or Johnny D. Boggs's *Dark Voyage of the* 'Mittie Stephens' (2004).

Among studies that deal with steamboat technology and construction, there is the still indispensable seminal work of Louis C. Hunter; *Steamboats on the Western Rivers – An Economic and Technological History* (1949). In more than six-hundred pages Hunter proffers information on almost every aspect of western steamboat history; details of its structural and mechanical development, its techniques of operations and work culture, as well as its status as a 'business institution', of its organizational practices, of 'ledgers and balances', and the conditions of travel for cabin and deck passengers. He also deals with issues of river improvements, accidents and regulations.²⁴ A more recent study, and a perfect companion, is Adam Kane's *The Western River Steamboat* (2004). Unlike Hunter's wide ranging study, Kane limits his focus to the technological (aesthetic, structural and mechanical) development of the antebellum steamboat, offering a detailed, illustrated account on everything from boilers, paddle wheels, gauge cocks, hog chains, safety valves,

²⁴ Hunter, Louis C. 1993 [1949].

²³ See, for example, John Francis McDermott's *Before Mark Twain: a Sampler of Old, Old Times on the Mississippi* (1968).

to bulkheads, water pump, beams and decking. Kane is also in a position to make use of archaeological information gleaned from the unearthed steamboat wrecks of the Arabia, Scotland, Cremona, Kentucky, Homer and a dozen others.²⁵

Other studies meanwhile have opted to focus on more general aspects of western steamboat culture. For example, Harry P. Owens's Steamboats and the Cotton Economy: River Trade in the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta (1990) sets out to describe the century-long history of Yazoo steamboating ('discovering and evaluating the role of the steamboat in the everyday social fabric' of the Delta), and so contributing to the 'historic preservation process' by, amongst other details, providing the 'names, dimensions, and descriptions of some six hundred steamboats.'26 In a different vein, Jerry O. Potter's *The Sultana Tragedy* - America's Greatest Maritime Disaster (2000) recounts the explosion of the Sultana on April 27 1865 that killed two-thirds of its 2,400 passengers. Combining a mix of court testimony, newspaper accounts, photographs, illustrations, and military and government documents, Potter scrutinizes 'the cause of the explosion, and the investigation and coverup which followed', exposing 'the greed, indifference, criminal misconduct and gross stupidity' that placed some two and half thousand people on a boat designed for 376.27 On an altogether different note there is Thomas C. Buchanan's Black Life on the Mississippi – Slaves, Free Blacks, and the Western Steamboat World (2004), which sets out to provide a 'counter-narrative' to the more commonly written histories concerning western steamboat culture, focusing on the 'marginalized' experiences of the free and slave African-American communities.²⁸

To these histories may be added a growing list of secondary sources which treat western steamboat culture as part of a larger historical narrative of the Mississippi River: studies such as, Walter Havighurst's Voices on the River (1964), William J. Peterson's Steamboating on the Upper Mississippi (1968),²⁹ Michael Allen's Western Rivermen,

²⁵ Kane 2004: 33-43.

²⁶ Owens 1990.

²⁷ Potter 2000.

²⁸ Buchanan's work draws on a number of different sources, but most crucially the testimonials of former slaves and free men and women of colour. Prioritizing the words and written testimony of African-Americans he examines how steamboat culture shaped the world of slavery. He pays particular attention to the everyday work culture, the opportunities and dangers, the conditions of transportation and the possibilities of flight.

1763-1861: Ohio and Mississippi Boatmen and the Myth of the Alligator Horse (1990), John Reps's Cities of the Mississippi (1994), or Thomas Ruys Smith's River of Dreams – Imagining the Mississippi before Mark Twain (2007). Not all of these works position the steamboat centre stage, but in detailing the societal and cultural history of the America's Mid-western waterways they provide invaluable contextualisation for what was a dynamic moment in the history of the industrialising New Republic.

Lastly, there are the many biographies, especially those pertaining to the life and work of Samuel Clemens, that elaborate on an individual's time or career on the rivers or their literary output concerning the western steamboat. Examples of such works include, Ron Powers' Dangerous Water – A Biography of the Boy Who Became Mark Twain (1999) and the more recent, Mark Twain – A Life (2005), and Fred Kaplan's The Singular Mark Twain – A Biography (2003). Indeed, in the light of Twain's popularity, his academic and scholarly currency, there are also countless critical readings, in particular, journal articles, that in discussing works such as Life on the Mississippi or The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, they likewise treat of steamboat culture through literary analysis. Something similar can be said of Herman Melville's Confidence-Man, that has of late stimulated much in the way of literary criticism.

* * *

At the heart of this thesis reside the work of Herman Melville and Mark Twain. As a study of nineteenth-century literary representations of the western steamboat it is equally built on the bedrock of interest in American literature and history. It demonstrates an interest in how literary works are appropriated by historians and how literary scholars historicise works of fiction. As such, it behoves an indebtedness to both historicist and literary schools of thought and practice, seeking to harmonize a number of their more contentious theoretical and methodological sticking points. To a large extent, each academic discipline

³⁰ Mary Helen Dolan's Mr. Roosevelt's Steamboat 2000 [1981], can perhaps be included in this list.

not only helped in selecting what material was read, but likewise proved invaluable in framing identified areas of study: be it technology, geography, society, or gender. Such influence, however, did not prevent a more organic process from determining the choice of authors or literary works, thematic context and a fully realised conceptual framework, where selection was as much influenced by the availability of material as it was by its content. Indeed, it is fair to say that the twinned roots of Twain's *Life* and Melville's *Confidence-Man* suggested not only the possible themes of interest (of initiation, confidence, travel, slavery, manners), as well as a list of travellers to pursue (Captain Basil Hall, Hon. Charles Augustus Murray, Mrs. Trollope, Miss Harriet Martineau to name but four), but also a variety of cultural traits and associations that characterised the world of steamboating in the popular imagination, such as racing, gambling and adventure.³¹

In turn these works influenced the process of selection and organisation. For example, the invaluable 'counter-narrative' offered by the subject of slavery acquired its form and focus from the paradoxical association of transportation and liberty (flight) visible in the narratives of fugitive and emancipated slaves. Similarly the large repository of representation offered by travellers was seen as most rewardingly read in the light of their complementary patterns of observation, in the repetition and divergence (some times polemical) of subject matter and attitude.³² Alternatively, the notable absence of material pertaining to many aspects of antebellum western steamboat design and construction, a consequence of the so-called 'unique culture of western steamboat production', steered consideration of the technological to contemporary public and political debates over the dangers of boiler explosions and river hazards, and of the steamboat's utility (economy, western expansion).

If this, in part, accounts for what material was read and the themes around which ideas were to be framed and structured, something needs to be said about how that material

31 Twain 1986 [1883]: 289.

³² The subsequent decision to divide these accounts (despite their overlap) along lines of gender was done not only to emphasize the political conditions of their authorship and publication but the separated circumstances of travel.

³³ See Foreword, by Alan L. Bates, in Kane 2004. For example, the absence of technologies like blue printing and photography. Equally, though drawings were occasionally made, they were not easily reproduced and frequently destroyed when a job was finished.

has been organised and (re)presented; about issues of context, concept and methodology. First there is the matter of language and terminology. Perhaps least controversial is use of the generic term 'literary' to classify the type of work under investigation, a term often used discriminatingly to differentiate works as being of either 'high' or 'low' cultural status. Here that term is applied more liberally and used to denote everything from novels, short stories, travel accounts, and personal / auto-biographical narratives to an author's private journal entries or epistolary communiqués. Thus, on the one hand, it not only identifies works more familiarly regarded as 'extra-literary', but also effectively blurs the lines of literary genres; of the common distinction made between fiction and personal musings; between novel and travelogue.³⁴

On the other hand, it is used to denote that no qualitative value-judgment is implied about the 'literary merit' of a particular work, and that each is more profitably understood as part of the free exchange that occurs within a larger cultural matrix of signification. This is not the same as saying that all texts are equal in their cultural currency or prominence, but that the 'literary' status of one is not elevated to the detriment of another. For example, although an epistolary text by Dickens may lack the fully realised ambition of *American Notes* or the novel *Martin Chuzzelwit*, perhaps precisely because unintended for public consumption, it nevertheless provides a rewarding representation of everyday steamboat society and travel.

More controversial perhaps is the use of the connected term 'representation'. In a manner of speaking, each of the above listed works constitutes a 'representation' – from Thorpe to Gould to Kane – whose production is not simply the consequence of authorial intent but inscribed by a range of discursive practices which influence and underpin its creation and presentation. In 'primary' works such as travel accounts this is visible in the wealth of conflicting representations (the differing co-ordinates of aesthetic appreciation for example) or a text's classification as either sentimental, romanticized or mythologized. In academic, 'secondary' works the issue is suitably illustrated by the changing emphasis

³⁴ Thus, for example, Chapter 2 sets alongside one another the socio-political observations and evaluations of Francis Grund and Michael Chevalier, with a novel, a travel account, and the letters of Charles Dickens.

placed by historians on the significance of the (western) frontier to American history, on the reconfiguration or deconstruction of terms like 'frontier' or the various shifts that have occurred in perspective or subject matter (who or what is written about). Thus, a critical assessment could be made of Hunter's presentation of steamboat technology, Dickens's portrait of American manners in *American Notes*, or of Buchanan's examination of black life on the Mississippi, examining each work in relation to the cultural climate of its production.

On the one hand, then, 'representation' means simply the textual presentation of the western steamboat — of its formal enclosure in grammatical (syntactical, metaphorical) patterns, literary or cultural tropes and its particular thematic usage. (Omissions or silences — the with-holding of information / details — can likewise speak volumes.) This traditional focus on form and content, however, does not presuppose the unqualified acceptance of a simple causal relationship between object and textual representation; that the written word is merely a mimetic response to something experienced or observed — that there is an 'objective' physical referent behind those words. On the other hand, 'representation' is about the wider contemporaneous cultural, historical and political climate and the idea that representations were continually re-appropriated throughout the history of western steamboat culture. It is also about the fact that representations are read in different ways in different times and constantly stimulate and play upon one another, synchronically and diachronically. As such, reading 'representations' is very much about revealing the constructed nature of the text; of how texts are, or become, inter-connected, and how they display or conceal the traces of those that preceded them.³⁵

The best way of characterising the formal approach of this thesis, then, is as a close-reading of various related representations of the western steamboat. However, in

³⁵ As a matter of some interest these issues are visible in (or connected to) the work of a number of the authors under discussion. For example, in *How to Observe Morals and Manners* Harriet Martineau offers a systematic treatise on the methodology of sociological research, exploring, among others, issues of bias, hasty generalizations and data recording techniques; in short, outlining the observer's philosophical, moral and mechanical requisites. Melville, meanwhile, 'plays' with the instability of cultural signs; of the dangers in presuming an untroubled correspondence between outward appearance and words with private intent. Alternatively, Twain's *Life on the Mississippi* repeatedly (indeed, it is arguably sown into the fabric of the text itself), engages with the problems of representation. This takes the form, for example, of cultural and aesthetic relativity, the 'manufacture' of portraits and the presentation of historical events.

many cases 'representation' consists of little more than a few prescient passages in a specific chapter or a few cursory descriptions scattered through-out a much larger work. For example, travel accounts entail the framework of cultural and societal engagement ('morals and manners') where the steamboat is typically one part of an American 'Grand Tour'. On other occasions the steamboat appears as no more than the setting for an entire work; a convenient literary framing device, as in 'The Big Bear of Arkansas', where it is the perfect locale for the exchange of stories. Alternatively, fictional narratives set on or near the Mississippi might feature the steamboat simply as part of an attempted mimetic (realist) depiction of everyday life – a local, common, practical means of travel. In this sense they function as part of the societal fabric – its representational importance tied to its very announcement. Thus, while there may be no obvious symbolic significance attached to the steamboat, no obvious ideological frame in its description, its participation or role in events is, in-and-of-itself, suggestive. In each of these separate cases, then, representation is circumscribed by a larger narratorial ambition or agenda.

Such textual 'limits' of representation in no way obviate the remainder of the work. Indeed, irrespective of the length of the representation, its published context served as part of the overall reading and analysis process. This might mean the genre of the work – travel account, slave narrative, satire – or the cultural, political and or societal conditions specific to its publication – whether the author was a woman or a man. It also means that the work itself has on occasion provided larger frames of reference. For example, the observations and evaluations offered by Martineau and Trollope about women in America (or American women) throughout their books played a part in contextualising the gendered conditions of steamboat travel. Similarly, in looking at the represented experiences of women travellers the views of each author sat alongside the larger historical and cultural context of early nineteenth-century female authorship.

The figure of the author has equally contributed to the context of each work, with both public and private work affording invaluable information in relation to which their representations may profitably be read. This has meant everything from the family letters of Twain, Dickens's social and political convictions, Martineau's sociological treatise

(*Morals and Manners*), to the abolitionist activities of Henry Bibb. ³⁶ Not that such material is always forth-coming, there is, for example, a notable discrepancy in the simple quantity of private expression between Twain and Melville concerning the western steamboat. That having been said, because this thesis is predominantly thematic in its structure (society, separation, slavery, piloting), that context is tailored accordingly. Where it is used less sparingly is in the chapters dedicated to Twain and his piloting experiences, wherein his epistolary confessions provide a useful guide to their literary representation. Use of such information, however, acknowledges a compromise with historical specificity, for while written at the time, such private material was unavailable for cultural consumption and allows 'readings' not possible to readers in 1883.

A further factor connected to authorial contextualisation is the scholarly baggage that each author carries. Most of the authors discussed here are well known, though their ties with steamboat culture maybe less so, and each comes with a variety of useable, readymade contexts. Twain, of course, is well represented in both academic and non-academic circles, his life and work, particularly as it pertains to the western steamboat, having been studied and portrayed repeatedly and in some detail.³⁷ Similarly, despite a delayed start, Melville's Mississippi novel has of late received much in the way of academic scrutiny, with essays and entire books devoted to its interpretation.³⁸ Even the once marginalized aspect of slavery has been brought to the fore by scholars such as Buchanan. As for the testimonies proffered by Dickens, Trollope, Martineau et. al., their work can not only be placed alongside fellow travellers to America and the West, and thereby treated within the broader study of nineteenth-century travel writing, but equally, where there exists a history of critical engagement, the author's larger oeuvre. Last but not least, despite the scholarly neglect of the Mississippi identified by Smith, studies relating to antebellum life on the River have provided a context by offering ideas and avenues of investigations as well as cultural, historical and biographical information.³⁹ They have, for example, helped locate

³⁶ See Chapter 4 of this thesis.

³⁷ See Chapters 6 and 7 of this thesis.

³⁸ For example, Jonathan A. Cook's Satirical *Apocalypse – An Anatomy of Melville's The Confidence-Man* and Helen P. Trimpi's *Melville's Confidence Men and American Politics in the 1850s.*

³⁹ Smith 2007: 3. He writes, 'that no previous account has focused its attention solely on the Mississippi's role as a prominent feature in antebellum culture.'

the western steamboat both practically and culturally; most purposefully within regional and national representations of the River; i.e., its place in the American imagination.

All these issues and contextual contingencies inform and influence the readings undertaken in this study and contributed to its overall design and structure. It needs to be stated that at no point has an attempt been made to assign a definitive contemporaneous interpretation or 'meaning' to a particular work. Rather, what is offered is a historically and culturally situated reading, with each representation purposefully located in a larger matrix of signification (i.e. placed and read alongside relevant prior and or contemporary publications). As hinted at above, this includes the author's personal correspondence, other work in which she or he has touched upon the same subject, the critical or public reception of their work, and work by other authors of a similar type. In addition to these primary sources are those that deal with the greater American context, work that helped flesh out the particular historical moment; whether that entailed issues of race, gender, politics or, more specifically, scientific debates about steamboat design, technology and safety. 40

Another way of addressing the issue of contextualization is to briefly consider the underlying conceptual framework of this thesis. For the most part this might be reduced to two overlapping areas of study; the first concerns the history of America's technological development; the second the history of American western expansion (or better, studies of the American Frontier). The former is the province of scholars such as David E. Nye, John F. Kasson and Leo Marx and deals with the culturally registered impact of technology on America and its people; how technology was experienced (used, understood, observed) and how those experiences were represented and disseminated (novels, newspapers, diaries, political discourse). The latter is the on-going debate over the significance (or meaning) of the West, or more properly, of western expansion and its impact or place in American history. Among its prestigious list of practitioners are the likes of Frederick Jackson Turner, Frederick Logan Paxson, Walter Prescott Webb, James C. Malin, Henry Nash Smith, Ray Allen Billington, Patricia Nelson Limerick, Walter Nugent, and Richard White.

⁴⁰ Such work has served to guide, aid and qualify, through invaluable technological and cultural information, aspects of, and associated with, western steamboat history.

The first area of study proved valuable for a number of reasons. Firstly, it helped to establish the western steamboat in the broader narrative of America's technological past, placing it alongside other industrial tools of territorial colonization. Secondly, it located the steamboat amongst contemporary debates concerning the impact of technology; whether that meant comparisons with canals or the railroad, or with regards to safety, management and commercial practices. In this respect it aided in delineating the context of political and public reception; about how technology was understood and experienced in antebellum America and the language and rhetoric through which such understanding and experience was articulated. As such, it not only initiated discussion of western steamboat culture under specific thematic banners: aesthetic versus practical, technology versus nature, productivity versus safety, as well as ideas of progress and ideals of democracy and egalitarianism, but also showed how these debates were present and operating in different cultural medias – in political debate, scientific journals, newspaper accounts and fictional tales – as well as the lexicon of literary tropes of their expression.

What is important here is illustrated by the distinction of object and context that Nye makes for his own work, *American Technological Sublime* (1994), writing that it is not about the 'history of machines and structures from an engineering point of view,' but 'the social context of technology'; about 'how new objects are interpreted and integrated into the fabric of social life.' What interests Nye in this instance are the 'intensely valued' experiences of 'ordinary people' for technological marvels, for engineering feats such as the Erie Canal and the first transcontinental railroad, as well as the form those experiences took ('terror' and 'wonder' were common emotions) and the language (conceptualisation) of their expression. Common to all these elements, with its emphasis on technology and collectivity, is the concept (and vocabulary) of the 'American sublime'. As Nye argues, unlike its European counterpart, the American sublime was 'democratic', 'organised for

⁴¹ Indeed, according to Nye, 'A new machine acquired social meaning when placed in a context and used for a purpose'. Nye 2003: 2.

⁴² In Kasson's argument, writes Jeffery L. Meikle, what mattered for the historian was the fact that the "general culture" had regarded technology as "a welcome source of excitement, an addition but not a fundamental disruption of the natural order." Meikle 2003: 158.

crowds of tourists', embraced technology and, notably, 'transformed the individual's experience of immensity and awe into a belief in material greatness.'

But there is also visible in Nye's study an interesting dialectic between experience and its adequate containment in language. Marx makes the matter particularly resonant by paraphrasing comments made by John Stuart Mill, who argued 'that machine technology inculcates its message directly, imagistically, wordlessly', and that meaning 'is inherent in its physical attributes'. Quoting Mill directly, he adds: 'The mere visible fruits of scientific progress, [...] the mechanical improvements, the steam-engines, the railroads, carry the feeling of admiration for modern, and disrespect for ancient times, down even to the wholly uneducated classes'. On the other hand, continues Marx, 'Much the same feeling surrounds the symbol of the machine when it is put into words [...] [f]or its meaning is carried not so much by express ideas as by *the evocative quality of the language*, by attitude and tone'. Thus, for example, the use of expressive phrases such as 'triumphing over' or the 'annihilation of space and time'; or; 'It is truly a sublime sight to behold a machine performing nearly all the functions of a rational being'.⁴⁴

The arena of the written representation is further enhanced in Nye's more recent, *America as Second Creation: Technology and Narratives of New Beginnings* (2003), in which he examines the contradictions visible in post revolutionary 'narratives of nation'. Here especially it is the narrativisation (the imagined / created myths) of technology and the American landscape. Indeed, conveniently divided between the 'mainstream' and so-called 'marginal groups' these narratives are shown to bestow opposed representations of the role of technology in settling the West – the central theme as Americans began to reimagine themselves as a self-created community. On the one hand, whether it was the axe, mill, canal, railroad, or the irrigation dam, mainstream narratives record a process of community creation where the 'dramatic action focuses on transforming an uninhabited, unknown, abstract space into a technologically defined place.'

⁴³ Nye 1994: 43. Here the concept of the 'American Sublime' remains in the background, indeed, Nye himself makes little reference to the steamboat, however, the ideas associated with the context of experience and perceptions are very much to the fore.

⁴⁴ Marx 2000 [1964]: 192-194. Emphasis added.

⁴⁵ Nye 2003: 3-4.

foundation stories', not only is technology portrayed as responsible for transforming the wilderness of the West 'into a prosperous and egalitarian society', but at the same time depicts machines as being 'dominant yet democratic, transformative yet conserving'. On the other hand, the counter-narratives 'emphasized the political and economic dangers of internal improvements'; ⁴⁶ registered the despoliation of the environment (deforestation, pollution); ⁴⁷ expressed dissatisfaction with the conditions of canal, steamboat or railroad travel, ⁴⁸ or underlined the exploitation of the worker. ⁴⁹

Such 'literary resistance to industrialization' is equally the focus of Marx's study *The Machine in the Garden* (1964), in which he examines the response by writers of the American Renaissance to the intrusion of technology into the American landscape. Marx frames his thesis as the clash of two 'cultural symbols' – that of the Garden or American pastoral ideal, and the technological machine. The clash itself he labels 'the pastoral design'; a scene comprising nature, by which he means an idealized image of landscape, and its counterforce. Traditionally, such a clash has meant the opposition of (the more or less fixed location of) town and country. In the American archetype, however, the counterforce becomes industrialization, or machine technology, and involves a radical change in this 'conventional pattern' as the ('alien') machine intrudes and, in-so-doing, transforms the 'country', threatening a final break between 'the two styles of life'. For Marx, this clash is epitomized in the 'Sleepy Hollow' sketch in Nathaniel Hawthorne's notebook entry for July 27, 1844 – a 'little event' that 'marks the shaping of a metaphor, or metaphoric design, which appears again and again in modern American writing. '52

Peacefully reposed in a Massachusetts wood near Concord, Hawthorne sets out to record 'such little events as may happen'. He begins with the minute detail of everything that he sees and hears – the shallow wooded space, the leaf strewn pathway, the sounds of

⁴⁶ Nye 2003: 176.

⁴⁷ Nye 2003: 71. For example, James Fenimore Cooper's description of a professional logger challenged the 'mainstream' invocation of the solitary pioneer. Similarly, in the twentieth-century it was Native American tribes who criticized the American government for failing to protect forests. Nye 2003: 71.

⁴⁸ Nye 2003: 177.

⁴⁹ Nye 2003: 116.

⁵⁰ Marx 2000 [1964]: 3-33.

⁵¹ Marx 2000 [1964]: 191.

⁵² Marx 2000 [1964]: 32. Indeed, Marx sees the 'The Sleepy Hollow episode' as prefiguring the birth 'of a new, distinctively American, post-romantic, industrial version of the pastoral design.' Marx 2000 [1964]: 32.

birds, insects, squirrels – gradually moving his observations to images of man and society - the village clock, cowbells. Far from introducing any 'tension' into the scene, the shift belies a 'harmonious effect' that, according to Marx, 'seem[s] to unify society, landscape and mind'. It is at precisely this point that Hawthorne hears the whistle of the locomotive, the long, 'harsh' 'shriek' that even 'the space of a mile cannot mollify [...] into harmony. [...] It brings the noisy world into the midst of our slumberous peace.' The disturbance, however, lasts but a moment, and when the train vanishes out of ear shot quiet is restored. Thus, to quote Marx, 'What begins as a conventional tribute to the pleasures of withdrawal from the world - a simple pleasure fantasy - is transformed by the interruption of the machine into a far more complex state of mind. '53

For at least one critic, Marx's literary bent is seen as detrimental to the force of his overall argument. As Jeffery L. Meikle argues, not only is the study 'distinguished by the near absence of any discussion of actual technologies' but his 'few examples [... are] so thoroughly derived from literature [...] that readers ha[ve] to take on faith the assertion that this supposedly recurrent event formed part of the collective consciousness of midnineteenth-century America.'54 However, what is questioned by historians is here taken as a virtue and serves as a guide in the identification and examination of 'literary' tropes and formal motifs (patterns), as well as a 'literary' historical context for contemporary ideas surrounding new technology. Indeed, used in conjunction with Nye, its value lies in those portions which detail the substance of late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century rhetoric of technology. For example, the arguments of Trench Coxe, a merchant keen to represent 'the machine [... a] as another natural "means of happiness" decreed by the Creator in his design of the continent; '55 or those of the lawyer, Timothy Walker, who regarded 'new

⁵³ Marx 2000 [1964]: 11-15.

⁵⁴ Meikle 2003: 147-150. In his summary, Meikle writes how Marx spoke of 'applying "the techniques of the literary critic" to get at "relatively impalpable' forms of experience." Such an approach enabled one to pay "attention to the 'texture' of a document, [to] its tone and pattern of imagery," in ways that were often not apparent to the "historian intent on 'extracting the paraphraseable content of a document." Meikle 2003:

⁵⁵ Marx 2000 [1964]: 160.

technology as the instrument appointed to fulfil the egalitarian aims of the American people.'56

If studies of America's technological development have helped in elaborating the western steamboat as an industrial tool and cultural symbol, so studies of the 'westering' frontier have aided in conceptualizing the broader cultural and historical issues, such as those of economy, migration, slavery, colonial territorial annexation, gender, ideology, mythology and ethnicity. Thus, like studies of technology that place the steamboat and steamboat culture (including its representations) in their particular historical moment, it introduces crucial concepts and patterns of reading, offering a number of ways by which to appreciate the steamboat's cultural significance, the value of its myths and associations. For example, Henry Nash Smith's Virgin Land, not only endorses the use of all manner of materials, but also underlines how those works might purposefully be read. One especially pertinent practice entails recognising that myths and symbols 'about the West, whether true or not, were often as important as facts in understanding western history.' He argues that 'myths' or 'symbols' need to be understood, not simply as the opposite of truths, but also as 'important belief systems that shaped as well as reflected a complex, interrelated set of historical, emotional, and psychological experiences.' For Smith, both myth and symbol represent 'an intellectual construction that fuses concept and emotion into an image', and are as important as 'an observable fact or event in shaping what actually took place in the West.' Works of contemporary popular literature are thus seen as reflecting 'many of the controlling assumptions of the day about the nature of the American west.'57

So it is that Smith shows, according to Marx, how 'down to the twentieth century the imagination of Americans was dominated by the idea of transforming the wild heart-land into such a new "Garden of the World", and that, 'On the whole, Americans were unsentimental about unmodified nature.' More than simply existing in art and literature,

⁵⁶ Marx 2000 [1964]: 187. Marx adds, for Walker, 'the machine is a token of the possibilities of democracy. It promises unbelievable abundance, hence a more harmonious and just way of life – including the life of the mind – than mankind ever has enjoyed.' Marx 1964: 190. As an added bonus Marx includes a scene from *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in which a steamboat destroys the raft Huck and Jim are drifting on. ⁵⁷ Etulain 1996: 161-162.

the goals embodied in this 'symbolic landscape' 'governed behavior on many planes of consciousness.' To quote Smith directly;

The myth of the garden affirmed that the dominant force in the future society of the Mississippi Valley would be agriculture. It is true that with the passage of time this symbol, like that of the Wild West, became in its turn a less and less accurate description of a society transformed by commerce and industry. When new economic and technological forces, especially the power of steam working through river boats and locomotives, had done their work, the garden was no longer a garden. But the image of an agricultural paradise in the West [...] long survived as a force in American thought and politics.⁵⁸

Equally useful has been the recent emphasis on uncovering those voices commonly overlooked or marginalized in accounts of Western history. This has entailed studies along lines of ethnicity, race and, or gender; studies which not only redress the scholarly neglect of representation, but which do so through the use of personal diaries, journals, letters and reminiscences; the recorded testimonies of the peoples themselves.⁵⁹ For example, Annette Kolodny's The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630 -1860 (1984), which brings to light women's conceptions of the West, including their own personal mythologies, and emphasises how those myths differed from the more dominant ones constructed by the American Frontiersmen. Another example, is Sandra L. Myers's study, Westering Women and the Frontier Experience 1800-1915 (1982), that examines 'women's preconceptions of the frontier', as well as 'how those ideas were changed and modified' as a consequence of their frontier experiences. Meanwhile, Julie Roy Jeffery's Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West 1840 -1880 (1979), explores how nineteenth century standards for female behaviour (specifically a 'women's societal role as an agent of civilisation and a keeper of morals'), was effected by her experience in the 'wilderness' of the Mississippi frontier. Thus, for instance, she shows how, far from living 'novel, path-

⁵⁸ Smith 1978 [1950]: 124.

⁵⁹ For example, Richard White has re-examined the place of Native American tribes in American history, adopting neither the perspective that treats them 'as savages or primitive, childlike peoples who were barriers to civilisation' nor, as is 'nearly always' the case with 'popular revisionist accounts [...] as virtuous, Edenic peoples invariably wronged by invading, rapacious Europeans.' Etulain 1996: 171.

breaking lives' 'western women' would more commonly replicate the experiences of her eastern counterpart.⁶⁰

The implications of such investigation with respect to the western steamboat are many. On the one hand, it underlines the importance of myth or 'tall tales' of river life to an appreciation of western steamboat culture; that they are a vital part of that culture and thus crucial to understanding its history; and that all its associated ideas, traits and tropes influenced the way travel was experienced (looked upon) and written about. On the other hand, it illuminates and helps contextualise some of the less researched and debated areas of western steamboat culture. For example, the noticeable difference in the recorded travel experiences of men and women, on how they travelled and what they saw, shedding light on the conditions of frontier living and society – on matters of custom and conduct (codes of propriety). Meanwhile, work on restoring and examining other formerly marginalized voices has already begun with Buchanan's work on the impact of steamboat culture on the lives of free and slave women and men of colour. Others voices are perhaps projects for the future: the use of steamboats in relocating various tribal populations, its role in fighting the so-called 'Indian Wars', and in the transportation of remunerations.

Underpinning all of these debates is the concept and polysemous term 'frontier'. Indeed, from Frederick Jackson Turner's address at the World Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893 to modern contemporary studies of western expansion, the frontier has been conceptualised in simplistic, general, as well as more focused, specialized terms. It has, for instance, been considered with respect to topography, environment, economy, climate and culture, as well as other social determinants, such as ideology, ethnicity, race, and gender. As an influence on American values, ideals and preoccupations, the frontier has not only been seen as the source of America's best traits, as well as being blamed for its worst, but also read as responsible for the growth of nationalism and the evolution of American political institutions. It has equally been portrayed as a shameful 'legacy of

⁶⁰ Etulain 1996: 171.

⁶¹ See, for example, the overviews offered by Richard W. Etulain in *Re-Imaging the Modern American West* – *A Century if Fiction, History and Art* and Gerald D. Nash's *Creating the West* – *Historical Interpretations* 1890-1990.

⁶² Turner in Billington 1977 [1966]: 2, 13. (Alternatively, see, Turner 1996 [1920]: 1-38.)

conquest'. ⁶³ Indeed, the appellation 'frontier' as a word or concept (better yet, construct), can be understood in a number of ways; as a physical geographic region or a metaphoric line of demarcation; as a matter of population density or dispersion; or as a question of geographical mapping (cartography) – of the uncharted (unknown). It can also be seen as something (a place or space) defined in opposition – as being 'not'-civilised or lacking in cultural sophistication. With respect to the American frontier it can thus be considered in relation to the more urbanized East and its defining cultural values.

It is this relationship of East and West that resides at the heart of Turner's original 'frontier thesis' and that which is most useful here. Indeed, quite apart from its supposed role in moulding 'the distinctive character of Americans' (traits such as 'individualism, hard work, and self-reliance'),⁶⁴ the frontier is portrayed as a unifying agent, responsible, not just for 'the grand series of internal improvement and railroad legislation', but whose 'economic and social characteristics' also helped relieve sectionalist tensions. In short, it was 'the advance of the frontier' that was responsible for the 'growth of nationalism and the evolution of American political institutions'. What is particularly valuable here, then, is Turner's emphasis upon the 'Middle region' as 'the typical American region', a place where North and South 'met and mingled into a nation', which, through its system of connecting waterways, became the locale of interstate migration and home to 'a process of cross fertilization of ideas and institutions'.⁶⁵

Not all cultural historians have agreed with this privileging of the frontier in the relationship between East and West; Richard White, for example, emphasizes the shaping power of culture. But there is no denying that many who wrote about the West (and about steamboat travel in particular), did so influenced or impressed by the cultural values of the urbanised East or Old World. Nor is there any doubt that some saw (and represented) the Mississippi as precisely the unifying force Turner identifies. However, the use of the term

⁶³ Nash 1993 [1991]: 144. This refers to Patricia Nelson Limerick's work *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West*.

⁶⁴ Nash 1993 [1991]: 3.

⁶⁵ Turner in Billington 1977 [1966]: 10-19. (Alternatively, see, Turner 1996 [1920]: 1-38.) This much broader concern was, of course, an issue for Turner himself, who 'disclaimed the one-dimensional character of his frontier theory and emphasized the complexity and interaction of a wide range of influences.' Nash 1993 [1991]: 28.

'frontier' is far from adequate here. Not because the Mississippi River never constituted the frontier in the minds and imaginations of Americans, it did, but rather that within the geographical and historical parameters of this thesis such a 'general' term obscures a number of the factors influencing the construction of each particular representation. For example, the crucial ideological difference contained in the geographical opposition of North and South, slave states and non-slave states, and the cultural differences between New World and Old. Then there is the issue of this study's overarching temporal scope, such that the gap separating the work of Trollope and Twain signals a contrasting set of cultural discourses relating to the frontier. What all this reinforces is the need for reading representations in the cultural and historical context of their production, where ideas and prejudices about the 'frontier' are the property of the author.⁶⁶

If there is a way of unifying all these representations around a single conceptual framework it is perhaps the various cultural discourses of any particular moment as they pertain to the Mississippi River. What this might entail is succinctly illustrated by Thomas Ruys Smith:

The giant river was a commercial thoroughfare that drew millions to its waters, united disparate elements, and brought together a uniquely diverse range of characters. It was simultaneously connective tissue, borderline, and crossing point; a channel of slavery and a path to freedom; a lonely wilderness for explorers and the setting for a fashionable tour; a pastoral paradise and an industrial powerhouse; a place of salvation, and a notorious underworld. It was America's river, physically and culturally at the heart of the nation; but it was also, to apply Timothy Flint's phrase, "ultima Thule": distant, strange, mysterious, magical. The story of the imagined Mississippi River is the story of antebellum America.⁶⁷

The key word here is 'imagined'; the Mississippi River as a phantasmatic space onto which was projected a myriad of ideas, dreams, myths and ambitions; in short, a site of imaginative and practical contestation. As Smith's list makes plain, the substance of these imaginings was far from stable or ideologically (culturally) reconcilable, indeed, it was malleable enough to accommodate paradoxical if not contradictory representation. Some of these paradoxical associations are certainly reducible to the opposition of the real

⁶⁷ Smith 2007: 2-3.

⁶⁶ Smith draws attention to the different cultural associations evident in the antebellum period between the Upper and Lower Mississippi. Smith 2007: 141.

and the fictional, to the saleable material of enticement (the West as fulfilment of fantasy, as opportunity / paradise / Eden) and the realisation and concrete fact of hardship, poverty and of course slavery. Timothy Flint's *Recollections of the Last Ten Years in the Valley of the Mississippi* (1826), for example, contrasts the 'romantic pull' of the River with the 'sad reality' of the 'wretchedly furnished' and 'usually sickly' emigrant, many of whom 'suffered, died, and were buried with charity'. Other paradoxes, meanwhile, are not so readily differentiable and become rhetorically inextricable; 'industrial powerhouse' and 'pastoral paradise' or technology and the pastoral ideal. But the change in emphasis is also attributable to the historical moment, to the reorientation of the river from periphery (as border) to its place at the physical and cultural heart of America – a path usefully represented by Smith as the 'Americanization' of the river.

For convenience this path can be divided into two historical periods; two periods divided by the 1803 Louisiana Purchase. The first can be read in relation to the common ideas and ambitions of distinguished individuals like Thomas Jefferson, James Madison and Alexander Hamilton, united in their interests for the shape and strength of America's future. For example, in 1786, and contrary to initial reticence, Jefferson had come to the plain, affirmative conclusion that 'the navigation of the Mississippi we must have', and that to abandon the Mississippi 'is an act of separation between the eastern and western country.'⁷¹ According to Smith, he may have reached this conclusion based, in part, on the persuasion of James Madison who had recognised in the Mississippi 'the key to imperial expansion [...] as the artery that promised to feed, extend, and guarantee the longevity of a pastoral America.'⁷² Lastly, in 1802, Alexander Hamilton unequivocally stated: 'I have

⁷² Smith 2007: 18.

⁶⁸ Smith 2007: 60.

⁶⁹ Marx 2000 [1964]: 160-161. See discussions of Tench Coxe.

⁷⁰ Joel Barlow writes, 'Lands yet unknown and streams without a name [...] Where Mississippi's waves their sources boast, / Where groves and floods and realms and climes are lost.' Smith 2007: 26. Smith also quotes an article in the *Freeman's Journal* of 1782 to demonstrate how 'the mystery surrounding the Mississippi and its tributaries contributed to its romantic.' Thus, 'from a source unknown collecting his remotest waters, rolls forward through the frozen regions of the north, and stretching his extended arms to the east and west, embraces those savage groves, as yet uninvestigated by the traveller, unsung by the poet, or unmeasured by the geometrician.' Smith 2007: 38.

⁷¹ Smith 2007: 32-33. Other significant representations were made in an attempt to gain control of the Mississippi from the French. One argument used by Livingston was the task of ascending the river, that passage up the river against the current was 'slow and expensive'. However disingenuous these representations may have been the strength of the river's current was a problem.

always held that the unity of our empire, and the best interests of our nation, require that we shall annex to the United States all the territory east of the Mississippi, New Orleans included.'73

The second (post-purchase) period of the River's Americanization took a variety of forms, that were not merely economic and military but also, and connectedly, cultural. For example, there were the cartographical and exploratory expeditions of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, and the 'military mission' of Zebulon Pike whose published work was brought to public attention in Jefferson's sixth annual message (1806). The Other notable works on the Mississippi River took the form of navigation aids and books that circulated 'important moments of Mississippi history and culture'; books such as Zadok Cramer's Navigator. Such material not only aided and abetted the many migrating to the West but, at the same time, also introduced and, was responsible for, forging its cultural and historical meaning for incalculable others. More significant, and ideologically binding East and West, is the central iconic figure of Andrew Jackson. As Smith argues, 'Jackson's closeness to the heart and soul of the nation was a direct result of his closeness to the Mississippi.' Indeed, it was at this moment that the river 'achieved a new prominence in national life, as both a symbol of the frontier and the West, and a breeding ground for national icons who came to be seen as potent representatives of the American spirit.'

The place of the western steamboat in this history is its role in effecting a change in the West 'from preindustrial agrarianism [...] to steam-driven powerhouse'. Evidence to this effect, for example, is evident in an article by James Lanman published in *Hunt's Merchant Magazine and Commercial Review* in 1841: 'Steam navigation colonized the West! It furnished a motive for settlement and production by the hands of eastern men, because it brought the western territory nearer to the east by nine-tenths of the distance [...] Steam is crowding our eastern cities with western flour and western merchants, and lading the western steamboats with eastern emigrants and eastern merchandise. It has

⁷³ Smith 2007: 31.

⁷⁴ Binding the continent together through exploration and mapping, assigning men such as André Michaux to the task of discovering the 'shortest and most convenient route of communication between the U.S. & the Pacific ocean.' Smith 2007: 29.

⁷⁵ Smith 2007: 45.

advanced the career of national colonization and national production, at least a century!' In this succinct, evaluative summary the steamboat is both 'motive' and means for national consolidation, bringing together by bridging (or effectively collapsing) the geographical, spatial gap between East and West, as well as the ideological gap of territorial expansion and economy. (Noteworthy too, is Lanmen's linguistic choice, the repetition of western and eastern and the final reiteration (doubling) of 'national'.)⁷⁶

In the light of these considerations chapter 1 sets out to provide an overview of the western steamboat as a technological object, with particular attention paid to its aesthetic appearance and its unique form of motive power. However, rather than a simple recitation of contemporary observations, the aim has been to locate such details within debates over steam technology – specifically the culture of the 'high-pressure, non-condensing engine'. On the one hand, it draws attention to the context of construction and design, stressing the many factors and influences that contributed to shaping the western steamboat's form and its mechanical operations – not least the particular and peculiar conditions of the rivers and smaller tributaries. It equally, and more generally, plots some of the key aspects and areas of its development. On the other hand, the chapter is designed to serve as a frame for the many themes associated with western steamboat culture discussed in subsequent chapters.

Chapters 2 and 3, in turn, are devoted to the representations of onboard society as offered by the early nineteenth-century traveller. The first examines the experiences and evaluations offered by Francis Grund, Michael Chevalier and Charles Dickens as regards the ideas and ideals of American manners and societal equality. Examined in the light of Europe's contemporaneous preoccupation with post-independence America, the so-called 'great experiment', it explores these themes, not only at the level of personal interaction, but equally with respect to the larger American nation and the consolidation of its diverse cultural heritage and diversifying composition. As such, each author's representation is treated not simply as the result of personal encounter and observation, each one testifying to the circumstances of steamboat travel, but also as works calculated to meet a larger political agenda. Indeed, whether the context is industrial, technological, or social, the

⁷⁶ Smith 2007: 45-46.

western steamboat is seen as a site of societal interaction or as 'a means of communication' that connects and entwines American society and its values.

As a complement to this discussion of societal behaviour and interaction, chapter 3 focuses on how dominant American social attitudes and structures, specifically the public and private relation of men and women, impacted on the experience of western steamboat travel. Using the narratives of female travellers, in particular those of Frances Trollope and Harriet Martineau, it considers the manner in which these cultural values of (gendered) difference shaped the experiences of women cabin passengers, and how those experiences were subsequently characterised in print. Thus, on the one hand, it portrays the practical circumstances of everyday travel; from the portrait of luxuries, amenities and personal sentiments regarding accommodation and activities, to the sense of 'confinement' as a direct consequence of the rigid separation of the sexes. On the other hand, it places these representations in the broader context of (nineteenth-century) 'woman as traveller' and 'woman as (travel) author', and how this dual framework effected both experience and published portrait.

Chapter 4, in turn, shifts focus away from the experiences and representations of onboard society to those of the African American slave. Central here, is the paradoxical association of transportation and flight that witnessed gangs of shackled men and women relocated from plantation to plantation (port to port) as part of America's internal slave trade, and its use as a potential method of flight to the free northern states. For the purposes of this chapter, attention is directed at the personal testimonies of William Wells Brown and Henry Bibb, whose portraits offer especially resonant and complementary illustrations of this association. The former, for example, provides explicit evidence of the violence and brutal treatment of transportation, offering insight on the practical as well as psychological details of the slave trade. The latter, meanwhile, discloses many of the details, sentiments, tactics and anxieties associated with the flight to freedom.

In contradistinction to these personal representations, chapter 5 proffers a close-reading of Herman Melville's last novel, *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*, which uses the 'frontier' and the Mississippi steamboat as a 'setting' for a satire on the nature of

contemporary American society and its values. Unlike earlier his novels, such as *Moby-Dick*, *Redburn* and *White Jacket*, Melville shifts attention from the ocean, and the work culture of sea-going vessels, and exploits the everyday encounters and conversations of passengers, rather than the lives, duties and responsibilities of officers and crew, as a microcosm of the American nation. Indeed, it is the social interactions of individuals, each one denoting one or more aspects of American culture, ideals and ideology, that are the principle focus of his satire and the object of his critical foil. Whether it is the actions of merchants or beggars, the words of philosophers or aristocrats, the novel suggests that the underlying gauge of a society's well-being is reflected in the measure of individual confidence. Thus, as the *Fidèle* travels south from St. Louis to New Orleans on April first, Melville represents the 'steamboat of state' as a medley of commercial and metaphysical transaction in a crowded, heterogeneous bazaar.

Until this point attention has fallen on representations published in the antebellum period of western steamboat history. Chapter 6, however, while largely retaining focus on pre-war steamboat culture, shifts the temporal perspective of authorship to the post-bellum era and into the genre of autobiographical remembrance. Moreover, it relocates authorial viewpoint from the external observer to internal participant – to the profession of piloting in particular. The central work here is Twain's Life on the Mississippi and its representation of his apprenticeship or initiation. In contrast to the broad themes of previous chapters, attention is paid to the specific, technical, practical and personal aspects associated with 'learning the river' and the task of navigating the rivers of the Mississippi Basin. As such, it focuses on the specific skills, qualities and knowledge required of the cub (and pilot), of his relationship with his mentor, Horace Bixby, with other pilots and the captain, and with the wider piloting community. Particular attention is also granted to Twain as author and the literary nature of his representation. As an interesting and rewarding inter-text, the chapter also considers the work of George Bryon Merrick who, though writing 15 years later, and about the 'Upper Mississippi', is writing about the same period in history, and about similar river experiences.

In consequence of the stature and authority, not just of *Life on the Mississippi*, but of Twain's Mississippi writings in general, chapter 7 uses those works, as well as several of the themes and ideas they raise, to examine the aesthetic appearance of the western river steamboat and some key aspects of its cultural representation. It opens with a brief account of *Life*'s personal and critical context, and its contemporaneous cultural status (granted by many paragraphists) as 'history'. It then proceeds to explore different portraits of the antebellum steamboat with respect to ideas of cultural / aesthetic relativity; specifically the representations of Dickens and Twain himself. For the former, this means a comparison with the form and features of the ocean-going vessel, and a portrait of dirt, ugliness and disorder; for the latter, it is as much a question of personal experience as aesthetic criteria, where the western steamboat is at once handsome and gaudy, magnificent and a sham. The final section of this chapter extends this discussion to a consideration of the main cultural associations apparent in Twain's literary portrayal. However, rather than returning to the 'Old Times' sketches of the Atlantic Monthly (or Life), it involves a close examination of the opening chapters of Twain's collaborative novel The Gilded Age, and which arguably serves as a model for his later works.⁷⁷

The underlying ambition of this thesis, then, is to provide a distinctive exploration of antebellum western steamboat culture as represented in a variety of literary forms during the course of the nineteenth century. Using a range of representations, from the personal to the public, the political to the professional, it examines the western steamboat, not just as a technological force (in terms of its practical utility as a mode of transporting people, goods and merchandise), but equally as a cultural symbol and literary creation; as an 'historical' and 'imagined' object. The two, of course, are far from being mutually exclusive. Indeed, more than simply exploring the role played by the western steamboat in American history, this thesis explores its convergence in representation with specific cultural and historical, regional, national and international, ideas and ideologies. To put it another way, through an examination of western steamboat culture (technology, societal manners, cultural practices,

⁷⁷ Twain collaborated with his friend Charles Dudley Warner.

as well as the literary presentation of its particular work culture), this thesis offers a unique perspective of larger themes in early nineteenth-century American cultural history.

CHAPTER ONE

THE WESTERN RIVER STEAMBOAT

The Steamboat, during the last twenty years, has been the means of peopling the West with millions of enterprising and prosperous people. It has built up large and wealthy cities, and placed within their reach all the means of comfort, all the elegancies of refinement, and every blessing, social, religious, and literary, enjoyed by the inhabitants of the seaboard. It has borne to every foreign region the surplus of those productions, with which the teeming earth has rewarded the Western cultivators. In fact, it has been just as essential to the growth of the nations, that are now expanding themselves in all the vigor of healthy, thriving youth over the prairies and forests, as the rich soil, whose products must otherwise have lain useless on their hands.¹

The history of steam navigation on the Western rivers is a history of wholesale murder and unintentional suicide.²

It is a happy privilege we enjoy of living in an age, which for its inventions and discoveries, its improvements in intelligence and virtue, stands without rival in the history of the world. ... Look at our splendid steamboats...³

In considering the cultural history of the nineteenth-century western steamboat attention need necessarily fall on a variety of contemporaneous discourses. Perhaps the best place to locate any such work is in the 'new industrial order' of the 1840s; a time when steamboats, factories and the railway, indeed, machine technology in general, 'had captured the public imagination', and the 'power of the machine' served as 'conclusive sanction for faith in the unceasing progress of mankind.' In the judgment of Leo Marx, it was upon such new technology that countless Americans rested their 'hopes, for peace, equality, freedom, and happiness'. Not only was technology the means of securing 'an economy of abundance', of freeing the masses from the toils of hard manual labour (and so providing time for cultural growth), but realizing the ideals (democracy and egalitarianism) of the New Republic. And yet, the dominant strain of technological positivism failed to hide or fully offset concerns over public safety or arguments about the effects of industrialization on the individual and

¹ The North American Review 1840.

² Brockmann 2002: 32. The quotation appears in Robert Fulton's 'What Constitutes an Engineer?' published in the *Journal of the Franklin Institute*, 21, pp. 55-56, 1851.

³ Quoted in Marx 2000 [1964]: 197.

society, the dangers and discomforts of travel, and the potentially detrimental effects to the environment. In paradigmatic terms it marked a clash between machine technology and the American pastoral ideal.⁴

In his seminal study, The Machine in the Garden (1964), Marx tracks the evolution and 'pinnacle' of this clash ('the pastoral design') to mid-nineteenth-century America, and there identifies 'a striking divergence' in response and representation between the 'popular' and 'high literary sphere' of culture. The latter, he argues, would be negative in spirit, the former, generally 'affirmative, even celebratory'. In fact, more often than not the 'popular sphere' of 'newspapers, [...] magazines, and political speeches' praised the new technology 'as emblems of the "conquest of nature," or of America's "Manifest Destiny" to occupy the continent, or-most often and most fulsomely-of the prevailing faith in the idea that history is a record of steady, continuous, cumulative material Progress.' Such emblematic ideals (the bonds of practical colonization, economic prosperity, cultural literacy and ideological rhetoric), while pertinent to what follows, will be examined in greater detail in subsequent chapters where discussion of various representations of the western river steamboat will focus or mediate such contemporary debate. In this chapter the frame of reference will be centred around the significance of the steamboat to the modernisation (economic and industrial) of the central North American continent, of the changes it facilitated and the technology it gave rise to.⁶

In 1843 S. A. Howland published a collection of 'authentic accounts' of the many disasters that had occurred throughout America. Entitled *Steamboat Disasters and Railroad Accidents in the United States*, it blends a mass of 'culled' journal articles in a 'remodelled' language, designed 'to render a more full, connected, and interesting narrative' of each particular incident. Not only are its author's intentions 'to preserve an authentic history of the many disasters [...] since the introduction of steam navigation, [as well as ...] the[ir] principal causes,' but, through 'appropriate reflection and remarks,' to 'give to the whole a decidedly moral influence.' What is of particular interest (more than the graphic details that

⁴ Marx 2000 [1964]: 188-192.

⁵ Marx means authors such as Emerson, Melville and Hawthorne.

⁶ Marx 2000 [1964]: 375.

behove a somewhat macabre fascination with physical, bodily destruction) is the appraisal of steamboat culture and the onus of culpability.⁷

For example, in the pages given over to the 'Explosion of the Steamboat Moselle' at Cincinnati (26 April 1838), attention is focused on both management and public sentiment. Howland begins his account – a combination of committee report, eye-witness statements, newspaper editorial and personal appraisal – with a description of the boat's destruction, the cause of the explosion and its bloody aftermath. He recounts how the steam was left to build up until an explosion, 'unprecedented in the history of steam', sent massive fragments of metal in every direction and rendered the boat 'a perfect wreck'. Indeed, so violent was the force that not only was the boat shattered 'as far back as the gentleman's cabin,' causing her to 'sink, and float with a strong current down the river', but it sent 'heads, limbs, and bodies [...] flying through the air', leaving many 'dreadfully mangled', or reduced to only 'limbs and other fragments'. Howland's account assigns principal blame to the captain, who in order to demonstrate the boat to her 'best advantage' and to uphold her reputation as a 'crack boat', had ordered all the steam 'that could be gathered' to build up in the boilers, with the intention of overtaking another vessel. Howland, however, qualifies his assessment, arguing that not 'all the blame of such disasters' can be apportioned to the actions or decisions of captains, especially 'while they are upheld in their recklessness, and their ambition to excel each other, at whatever risk, [...] by the tone of public sentiment.' To add emphasis to his argument he quotes a Cincinnati editor:

For this sad result, we, in part, take blame; we plead guilty, in common with other presses, of having praised the speed and power of the boat, – a circumstance which doubtless contributed to inflate the ambition of its captain and owners to excel others in rapidity. We feel confident that, if the public are to have any security against steamboat accidents, the press must change its tone. Boats must be praised for their comfort, convenience, and the care and discretion of their commanders, – but not for their speed. They will always have as much speed as their machinery will bear, without the aid of foreign excitement. Safety is better than speed.⁹

⁷ Howland 1843: v-viii. Author's name courtesy of Brockmann 2002: 87n.42. The date of publication given by Brockman is 1846; the edition referred to here was published in 1843 by the same Dorr, Howland & Co.. Similar publications include: *The Mariner's Chronicle: Containing Narratives of the Most Remarkable Disasters at Sea* (1834), Charles Ellm's *Shipwrecks and Disasters at Sea* (1836), and *Lloyd's Steamboat Directory and Disasters on the Western Waters* (1856). See Brockmann 2002: 56.

⁸ Howland 1843: 117-118.

⁹ Howland 1843: 118.

On the one hand, Howland's account recycles contemporary opinion that identified a culture of 'wilful negligence' among some steamboat captains and / or engineers, and a recklessness fuelled by a desire to 'gratify their vanity'. 10 So pervasive was this belief that it had already been endorsed by President Andrew Jackson's assessment in his State of the Union message of 3 December 1833, notably framed within a stance of technological positivism: 'The fact that the number of those fatal disasters is constantly increasing, notwithstanding the great improvements which are everywhere made in the machinery employed, and in the rapid advances which have been made in that branch of science, show very clearly that they are in great degree the result of criminal negligence on the part of those by whom the vessels are navigated.'11 On the other hand, Howland draws attention to the value placed on reputation by steamboat culture and economic circumstance - most dramatically secured by overtaking ('racing') another boat – that 'it would not do to risk her popularity for speed by giving to another boat [...] the most remote chance of being the first to arrive at the destined port.'12 Indeed, reputation was for many owners and captains arguably a matter of livelihood and profitability, where having a fast boat and a good reputation (or a reputation for being fast), was vital in securing the trade of merchants and businessmen, as well as the patronage of passenger traffic. 13

Central to this discussion is the source of the motive power itself: the high-pressure non-condensing engine. Invented by Oliver Evans around 1800, and illustrated in his 1805 book, *The Abortion of the Young Steam Engineer's Guide*, ¹⁴ it presented a major challenge

¹⁰ In a report (one of two, the other being *Report 125*) presented to the House of Representatives in 1824 by the Representative Samuel Vinton (Ohio), *Report 69* described 'racing' in the following terms: 'Engineers and even captains of steam boats, have a great propensity to overload their safety valves. It enables them to make a show of great speed at leaving port, which gratifies their vanity.' Brockmann 2002: 14. See also 'Steamboat Disasters' (January 1840) in *The North American Review* (below).

¹¹ Quoted in Brockmann 2002: 44. It was his first State of the Union message of his second term.

¹² Howland 1843: 116. See also the comments made by Michael Chevalier below.

¹³ 'An extended experience enables us to say, that the qualities which will most effectually fill the cabin of a Western boat are not (generally speaking) the greater stability and experience of the captain, the safer or more substantial construction of the boat, or engine, but rather, a reputation for speed, which promises a progress of a few more miles a day, or the difference of a few dollars less in the price of passage. [... A boat] which has proved the faster in a trial of speed, leaves port crowded, while the empty cabin of the [... another] causes captain and owners mentally to resolve, that the next boat they build, shall at all events be a fast one.' *The North American Review* [1840]: 22.

¹⁴ The full title of Evans's work is *The Abortion of the Young Steam Engineer's Guide: Containing an Investigation of the Principles, Construction and Powers of Steam Engines.*

to the traditional design of Boulton and Watt, ¹⁵ enabling steamboats to run not only faster, but at less expense. The former was the result of the engines' capacity to produce a higher ratio of pounds per square inch (psi), with Evan's (design) advocating pressures of more than 100 psi in contrast to the customary 2 to 4 psi. ¹⁶ The latter was achieved through the favourable combination of capital, fuel, labour and maintenance costs, and the interest rate; in short, the engine's 'lower total operating costs under American conditions.' ¹⁷ During the first decades of the nineteenth century, engineers made use of either design, resulting in the ruthless cutting of rates, the increased frequency of "accidents" and of 'collisions, some intentional', in particular on the Hudson River in the East. ¹⁸ However, in spite of resistance driven by concerns over the danger associated with their use, by 1830 the high-pressure, non-condensing engine had become the dominant type. ¹⁹

With respect to the western steamboat, the reasons for this choice were inseparable from a mix of economic, practical and cultural factors, none so significant perhaps as the unique conditions to the western rivers; in particular the strength of the current.²⁰ Indeed, any vessel attempting to make use of the twenty-thousand or so miles of navigable riverways was confronted by a myriad particular and peculiar characteristics.²¹ For instance, the lower Mississippi River had a tendency to meander as it cut through the soft alluvial sediments, causing the creation of 'cutoffs' and 'oxbow' lakes, and the erosion of the forest lined banks that consequently dumped great volumes of driftwood into the river. Not only was this floating debris a threat to hulls and paddlewheels, but it likewise accumulated on obstructions in the river to form 'rafts' or 'islets' that could potentially stretch for several

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¹⁵ According to Harlan I Halsey, 'Except for the eastern seaboard, Evans-type high-pressure steam engines completely dominated the American scene. The low-pressure steam engines on the eastern seaboard were Boulton- and Watt-type double-acting, jet-condensing, beam engines.' Halsey 1981: 724.

¹⁶ Brockmann 2002: 21.

¹⁷ Halsey 1981: 744.

¹⁸ Brockmann 2002: 11.

¹⁹ Halsey writes that 'high-pressure steam engines had almost completely displaced low-pressure engines throughout the United States by the 1830s even in cities where the engines were made and where differences in transportation costs would have been insignificant.' Halsey 1981: 739. See also Coleman Sellers, 'Oliver Evans and His Inventions' in the *Journal of the Franklin Institute*, 122: 1. July 1886.

²⁰ For the significance of economic factors to the choice between high-pressure and low-pressure steam power in America in the early nineteenth-century, see Halsey 1981.

²¹ Kane quotes James Hall, who, writing in 1846, states, 'that steam navigation had been brought from "an unpromising beginning, through discouragement, failure, disappointment – through peril of life, vast expenditure of money, and ruinous loss, to the most complete and brilliant success." Kane 2004: 59.

miles. More deadly still, this driftwood was the source of innumerable snags ('planters' or 'sawyers') which if struck would most likely puncture or split open the hull.²² In contrast, the upper Mississippi River, whose currents were more stable, was swifter, shallower, and characterised by rocky ledges and inestimable bars that proved especially dangerous in periods of low water.²³

These particular river conditions however are but one set of factors. Note need also be taken of the actions and achievements of individuals, the vast material resources offered by the densely wooded tracts that bordered many of the rivers, the coal rich land of the surrounding regions, the rapidly growing industrialized economic conditions (for example, Eli Whitney's invention of the cotton gin (1793)), and the cultural ethos of the 'frontier'. In light of these elements the intentions for what follows are twofold. On the one hand, using contemporary representations and historical analysis, to elaborate the context of western steamboat design and construction, with especial reference to economy, technology, and geography, and on the other, to provide a picture of the steamboat's dominant structural and technological features. The objective of such information, while calculated to illustrate the character of the steamboats themselves, their grandiose aesthetic appearance and industrial power, is also designed to serve as a physical context for the variety of connected cultural aspects discussed in subsequent chapters.²⁴

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²² As driftwood floated down stream its branches would be lost and what remained become waterlogged and drop down on to the riverbed where one end would become imbedded in the soft sediments leaving the other to protrude into the channel. Collectively known as snags, planters were of a kind that were immovable, while sawyers oscillated with the current.

²³ In contrast, the Ohio River was dramatically affected by seasonal climatic changes; its riverbed was littered with rocky ledges and bars hazardous in low water, and obstructed by such features as the Des Moines Rapids and Rock Island Rapids. Navigation on this river was determined by rain, snow, frost, dry weather and thaws which affected water level. One major obstruction was the Falls of the Ohio at Louisville, which were bypassed with the opening of a canal in 1830. The Missouri was similar to the lower Mississippi but colder, shallower and more rapid.

²⁴ For instance, the steamboat's physicality (its teaccase).

²⁴ For instance, the steamboat's physicality, (its topography, architecture and mechanical power), all offer specific reference points for an examination of on board societal activity – on the placement, movement, and separation of passengers – while simultaneously serving to underline the work of the pilot in his task of navigation.

EARLY STEAMBOATS ON THE WESTERN RIVERS

Even before Robert Fulton steamed 'one mile up the east River' in August 1807, or a mile against the current of the Seine in August 1803, John Fitch had conceived of a 'Machine' 'to facilitate the internal Navigation of the United States, adapted especially to the Waters of the Mississippi.' As Thomas Ruys Smith has shown, Fitch was not alone in making the link between steam technology and the internal water system. In 1785, James Rumsey had made his own prediction to Washington that "boats of passage may be made to go against the current of the Mesisipia [...] from sixty to one hundred miles per day." Seven years later, Gilbert Imlay saw it 'as a fait accompli [...] writing that "boats must be worked up [the river] with steam and sails" – steam being a matter about which "there can be no doubt of [...] success." The honour, however, of descending and (critically) ascending against the current of the Mississippi in a steam-driven boat would fall to another man: Nicholas Roosevelt. 27

Roosevelt was a partner of Robert Fulton and Robert Livingston in the Mississippi Steamboat Navigation Company and together they 'held the monopoly for steam travel on the Western Rivers.' Fulton and Livingston had already realised the idea that steamboats could provide a continuous commercial service in America with the success of the *North River* on the Hudson in 1807. That such a feat could be duplicated on the faster more turbid rivers of the western and southern states however, was met with considerable scepticism.²⁸ (Livingston himself (however disingenuous in his arguments in his efforts to rest the River from the French) had reasoned that 'passage up the river against the current was "slow and expensive [... and that] even England [...] has never ventured to send her commodities by that channel."")²⁹ Roosevelt believed otherwise and, on receiving a guarantee from his associates, undertook to survey the western waters to determine the feasibility of launching a boat on the Mississippi River. To accomplish the task he travelled with his wife Lydia to

²⁵ Both Rumsey and Fitch would be rewarded with patents for their boats.

²⁷ Jefferson's Message to Congress, quoted in Smith 2007: 38.

²⁶ Smith 2007: 35. Smith is quoting Imlay's *A Topographical Description of the Western Territories of North American* (1792).

²⁸ According to Smith Fulton had expressed the ambition of launching a boat on the Mississippi: 'Everything is complete for the Mississippi, and the project is immense.' Smith 2007: 37.

²⁹ Smith 2007: 33. According to Smith, 'In an effort to secure Louisiana, they [Livingston and James Monroe] were continually at pains to denigrate the river and its colonial unity.' Smith 2007: 32.

Pittsburgh, then the industrial centre of the Trans-Appalachian West, in the spring of 1809. Once there he set about building a flatboat to take them South to New Orleans – a journey that would require six months to complete.

At this time the only places of note along the 2,000 mile river route were Natchez, Cincinnati and Louisville; the census of 1790 calculated no more than 100,000 Americans residing in the Mississippi Valley.³⁰ The river, however, as Smith has meticulously shown, was not without a marked identity – a contested site of imperial and cultural 'imaginings'. Smith writes: 'From threatening wilderness, to chimerical dream, to the hub of American commerce and empire, the Mississippi stimulated a heady mixture of desires.'³¹ It was, for example, a site of exploration and mapping, whether that meant the influential and popular river guides of Zadok Cramer (*Navigator*, first published in 1802) offering 'rudimentary but detailed maps of the rivers course, complemented by thorough textual descriptions,'³² or the missions of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark (1804)³³ or later, Zebulon Pike (1805). The Mississippi was also contained in the personal accounts of men such as Jonathan Carver, *Travels through the Interior Parts of North America* (1778) and Robert Rogers's, *A Concise Account of North America* (1765), and was the preoccupation of men such as Thomas Jefferson and James Madison.³⁴

As a commercial artery the rivers were home to a stratified world of boatmen, using a variety of river craft, for transporting a diversity of goods and merchandise. As Michael Allen has shown, it was a world, generally speaking, divided 'into four broad categories: merchant navigators, farmer flatboatmen, agent boatmen and common hands.' The first

35 Allen 1990: 94.

³⁰ According to Michael Allen it comprised an 'amalgam of French, Spanish, English, American, African, Caribbean and Indian peoples.' Allen 1990: 54. For a detailed survey – geography, river conditions, habitation, etc., – of the Ohio and Mississippi Valleys see Allen 1990: 27-57.

³¹ Smith 2007: 16.
³² Smith 2007: 38-58. Roosevelt would make use of a copy on his descent of the Mississippi. Similar works included Samuel Cumming's *The Western Pilot* that offered 'important moments of Mississippi culture and history.' Smith 2007: 58.

³³ In their mission to 'explore the Missouri' Smith argues that the Mississippi was 'an important stepping-stone' for Lewis and Clark, with the two men first reaching the river on November 13, 1803. Smith then goes on to write how they 'pulled into the river on November 19'; fought in a keelboat 'against the current [...] at little more than one mile per hour' to arrive at Kaskaskia on November 28; finally reaching St. Louis in early December. Some six months later, on May 21, 1804, "under three Cheers from the gentlemen on the bank," the expedition moved into the Missouri.' Smith 2007: 39-40.

³⁴ Smith discusses the competing visions entertained by the two men for the Mississippi River.

meant businessmen, some who never saw the river, while others ran their own flatboats. The second were farmers who, during winter and early spring, constructed their own flatboats and transported their surpluses to New Orleans. Agent boatmen, meanwhile, were flatboat and keelboat pilots who, with the proliferation of steamboats, grew into a large, seasoned and professional class. The last group, and accounting for eighty percent of all working rivermen, was a varicoloured mix of frontier society; a group who, along with the agent boatmen, became the central figures of pre-war river mythology.³⁶

The types of craft included rafts and flatboats that navigated slowly with the current and keelboats, barges and bateaux that were capable of making the upstream trip by an arduous manual process of poling and pulling.³⁷ In the early years of river trade flatboats carried articles such as 'furs, salt, lead, lime, flour, pork, and whiskey.' By the turn of the century, and the great post-Revolutionary western migration, cargo became more diverse and miscellaneous. It included 'hemp, cotton, potatoes, brandy, ale, logs, lumber, furniture, manufactured goods, or livestock.' Keelboats on the other hand, though they carried just ten percent of total river commerce, shipped crops such as 'sugar, molasses, coffee, and rice.' Either method of travel had its own hazards, but journeys upstream were especially gruelling and painfully slow – a single trip could require between three and six months to complete, with daily distance at an average of fifteen or twenty miles. Each equally had its own equipment and techniques for moving and manoeuvring the craft.³⁸ Such work made the workmen and pilots familiar with the specific features of the various rivers.

It was from such men that Nicholas Roosevelt intended to acquire at least some of the information he wanted.³⁹ Their reaction on hearing of his plan, however, was one of incredulity, with pilots and boatmen alike simply gesturing toward the whirling waters of

³⁶ Allen 1990: 88-140. See also Smith's chapter on 'Jackson and the "Half-Horse, Half-Alligators". Smith 2007: 45-78.

³⁷ See Havighurst 2003 [1964]: 29-42. They avoided the roaring current and swirling eddies by staying close to the shore.

³⁸ Allen 1990: 58-87. The voyage from New Orleans up to Louisville, for example, required from three to four months. Hunter 1993 [1949]: 22.

³⁹ The work of these vessels however generated a trade that witnessed the movement south of such items as flour, pork, beef, whiskey and glass, of hides and hay, as well as livestock, such as chickens, ducks and geese, and the shipping of other articles and merchandize like molasses, chinaware, fabrics and tea north from New Orleans. Dohan 2000 [1981]: 93. Nor did all these vessels simply disappear from rivers with the arrival of the *New Orleans* and its successors.

the Mississippi River. 40 Undaunted, Roosevelt followed the Ohio and Mississippi south, gauging, measuring, determining their velocities, obtaining 'all the statistical information within his reach.'41 He even purchased and opened coal mines along his route, anticipating his future steamboat trip. His journey complete, Roosevelt made his report to Fulton and Livingston, and with his family in tow returned to Pittsburgh to begin the year long (1810-1811) process of building the first western steamboat: the New Orleans. 42 Constructed according to Fulton's design, the boat measured 116 feet in length, 20 feet in beam, had a depth of 7 feet, and was powered by a low-pressure condensing engine with a 34-inch cylinder, of Boulton and Watt design. 43 It had two cabins below deck (a ladies' cabin and a gentleman's cabin, separated by a folding door), each with four berths, a hull built like an ocean-going ship, two masts as auxiliary sails, and diminutive paddle wheels – all at a total cost of \$38,000.44

As with the flatboat two years earlier, Roosevelt planned to pilot the steamboat down to the city of New Orleans. 45 This time the journey required only several months to complete, but the travellers (in addition to Roosevelt and his family, more than a dozen) had to battle not just rapids and river hazards, but earthquakes and floods. 46 Roosevelt also took the opportunity to publicize his boat's ability to challenge the river's mighty current, and was keen that inhabitants of scattered riverside communities should satisfy their curiosity.⁴⁷ For instance, he surprised the citizens of Louisville who he had invited on board to dine by starting the engines and taking the boat upstream, leaving his guests anxious under the misapprehension that they were being pulled toward 'The Rapids of the

⁴⁰ Latrobe 1871: 8.

⁴¹ Latrobe 1871: 9.

⁴² The day of departure was 20 October 1811.

⁴³ According to Louis C. Hunter, the Boulton and Watt engine, which long remained the standard engine for industrial purposes, had the distinctive features of 'a large, vertical, double acting cylinder, using steam of but a few pounds' pressure to the square inch. The exhaust steam passed from the cylinder into a condenser where it was condensed by a jet of cold water to create a partial vacuum. In this engine, the steam was in fact used principally to produce this vacuum, and the power for driving the piston was supplied less by the direct pressure of the steam than by the pressure of the atmosphere.' Hunter 1993 [1949]: 123.

Kane 2004: 45.

⁴⁵ The entire party, beside Roosevelt, his wife (who was once again pregnant), and their two year old daughter, consisted of a pilot, engineer, six rivermen as crew, two female servants, a waiter and cook. One reason for the length of the journey, was the low water at the Falls of the Ohio which necessitated a delay of some three-four weeks.

⁴⁶ The travellers were also fearful of attacks from 'Native Americans' and pirate gangs.

⁴⁷ For a full modern account of Roosevelt's voyage see Dohan 2000 [1981].

Ohio'. After its initial voyage the *New Orleans* entered into the New Orleans-Natchez trade, where it laboured until wrecked on a snag in 1814 – its range having been restricted by the shallow waters above Natchez. In the years that followed Fulton built several more boats, and it seemed as if he and Livingston would repeat the dominance they exercised on the waters of New York State. Unlike their counterparts in the East however, westerners took umbrage at the fourteen year monopoly granted by the officials of Orleans territory, not only because they viewed such eastern schemes with suspicion, but because they were convinced of their right to travel 'unmolested' on what they saw as a 'common highway'. Meanwhile, other owners with boats plying the waters of Louisiana simply ignored this monopoly.

Perhaps the most forthright of opponents was Captain Henry Miller Shreve, whose success with the *Enterprize* in 1814, of which he was captain, and the *Washington* in 1816, did most to end this monopoly. Shreve's first western steamboat was the *Comet*, built at Brownsville in 1813 with his partner Daniel French. It was a small boat, measuring just 52 feet in length, 8 feet of beam, and weighing a mere 25 tons, but its power was generated by an oscillating high-pressure engine based on a patent granted to French. Unlike its low-pressure rival which condensed exhaust steam by cold water to generate a partial vacuum (the power driving the piston supplied more by the pressure of the atmosphere than the direct pressure of the steam), the high-pressure non-condensing engine utilized its steam directly, and shortly thereafter, expansively, exhausting it directly (via the chimneys) into the air. In French's version, the engine, reputedly, dispensed 'with the heavy beam action [of the low pressure engine] and employ[ed] a very simple and ingenious valve gear [...] [which required] but one-tenth the total parts and less than one-half the moving parts found

⁴⁸ For a description of the evening's events see Dohan 2000 [1981]: 74-77.

⁵² Hunter 1993 [1949]: 123.

⁴⁹ Kane 2004: 46. Other boats built by Fulton, for example, included the *Vesuvius*, built some three years later. This boat was 160 feet in length, 30 feet in beam, and drew 6 feet when loaded, its machinery was located about amidships, leaving room for cargo abaft, and had a square sail to augment its low-pressure engine. Passengers where accommodated in a cabin 8 feet high and 60 feet long, above which was a canopy shaded promenade. Kane 2004: 48.

⁵⁰ Hunter 1993 [1949]: 9-11. Hunter here quotes the Cincinnati *Western Spy* which wrote 'Our road to market must and *will* be free; this monopolizing disposition of individuals will only arouse the citizens of the West to insist on and obtain recognition of their rights, viz. the privilege of passing and repassing, unmolested, on the *common highway* of the west.'

⁵¹ Hunter 1993 [1949]: 9-11. For an account of the life of Shreve see Hardin, J. Fair 1927

in other engines.'⁵³ As such, it 'avoided the awkward gearing and inefficient transmission of power' that were problems associated with the low pressure engine of Boulton and Watt.⁵⁴ It was this engine that powered the *Enterprize*⁵⁵ on its successful career: delivering military supplies to General Andrew Jackson in his defence of New Orleans against the British, and helped it become the first steamboat to make the upriver trip to Louisville and Pittsburgh – a feat it accomplished in just twenty-five days.⁵⁶

Other landmarks in the first decade of western steamboat construction and design, are the *General Pike* (1818), the first steamboat built exclusively for the conveyance of the public and the *Western Engineer*, that was designed explicitly for a 'military and exploring expedition' up the shallow Missouri River.⁵⁷ The most remarkable boat however, was the 400 ton, stern-wheeler *Washington*, a boat typically regarded as the prototype of all later western river boats because of its engine type and layout.⁵⁸ Designed by Shreve and built at Wheeling (1816), the two-decked *Washington* was powered by a one hundred horsepower, high-pressure non-condensing engine, placed (almost) horizontally relative to the deck, and connected directly with the paddle wheel through a pitman, employing neither beam nor flywheel.⁵⁹ (The entire engine weighed less than the flywheel on Fulton's steamboats.)⁶⁰ Her hull was shallow-keeled and 'floored' to receive the boat's four boilers and two cylinder engine. On the upper deck was an 80 foot cabin that opened into two apartments

⁵³ Hunter 1993 [1949]: 137.

⁵⁴ Kane 2004: 47.

⁵⁵ The *Enterprize* was a slightly larger boat, weighing 75 tons, measuring 70 feet in length, 15 feet of beam, and drew approximately 2½ feet, and was powered by a 24-horsepower, oscillating high-pressure engine. See Kane 2004: 50.

⁵⁶ Another advantage of the *Comet* was its placement of the paddle wheel inside the lines of the hull, thereby minimizing hull distortion. Kane 2004: 47.

⁵⁷ Hunter 1993 [1949]: 47. As regards the *Western Engineer*, its high-pressure engine had one improvement subsequently incorporated on all later western steamboats. As Kane confirms: 'By ... use of the cut off cam ... the steam is made to act with its full (or boiler) force through about five-eights of every stroke of the piston; and by its inherent or expansive force only, through the residue of the stroke, thus nearly doubling the efficiency of the steam power, in comparison with that previously employed in western river boats.' Kane 2004: 53.

⁵⁸ While historical evidence is contradictory, the *Washington* was a 400 ton stern-wheeler, and the first steamboat to employ a horizontally oriented high-pressure engine, with its boilers on the main deck; the engine had a six-foot stroke and a cylinder with a diameter of 24 inches. It had a powerful 100 horsepower engine that weighed 9,921 pounds.

⁵⁹ Hunter 1993 [1949]: 127.

⁶⁰ Hunter 1993 [1949]: 137. For a full consideration of the advantages of the high-pressure engine see Hunter 1993 [1949]: 122-144.

at its stern, and two rooms at the bow. It also had a pilot house positioned on top, and two tall, cross-braced, chimneys. As one contemporary observer described her:

The boiler is placed midships on the deck, and is heated by a furnace placed at either end. The steam is conveyed through two tubes to the machinery, which is under deck in the after part of the boat, and which, being set in motion, turns a single water wheel, placed near the stern, and concealed from the view of persons on the deck by a gentle elevation of the flooring timber. The arrangement below, is also, different. A common cabin about 80 feet long extends from the centre to either end. In the stern it opens into two apartments, one of which is a drawing room, and the other a dormitory, both appropriated, exclusively, to the use of the ladies. Towards the bow there are, also, two rooms, one of which is the private apartment of the captain and in the other, the bar is kept. In the large, common room, there are 20 berths, above & below, on either side of which is calculated for the accommodation of two lodgers.⁶¹

Her maiden voyage however proved a literal trial by fire, when on the morning of the third day, not 200 miles out, at Marietta, her boiler exploded, resulting in the first steamboat disaster in America. It was the fifth of June, 1816, the boat's fires had been kindled, her steam built up, and the crew about to weigh anchor, when the 'nearest' boiler exploded, killing six passengers and three crew members, and injuring twenty or so others with a torrent of scalding water and steam. The *Weekly Aurora* wrote with typical graphic detail of the 'Death and the most excruciating pain', of how half a dozen individuals, 'were nearly skinned from head to feet, and others slightly scalded to the number of 17. In stripping off their clothes the skin peeled with them.' Despite this early tragedy the *Washington* is revered for her record breaking trip up a Mississippi in full spring current, requiring just four days to reach Natchez, fifteen to reach Memphis, nineteen to reach Cairo, and twenty-one to reach Shippingport.

In the wake of the *Washington*'s success other boats accomplished similar feats that added to the increasing number of navigable water routes, extending ever outward the lines of communication and the colonisation of distant 'frontier' territories. Besides the voyages of the *Enterprize*, there were those of the *Independence* (1819), the *Osage* (1821), and the *Virginia* (1823), that finally put paid to scepticism about the steamboat's ability to conquer

⁶¹ Kane 2004: 50. These observations are from the diary of William Mercer.

⁶² Quoted in Hunter 1993 [1949]: 283. The *Weekly Aurora* was a Philadelphia paper. The date given is 18 June, 1816.

⁶³ Havighurst 2003 [1964]: 59.

the mighty Mississippi current (and its ancillary routes), and saw the steamboat underline its presence and begin to exercise a vital influence on river commerce. In general, all these early steamboats were typically small in size, and diverse, not only in their structural and aesthetic design, but in their mechanical components, with shipbuilders experimenting with hull form, paddle-wheel placement and structure, and cabin arrangement. They had deep-draft, heavy built hulls, that were either flat or round bottomed, and whose form was more consistent with ocean-going vessels. (Heavily built meant double frames, thick planking, and often a traversely oriented bulkhead (or snag chamber), designed to prevent flooding should the bow happen to be breeched.) The hull equally provided space for both cargo and passengers (though some boats erected a cabin on the main deck spanning the after section) and was often adorned with figureheads and bowsprits. In terms of motive power boats were either of high or low pressure design.

At this time boats were being produced in both western and eastern shipyards – the latter boats entering service via New Orleans, and an Atlantic coastal journey. However, as the impracticality of their dual site of production became apparent, and boats entered their second decade of production, it was not long before the migration of eastern engineers and shipwrights grew to ever larger numbers. By the mid-1820s all western steamboats were in the hands of western shipwrights, with production localised in the large industrial cities of Pittsburgh, Louisville and Cincinnati. One reason for this centralisation was that eastern men were disadvantaged in not being able to observe river conditions and the performance of their boats, as well as boats belonging to other shipyards, and thus carry out appropriate alterations. Another was that boats built in the east needed to survive the Atlantic costal voyage, and as such their design proved impractical for the unique river-routes of the west. Meanwhile, western ship builders not only had the benefit of making immediate changes

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⁶⁴ More specifically, the *Enterprize* made the trip to Pittsburgh; the *Independence* ascended the turbulent Missouri in 1819, all the way up to the head of the Santa Fé Trail; the *Osage* travelled up the Tennessee to Waterloo 1821, followed by the *Rocket*, *Courier*, and *Velocipede* that steamed into northern Alabama; finally the *Virginia* delivered military supplies to Fort Snelling in 1823. Havighurst 2003 [1964]: 58. According to Havighurst these boats opened the gates for the dawn and growth of packet companies. For example, as a consequence of the *General Jackson*'s voyage up the Cumberland from New Orleans to Nashville in 1818, a feat accomplished in just thirty days (a journey that entailed five months of gruelling toil for keelboatmen), Nashville merchants seized the initiative and established a steamboat company that within six years had a dozen packets running regularly to Louisville and New Orleans.

based on direct empirical observations, of river and steamboat, but were assisted in their production, and its costs, by the plentiful supply of timber and the increasing number of foundries established in the first half of the nineteenth century.⁶⁵

THE WESTERN RIVER STEAMBOAT

If the opening decade of design and construction was marked by variety, then the next fifteen years were characterized by a move towards standardization. In these years the western steamboat underwent a set of major adaptive improvements, growing in size, power and tonnage, becoming specifically tailored to meet the demands of western rivers. Through a process of trial, error and adaptation, a mix of experimentation, empirical observation and (local) cultural sensibilities, hulls become longer, wider and shallower, paddlewheels grew in length and breadth, and passenger cabins were relocated to the main and upper deck. So dramatic did these changes become that steamboats of mid-century showed little if any resemblance to those of the opening decade. Indeed, in the year that John Tyler took the oath of presidential office, hundreds of white, three-tiered leviathans were busy plying the arteries of the Mississippi Basin. As *The North American Review* observed in 1840: 'not less than fifteen thousand human beings, and an amount of property, in boats and cargoes, hard to be calculated.'

The dramatic growth of steamboat traffic was echoed by a corresponding rise in cultural signification, prominent not only in various printed media (newspapers, journals) but in political oration and legal cases. Taken together these representations record and mediate the myriad aspects of steamboat culture; from daily commercial advertisements and announcements of 'disasters' (accidents, explosions) to editorials and speeches filled with the rhetoric of technological positivism and ideas of mechanical improvement, to the innumerable travel accounts that painted pictures of everyday travel. One way to assemble these representations, as David E. Nye has done, is to read them as part of a larger 'complex narrative system' of 'technological foundation stories' that 'explained and

⁶⁵ Kane 2004: 61.

⁶⁶ Anon 1840: 21.

validated [American] expansion' through the application of 'new technologies to the physical world.' To use Nye's phrase, it is 'America as Second Creation' by means of technological 'improvement'.67 Not all representations however were celebratory. In opposition to these dominant, 'mainstream' assertions there emerged a number of so-called 'counter-narratives' highlighting the dangers of steam power as well as the detrimental environmental (or ecological) effects of these 'improvements'.⁶⁸

With respect to the western steamboat this opposition saw mainstream narratives publicise national prosperity – a 'national colonisation and national production'. In such stories the steamboat facilitated the spread of settlement and stimulated the growth of towns into booming cities, opening up the continent and bringing 'the "unused" land of the Ohio Valley into the national market after 1810.⁶⁹ Thus, they established and consolidated commercial, political and cultural links between distant parts of the Union; aided in local and mass migratory mobility, the relocation of immigrants and easterners; making possible an inter-regional trade. Steamboats themselves, meanwhile, gave rise to new industries like foundry work, lumbering and shipbuilding, and because construction was a multifaceted affair, there were additional firms which dealt with machinery, structure or décor, offering employment for carpenters, mill-wrights, joiners, gilders, glaziers, glass suppliers and sheet-metal workers.70

'Counter-narratives' on the other hand showed how land speculation was equally subject to 'exaggeration and fraud' (so-called wild-cat towns), with settlers purchasing lots of nonexistent communities.⁷¹ They also emphasized the limitations placed on navigation, whether topographic or seasonal, how some localities could only be reached at times of high water or when rivers were free from winter ice. Nor did the steamboat itself escape

⁶⁷ In such 'stories' the western steamboat is set amongst other machine technologies such as canals and

⁶⁸ Nye 2003: 1-7. Nye at one point writes that; 'The expansion of steam power into new regions seemed to be the same thing as the spread of civilisation itself.' Nye 2003: 156. ⁶⁹ Nye 2003: 285.

⁷⁰ Such overt configurations were underlined by narratives that recorded the benefits of technology and presented the West in terms of its rich resources, can equally be seen in even the less overtly ideological / political works, for example, the travel narrative of Eliza R. Steele – whose summer excursion (frames) alludes to the process of western industrialisation her narrative includes references to railroads and railroad construction, but whose representation of the nature (landscape) is given in terms of the 'value' of the land the 'rich' / 'fertile' properties whether it be mineral deposits of timber, etc.,

⁷¹ See Dickens's Martin Chuzzlewit and Chapter 22 in George Merrick's Old Times on the Mississippi.

unfavourable representation, often being described as 'too expensive, too noisy, or too fast'. ⁷² Narratives like that of James Hall, meanwhile, highlighted the pleasures of non-steamboat travel, such as flatboats and keelboats, that allowed for greater contact with the surrounding landscape. ⁷³ Such discontents, disadvantages or alternatives however, were largely overshadowed by the dangers of travel, whether it came from the rivers themselves, technology or human 'error' or mismanagement. Rivers, for example, were awash with floating debris (logs or ice) and sunken, hidden obstructions such as embedded planters and sawyers, or even derelict wrecks. ⁷⁴ Yet more deadly and dramatic, not just in terms of total casualties (amount as well as degree of suffering), but also with respect to the number of major disasters, were boiler explosions. ⁷⁵ So pervasive was the association of danger, death and destruction that one contemporary article confided: 'In truth, the accidents involving destruction of life and property, have become so frequent upon the Western rivers, that we look as regularly, when we open a newspaper, for a steamboat disaster, as for foreign news.'

Into this mix of representation can be fitted the innumerable foreign travel accounts of such noteworthy figures as Charles Dickens, Charles Joseph Latrobe, Harriet Martineau, Frances Trollope, and Michael Chevalier; visitors who journeyed up the Mississippi River from the port of New Orleans or from the Eastern seaboard states across the great lakes and the newly constructed Erie Canal, down the Ohio to either the Mississippi or Missouri. In general, these representations display a number of textual and formal similarities, focusing, for example, on the boat's aesthetic appearance, its technological mechanics and operations, on the character of on board society and activity, and 'incidental' observations

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⁷² Nye 2003: 287.

⁷³ John Hall's *Letters from the West*. Nye writes, 'Hall disdained the steamboat, preferring the slower movement of the keelboat, which was quieter and stopped more frequently. When he felt like it, he could walk along the bank and talk to local inhabitants, while keeping pace with the boat.' Nye 2003: 286.

⁷⁴ Other dangers involved rocks in shallow water, or simply running aground.

⁷⁵ Hunter 1993 [1949]: 282.

⁷⁶ Anon 1840: 20. The author of 'Steamboat Disasters' sets up a similar dialectic between the rewards of steamboat technology and the accompanying dangers; that 'Such magnificent results could not reasonably be expected, without some accompanying evils.' In its list of dangers, there is, for example, the depth of river, which can on occasion be greater than three hundred feet (25). Other dangers include, the threat of collisions (24) fire (25); the composition and character of their crews; the qualifications and habits of their captains and other officers; and that no testing is done of boilers prior to use (27). Then there is the temper, wants and deportment of the class of people who form the majority of their passengers.

of landscape and climatic conditions.⁷⁷ Some, like Chevalier, record the positive effects of steamboat technology – the economic strength and the benefits of national consolidation. Others, like Martineau, reflect the simple pleasures of excursion. Visitors like Trollope and Dickens meanwhile seemed more intent on emphasising the poor or 'democratic' nature of society, and their bad manners.⁷⁸ When it came to the dangers of travel almost every account draws specific attention to most, if not all, the above concerns, occasionally engaging with topical newspaper coverage and contemporary speculation as to the cause of explosions. Before turning to consider these, and related aspects, attention needs be paid to the general features of the steamboat's structural and technological construction and design, as well as some of the governing principles for the form they took.

Guiding, influencing and aiding shipwrights were a mix of economic and practical, environmental factors (river conditions). One such factor proved to be the profit incentive – for, in addition to captains pushing their boats to cover the growing distances in ever shorter times, the rapid rise of commercial trade and passenger traffic put a premium on space and appropriately enticing accommodations. Steamboats now had to be competitive, not just in terms of speed and tonnage, but also in the length of their running season and the luxuries and comforts they provided. Thus, as the steamboat's draft decreased, and hulls became too small to accommodate passengers, designers began relocating cabins above deck, ultimately raising the steamboat further above the waterline. An initial, and brief, solution to the lack of space entailed the placement of cabin passengers on the main and upper deck – the gentleman's cabin located on the former, the ladies' cabin on the after portion of the latter. Deck passengers in turn were allocated a space on the forward portion of the upper deck. It was not long, however, before a more permanent arrangement was introduced, raising the overall superstructure to three decks – 'main', 'boiler' and

⁷⁷ The composition and colour of these portraits was mixed, if not at times polemical. See Ray Allen Billington's *Land of Savagery Land of Promise*.

⁷⁸ For the contrast of experiences see Chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis.

⁷⁹ Hunter 1993 [1949]: 380-381. That being said, *The North American Review* 'Steamboat Disasters' article of 1840 assests to the fact that '[t]he astonishing increase of travel on the Western waters has been another reason of the indifference of the boatmen to the comfort and safety of their passengers, of whom the crowd is occasionally so great, that the existing number of boats, increasing too as they have been with unexampled rapidity, is altogether inadequate, at certain seasons of the year, to comfortable or safe transportation.' Anon 1840: 36.

'hurricane' – wherein between 3/4 and 4/5 of the boat's total structural area was above the waterline.

In this structural and topographical arrangement the boiler deck was dominated by a long central saloon that ran the length of the deck, comprising the (longer) gentlemen's cabin / saloon and the (partitioned off) ladies' cabin aft, with individual cabins or state-rooms on either side. This deck equally housed a pantry, washrooms, a bar, and baggage room, and was, in its entirety, ringed by a walkway. Located below, the main deck was not only used to accommodate all the steamboat's machinery, and provide extensive space for freight but was also equipped with a blacksmith's shop, hatchways to the hold, and on occasion wooden bunks for deck passengers, who alternatively found space on or amongst whatever cargo was being transported. The hurricane deck meanwhile, was largely left open and functioned as a promenade or night-time place for sleeping deck passengers. After 1840, however, a series of cabins were added to this deck, and were used to house the crew and occasionally passengers. Known as the Texas, these cabins quickly grew in length until they covered one third of the vessel's length. On top of this structure, or on its forward end, was located the pilothouse.

Another factor influencing design was the seemingly inexhaustible tracts of forest that were not just an invaluable source of fuel, but also provided the principal construction material during the antebellum era. For example, white oak, which was widely available in the Trans-Appalachian West, was used for the majority of hull components; its properties – generally heavy, hard, stiff, resistant to rot, granting superior shock-resisting abilities – made it a natural choice for the boat's keel, keelson, stem, sternpost, planking, stringer's clamps, framing, deck beams and stanchions. Additionally, white pine (while low in strength is light of weight, straight of grain, and moderate in terms of rot resistance), was used for the superstructure; for decking and bulkheads. Other wood types included yellow pine for the boat's structural members and decking, yellow poplar for its superstructure, or cedar for decking.⁸²

⁸⁰ The exception was the space occupied by the wheel houses on side-wheelers.

⁸¹ Kane 2004: 91-93.

⁸² Kane 2004: 96-97.

River conditions were undeniably central in informing design, whether it was the speed and shallowness of the water or its debris and snag filled current.⁸³ In consequence hulls were built long, light and very shallow, with their exterior typically sheathed by smooth, seamed, light planking rather than overlapping, and frequently enclosed with sheet iron at the bow. All of this made for a streamlined and sturdy structure designed to protect against driftwood and grounding. There was also the universal adoption of longitudinal bulkheads to help prevent hogging and sagging deformations that had the potential to increase draft, open planking seams, and throw machinery out of its alignment and twist, or even rupture, steam and water lines. Engineers further reduced the tendency of hulls to distort by placing the machinery, its engines, boilers and paddle wheels (on side-wheelers), about amidships, thereby pushing the centre of the hull down while lifting bow and stern.⁸⁴ But hull limberness was also an asset, for flexibility in construction precluded or minimized damage from impacts. In succeeding years, 1835-1841, hull form and structure was strengthened through the use of 'hog-chains' that maintained the shape of the hull. These so-called 'chains' were in fact iron rods running the length of the boat (carried on the tops of braces, or 'Sampson posts', just below the boiler deck), with each end attached to the bottom of the hull. The tension of these rods could be adjusted with turnbuckles. In addition to assisting the retention of hull shape, hog-chains also made possible construction with lighter timbers and without the necessity of heavy, staunch, longitudinal stiffeners, that allowed greater limberness and the boat to 'work and strain freely'.85

Hull design also involved the perfection of bow shape and construction, which in turn hinged on several contingencies. Firstly, while wharf boats or floating docks were common, less frequent landings were unable to afford the cost incurred by such structures, and so forced steamboats to climb on to muddy riverbanks. As a result, the bow was built

83 Anon 1840: 23.

⁸⁴ Kane 2004: 93.

⁸⁵ Kane 2004: 108-112. *The North American Review* makes the connection between construction and design and safety, with the desire to extend a boat's running season. Specifically, it writes, about the change in the construction of hulls, phrasing it thus: 'It was formerly usual to put a mass of solid timber in the bows of boats, and they consequently often came off from these encounters [with snags] with impunity. But it was found that this substantial mode of building gave them too much draught, and that boats so constructed had to lie by, sometimes for several months, in the season of low water. Lightness of draught, therefore, has recently been a quality especially sought after; and it has been attained to such an extent, that, excepting the bark canoe, there hardly floats a craft more buoyant, and more frail, than the low-water steamboat.'

with a long, rounded rake to enable it to be eased up onto the bank. 86 Secondly, the bow was, in general, more heavily built than the rest of the hull, not only so as to withstand the frequent landings, but to defend it against the ubiquitous dangers of driftwood or even ice while travelling.⁸⁷ In its overall form however, the bow was tailored in line with the boat's intended application, for example, whether its primary purpose was to transport passengers or freight. For its part, the keel, which needed to be both flexible and shallow so as not to draw too much water, and thereby hamper manoeuvrability, became so shallow that it is more accurately described as a 'keel plank' – extending no more than an inch or two below the bottom of the hull. Moreover, while the stem and sternpost were generally simple, the framing of the steamboat's hull proved particularly complex, comprising of 'flat floors and vertical or nearly vertical futtocks' and 'curved frames at the bow and stern'. Framing was also heavier in the forward half of the steamboat, primarily to support the weight of its machinery, and made use of several different framing systems: 'standard chine, chine log, and rounded knuckle'.88 A further feature was the keelson that 'laid on top of the floors and fastened to both the floors and the keel below', and that served principally 'as a longitudinal stiffener', though it also offered a platform for the longitudinal bulkheads that ran the length of the steamboat.89

Another major feature of the western steamboat was its paddle wheel or wheels, that were to be the exclusive method of propulsion. Located either aft on 'stern-wheelers' or either side the hull on 'side-wheelers', the paddle wheels, despite their being heavy and inefficient, boasted several advantages. Two principal benefits were their low cost and the relative mechanical simplicity of their construction. Indeed, the uncomplicated nature of their design made them easy to repair, meant they could be maintained without access to either foundries or machine shops — an invaluable asset in light of the distances boats regularly travelled from urban centres and the damage they frequently sustained from

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⁸⁶ Kane 2004: 88.

⁸⁷ According to Kane the bow was more heavily built in general, stiffened by breast hooks and yokes and heavy transverse beams, against landing on riverbanks and encountering driftwood or ice while travelling. Frames had less room and space at the bow but with larger dimensions than those in any other portion of the hull. The building of snag chambers in bows seems to have ceased during the late 1830s. Kane 2004: 90.

⁸⁸ Kane 2004: 88-100.

⁸⁹ Kane 2004: 105-106.

collisions with driftwood. Furthermore, because all their parts were above the waterline for most of the wheel's revolution there were no problems with watertight seals (as was the case with propellers on Eastern boats). With respect to the choice of stern- or side-wheeler (popular opinion favoured the latter), design and construction saw a swing in preference during the course of the nineteenth century to the former: a shift in dominance from side-wheelers in the first four decades (1811-1850), to stern-wheelers there onwards.

More specifically, western steamboat design saw the gradual movement of paddle wheels on side-wheelers, from amidships in the 1820s, further aft, until, by the mid-1830s they were positioned between 1/4 to 1/3 the length of the vessel forward of the transom – the place they remained for the rest of the nineteenth-century. Alternatively, the sternwheeler, which had a number of advantages over its rival, was characterised by a single large wheel projecting aft. On the one hand, not only did this location protect it from the river's floating debris (the shape of the hull pushing debris to the sides),⁹¹ but its lower draft enabled stern-wheelers to operate on shallower water and thus extend both their range and the length of their navigable season. On the other hand, the size of the paddle wheel was initially limited because its heavy weight made the hull prone to hogging. With the application of hog chains in the second quarter of the nineteen-century such a weakness was rendered ineffectual, and western rivers saw the growth and eventual dominance of the stern-wheeler. Early decades also saw adjustments in paddle wheel technology, with increases in width and diameter, as well as a corresponding growth in size, until, by 1840, their average diameter was eighteen to twenty-two feet. Ten years later, that average had risen to between twenty-five to thirty-one feet. 92 Meanwhile, the buckets of paddle wheels saw a similar increase in width and depth, though not in proportion to their diameter. 93

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⁹⁰ Unlike their Eastern counterparts the shallowness of Western rivers precluded the use of propeller technology.

⁹¹ Kane 2004: 79-90.

⁹² Kane 2004: 82.

⁹³ Buckets were simple planks of wood bolted to the arms, with a batten used to keep the bolt from pulling through the bucket. Buckets were frequently damaged, so several spares were carried on board at all times. Kane 2004: 123-125.

THE DANGERS AND DISCOMFORTS OF WESTERN STEAMBOAT TRAVEL

In general, most travel narratives, articles and stories of the western rivers involved descriptions of the western steamboat itself, offering details of architecture and aesthetic design, of machinery and topography, of its overall form and shape. Some authors, and especially the European traveller, were predisposed to establish the western steamboat within the broader cultural and technological context of steamboat design, contrasting western boats with their eastern or European counterparts. For example, travelling in 1832, Charles Joseph Latrobe offers a comparison between the superior 'finish and durability' of Eastern boats and the 'floating palaces' of the West, observing how the former prove less attractive in their appearance, are greater in cost and invariably powered by low-pressure condensing engines.⁹⁴ He also notes how structure and appearance reflects the difference in practical application; where because the western steamboat accommodates passengers as well as heavy freight, it places its cabins on the main deck (the hull reserved entirely for the transit of goods), and as a result appears much higher out of the water.⁹⁵

Other visitors, influenced as much by 'aesthetic criteria' as by personal prejudice, proved less complimentary in their representations. For instance, when Dickens travelled on board the *Messenger* from Pittsburgh to Cincinnati in 1842 he not only commented on the absence of 'mast, cordage, tackle, [and] rigging' but also remarked on the boat's 'long, black, ugly roof, covered with burnt-out feathery sparks; above which tower two iron chimneys, and a hoarse escape-valve, and a glass steerage-house.' Travelling in the same year, J. S. Buckingham ESQ., showed himself to be similarly unimpressed with the so-called 'floating palaces' of the West. In his narrative (Buckingham likewise travelled on several different boats), he observes how the steamboat's 'upright stern-post', its naked stern and bow, and the lack of any 'projecting stem, cutwater, or figure head', denies it 'the

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⁹⁴ Halsey's recent article contradicts Latrobe's assessment. Halsey 1981. (See footnote 15)

McDermott 1998 [1968]: 26-39. The sole purpose of eastern boats is the transportation of passengers. Latrobe was travelling in 1832 and published a two volume account in 1836. He writes: 'As to the Eastern steam-boat, the whole of the hold is converted into cabins – the transport of heavy freight being no part of the speculation; they are superior in finish and durability, but not in appearance, to those of the West, and cost much more; being, moreover, almost invariably furnished with low-pressure engines.' McDermott 1998 [1968]: 27.

⁹⁶ Dickens 2000 [1842]: 175. For a more detailed consideration see Chapter 7 of this thesis.

grace and beauty of the English steamers, in her model.'⁹⁷ In their criticism and aesthetic preference for the 'boat-like gear'⁹⁸ of other vessels, Dickens and Buckingham may have found more sympathy for the boats of the opening decade. However, after some twenty-five years or so of development, western shipwrights had learned that the best boats were those that had lightly constructed, shallow, long, narrow, and flat-bottomed hulls. They had learned that such a design displaced the most amount of water; that longer boats were faster than shorter ones; and that a long, full hull increased buoyancy and decreased draft, and thus increased profitability by lengthening the a boat's running season.⁹⁹

Most attention, however, was centred on the steamboat's motive power – the high-pressure engine. The positioning and design of this machinery, of engine and boilers, had, by 1835, developed 'into the general form it would retain for the remainder of the century' (though there were 'still no standards or specifications in the detail of its construction'). ¹⁰⁰ In its first years of use, the high-pressure engine was producing pressures ranging from 40 to 60 psi. In the 1840s, that pressure had risen to 100 psi, and, by mid-century was between 125 and 150 pounds. ¹⁰¹ And yet, as Louis C. Hunter observes, these were but 'customary running pressures [...] and might be and were exceeded, when occasion suggested or necessity required, by dint of hard firing and the resort to highly combustible materials such as resin, oil, or pine knots. ¹⁰²

Besides producing such quantities of power the high-pressure engine had several advantages that made it the undeniable challenger to the low-pressure, condensing engine designed by Boulton and Watt. These advantages where both practical and economic. For example, in an advertisement placed in the *Pittsburgh Gazette* by its inventor, Evans, on 20 May 1812, he emphasizes many of its virtues, announcing: 'They are less expensive, more simple and durable, occupying infinitely less room, require much less fuel, are thirty times

97 Buckingham 1842: 264.

⁹⁸ Dickens 2000 [1842]: 174.

⁹⁹ Kane 2004: 84-88. Kane writes that 'a steamboat's running season was inversely proportional to its draft.' Kane 2004: 88.

¹⁰⁰ Kane 2004: 67-70. For example, there were still 'no general rules in the construction of the furnace, the grate bars, the diameter of the flues, or the diameter and length of the chimneys.' Kane 2004: 69-70. ¹⁰¹ Hunter 1993 [1949]: 123-131.

¹⁰² Hunter 1993 [1949]: 131. See Chapter 4 of Mark Twain's *Life on the Mississippi* or the opening chapters of *The Gilded Age* when he writes of techniques for building up fires and steam. Also, see Chapter 7 of the thesis.

more powerful, and can be conducted by any man of ordinary capacity with less than two months practice.'103 Each and every one of these qualities was an unmistakeable benefit for western boats in light of the circumstances under which they operated; whether it was the disadvantages of working on the industrial frontier or the particular conditions of the rivers themselves. Indeed, mechanics and builders of the frontier were essentially 'practical' men, labouring largely upon their own initiative and 'in the stream of local tradition', without much recourse to theoretical publications, and with 'little if any direct aid from science or trained engineering skill.'104 Nor were some travellers, like Latrobe, reticent in confirming the engine's suitability, declaring how the turbid and swift rivers require 'the application of greater power', or how simplicity of construction is 'of great consequence on a navigation where the boat must proceed five or eight hundred miles without the possibility of repair.' Latrobe equally refers to the engine's lightness, of its 'working off all the steam which is generated,' and that 'the mud is not apt to accumulate so fast in the boiler of the highpressure engine. 105

The boilers of these engines were direct descendents of the type designed by Evans, and with few exceptions, were constructed from iron. 106 The typical boiler was long and cylindrical, and placed horizontally just forward of amidships on the main deck. They were constructed with little regard for efficiency but proved easy to clean and repair, while their number and dimensions varied as builders sought a design that combined minimum weight and cost with maximum strength and power. In the early decades of the nineteenth century

¹⁰³ Quoted in Brockmann 2002: 31. The second advert appears in *The Commonwealth* dated 10 April 1813. Hunter 1993 [1949]: 175. In his study, Hunter argues that the work of western steamboat mechanics is not to be judged by any ideal standards of engineering practice, that they were 'practical mechanics, working, in the stream of local tradition, upon their own initiative and with little if any direct aid from science or trained engineering skill.' He adds that: 'There is nothing to suggest that they were familiar with and influenced by the publications of such men as John Scott Russell, Thomas Tredgold, James Renwick, and Paul Hodge. [And that t]he handbooks of Oliver Evans and John Wallace were written on a level more appropriate to the needs of practical men and probably represented the sum of steam-engineering literature accessible to the

great majority of engine builders.' Hunter 1993 [1949]: 175.

McDermott 1998 [1968]: 28. 'The expense of the low-pressure engine will ever present its introduction in these boats, as long as they are constructed with so strict a view to economy. Its complication and the consequent difficulty of repairing and derangement, and its liability to be disordered by the deposit from the muddy water, are serious objections, while long voyages have to be performed through a wilderness, where no mechanical aid is within reach, occasionally, for hundreds of miles. And the greater weight of this description of engine, where every pound added to the machinery is grudged, as so much deducted from the ability of the boat to carry freight, adds one other and formidable objection to its use.' Anon 1840: 28. ¹⁰⁶ According to Kane, while in general technical literature regarding the design of the antebellum western steamboat is scarce, there exists the notable exception of high-pressure boilers. Kane 2004: 71.

(1820s / 1830s), boilers typically numbered between four to eight, and rested horizontally and longitudinally on a single layer of brick intended to insulate the deck from the heat of the furnace, and connected by several drums positioned above and below. The former set of drums were steam drums that collected the steam before passing it to power the engine, the latter were mud-drums that collected sediment and enabled its ready removal via a blow-off valve. Indeed, sediment and plant debris accumulated quickly, and though the mud-drum accounted for the majority of it, the rest formed a dense deposit or crust coating the bottom of the boiler and the flues, thereby sealing them off from contact with the water and required cleaning several times per journey.¹⁰⁷ The furnace, meanwhile, was placed at the forward end of the boilers to produce a strong natural draft through the chimneys, which accelerated the combustion of fuel, and whose height carried the smoke and soot away from the boat. Throughout this period chimneys grew in diameter and height, rising from an average height in the 1820s of 14 feet from the centre of the flues to between 25 to 45 feet in the early 1830s, increasing in diameter from twelve inches to 25 to 40.¹⁰⁸

In their representation of western steamboat machinery, travellers often gave a seemingly paradoxical picture; testifying to the 'unquestioned' practical benefits of the high-pressure engine on the one hand – that such motive-power was necessary to battle the strong current – while highlighting several negative aspects on the other. Some of their objections, like those of Buckingham, pertain to the irksome disruption and discomfiture as a consequence of noise and vibration: how 'the tremulous motion communicated by the high-pressure engine [...] was so great as to render it almost impossible to write, and very difficult even to hold a book steady enough to read.' He also describes how at every revolution of the wheels the engine 'gave out a burst of steam' that sounded, 'like the hard breathing of some huge mastodon labouring under the asthma.' (Indeed, it was not uncommon for nineteenth-century narratives to employ anthropomorphic tropes as a way of describing the steamboat and its operations, demonstrating innumerable variations on

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¹⁰⁷ Kane 2004: 79-81.

¹⁰⁸ Kane 2004: 83.

¹⁰⁹ Buckingham 1842: 262. Some thing similar can be seen in the description of Fulton's steamboat the, *North River* that was regarded as 'a monster moving on the waters, defying the winds and tide, and breathing flames and smoke.' Quoted in Smith 2007: 37.

the image of, 'puffing and panting', of its 'groaning', or again how 'the unwieldy machine takes its hoarse sullen way'.)

Other, and more serious objections, dealt with issues of safety; whether it was the dangers posed by the rivers themselves, collisions with other boats, fire, or most alarming and destructive, boiler explosions. Travel narratives adopted various strategies for dealing with these issues, raising the subject instructively by referring to the tendency of accidents or the recent 'number of disasters'; more allusively with respect to a boat's reputation or the presence of life preserves; or 'dramatically' by recording incidents of grounding or running over floating debris. For example, while Trollope writes of being startled by 'a sudden and violent shock' as the steamboat runs 'aground', 113 Eliza R. Steele describes how 'a terrific and astounding bang, clang and clatter, as if the boat had been cracked to atoms' turns out to be 'Only a log!'. 114 Meanwhile, Martineau reports how the boat she was on, the *Henry Clay*, 'had the highest reputation of any boat on the river, having made ninety-six trips without accident; a rare feat on this dangerous river', and narrates how members of her own party had survived two previous incidents of collision, one with another boat the other with a snag. 115

The subject of boiler explosions, the most feared and the most commonly discussed and debated, needs to be read not just with respect to cultural attitudes and public concerns, but within the larger context of scientific research and legislative action. One particular theory for the cause of explosions was that of low water, either as the consequence of the boat's careening to one side (thereby exposing parts of the boiler), the inattention of the engineer or the stoppage or failure of the water supply pump. The primary dangers here were when water was subsequently brought into contact with the boiler's overheated iron, or the 'foaming' that resulted from the safety valve being opened. Other theories included the formation and ignition of combustible materials, the presence of a 'mysterious'

¹¹⁰ Houstoun 1850: 2: 22.

¹¹¹ Hall 1829: 249.

¹¹² Dickens 2000 [1842]: 178.

¹¹³ Trollope 1997 [1832]: 23.

¹¹⁴ Steele 1975 [1841]: 212.

¹¹⁵ Martineau 2005 [1838]: 5-12.

'explosive' gas, or, and more typically, the use of excessive pressures; whether attributed to the work of the engine, the 'wilful negligence' of the captain and / or the engineer who let pressures accumulate for the express purpose of generating more speed, or as the result of engineer incompetence. Dickens, for instance, identified a culture of recklessness and inadequate technical training that saw steamboats 'under the management [...] of reckless men whose acquaintance with its mysteries may have been of six months' standing'. Indeed, in light of such circumstances, he declares that it is a 'wonder [...] not that there should be so many fatal accidents, but that any journey should be safely made.' Other authors were even more explicit in shifting culpability away from the technology itself to mismanagement or wilful negligence – that it is not 'the principle which is wrong, it is the careless use of it.'

A more detailed assessment of accidents, and of boiler explosions in particular, was published by *The North American Review* in 1840, and entitled 'Steamboat Disasters'. The article begins with a comprehensive overview of the various dangers ('evils') that surround steamboat travel: the obstruction filled rivers, the collision of boats, the dangerous mix of flammable cargo (turpentine, gunpowder), combustible structure and sparks generated by the chimneys, existent yet ineffectual legislation, the design and construction of technology (*flue boiler*) or the boat itself, and lastly, the pervasive cultural attitudes and practices. As part of its inquiry the article considered the recently passed Steamboat Bill of 1838, which, because it was passed 'in haste and under the influence of temporary excitement, it must of course be crude and ill-digested, and may be mischievous.' Not only does the article expose a number of the Bill's shortcomings (inspection, safety valves, running lights, construction), but it also offers recommendations for remedy as well as suggestions regarding 'powers of prosecution' and the education and examination of engineers. It also links the failure of the Bill to the 'power' of the steamboat fraternity, observing: 'the

¹¹⁶ The author for *The North American Review* offers a similar list, alluding to 'a certain much talked-of and mysterious gas.' Anon 1840: 21. See also Hunter 1993 [1949]: 289-309. ¹¹⁷ Dickens 2000 [1842]: 175.

¹¹⁸ McDermott 1998 [1964]: 28-29. Equally, the author for *The North American Review* state how, while a variety of technological reasons can 'ingeniously' be found 'as long as the management of so tremendous an agent as steam shall be abandoned to the control of careless, ignorant, or intemperate engineers, no perfection of boiler or engine, no strictness of periodical examination, will insure any exemption from explosion.' Anon 1840: 21.

defects of the bill are so glaring, and its structure so bungling, that it can be violated with impunity. The boatmen are so numerous, form so powerful a class in all the river towns, and have so long lived uncontrolled, – their wandering life rendering them but little amenable to the laws, – that it is not to be expected the first attempt to bring them into order and discipline should be entirely successful.'

The main focus of criticism, however, is a mix of commercial competition, wilful negligence and passenger exuberance, all underwritten by a need for speed. Thus, on the one hand, the article confirms that it is a reputation for speed that 'will most effectually fill the cabin of a Western boat', where a boat that 'has proved the faster in a trial of speed, leaves the port crowded, while the empty cabin [...] causes the captain and owners mentally to resolve, that the next boat they build, shall at all events be a fast one.' As a consequence of this need for speed, steamboat captains were keen to demonstrate their competitiveness, either by reducing the time it took to complete a particular trip, or, and more dramatically, by racing another boat. (And then there is also the cultural factor, what the author of the article sees as the 'unaccountable [...] frantic desire to get ahead, no matter at what risk, or for what object, or haply for no object at all.') On the other hand, this need for speed is reflected not only in the continued use of high-pressure engines (the power they produce and their lightness of weight), but also the design and use of the safety-valve that gives engineers the power to hold it down by means of placing weights on the so-called 'death-hook'.¹²⁰

That being said the article's author is ready to acknowledge the 'desirability' of speed, and that while speed is employed within the bounds of the engine's strength, that is, 'without extra strain or effort, the preference [...] is legitimate and reasonable.' As such, he shifts the burden of the blame onto the human part of the equation, to mismanagement and cultural attitudes. To highlight these several contributing factors the author draws on the explosion of the *Moselle* in 1838, an example he considers to be 'well adapted to show

¹¹⁹ Anon 1840: 37-41. See also Brockman 2002. The article equally exposes a culture of distrust.

Anon 1840: 19-42. Safety was also an issue with respect to hull strength as boats became shallower and less substantially built to ensure lightness of draught and so a longer running season, but making them less resilient to impact. Anon 1840: 23.

the ignorance and wantonness of men [...], the blindness and infatuation of passengers, and the gauge by which steamboat performances are generally measured.' Its use is aptly supported by the author's personal experience – he himself having travelled on the boat in question only days before, during which he witnessed the very conflux of actions and emotions that gave rise to the subsequent explosion. So it is that the author records how the captain's decision to make a 'brag trip' was met with 'the excited condition of her crew' and greeted with enthusiasm by many of the passengers, weary from the monotony of the voyage. The show of speed, however, is compounded by the opportunity of a race – a prospect that elicits, not only 'tremendous' excitement among the passengers, but sees both 'Captain and passengers vy[ing] with each other in stimulating the exertions of the fireman.' Indeed, the zeal and excitement is such that 'rosin' – a highly combustible material – is 'freely' added to the furnaces as a means of increasing pressure. As if to underline the collective sense of exuberance (and complicity) the author peppers his account with words and phrases such as 'all-pervading spirit', 'the excitement of rivalry', 'the mania', and 'frantic eagerness'. 122

The article similarly makes references to other contributing factors that allow such reckless practices to continue. Firstly, for example, it alludes to the low status ('character') of the travelling public (to the low value placed upon human life), that unlike the wealthier patrons of eastern boats whose presence ensures voyages are made without incident: 'the lower we descend in this scale, the less is the estimate we find put upon human life, and the less is the horror felt at its violent or wanton destruction.' Secondly, it confirms how the dramatic rise in travel on western rivers has resulted in 'the indifference of boatmen to the comfort and safety of the passengers'; in short, how, despite the increasing number of

The cause of the disaster is revealed to be the captain's 'rashness' and his 'effort to pass the very boat that had outstripped him on [this] his previous trip.' Anon 1840: 31. Interestingly the author concludes his article with reference to the emergence of railroads: that 'The scene of danger and of risk to the traveller is about to be removed from the water to the land. [...] The rapidity, the ease, and we may add, the safety of railroad travelling (that is to say, upon substantially constructed railroads,) would instantaneously demolish all competition upon a river, where ice in winter, low water in summer, a circuitous and tedious route at all times, interfere inevitably with precision and accuracy of movement. Indeed, the prediction is hardly a rash one, that as much as the steamboat has done for the West, the railroad is destined to do more.' Anon 1840:

¹²² Anon 1840: 28-29.

steamboats, their number 'is altogether inadequate, at certain seasons of the year', for the 'comfortable and safe transportation' of passengers. Thirdly, this astonishing growth, while being partially addressed with an increase in the number of boats, has left 'it impossible to procure for all of them commanders of suitable age and experience.' Finally, the author alludes to the monopoly of the boatmen and the ineffectualness of state legislation.¹²³

A number of foreign travellers made comparable diagnosis of prevailing cultural practices. Latrobe, for example, observed how 'The history of steam-boat disaster is one of the most terrible and revolting imaginable; and the disregard of human life which is as yet, generally speaking, a feature of the West, is a sure proof that the standard of moral feeling is low.' Even more explicit was Chevalier, who characterised this dominant cultural ethos as 'Everyone for himself!', where 'The mass is everything, the individual nothing.' Indeed, he confirms that the motto of the West is 'Victory or death!' where victory 'is to make money, to get dollars, to make a fortune out of nothing.' Thus, when it comes to steamboat technology and operations, what is essential is not the life of one, or even of hundreds, but only that steamboats should be plentiful – that just so long as they 'move at a rapid rate and are navigated at little expense' it matters little if they are staunch or well commanded. 125

While such representations account for the dominant tone and substance of cultural attitudes, they are not without exception. *The North American Review*, despite all its stated concerns and objections, opines that there nonetheless exists 'abundant proof' of 'care and vigilance'. It argues that; 'It is a well-known fact, that accidents but seldom happen to the larger and more valuable boats, and the reason is obvious; the amount of capital invested in them compels their owners, in the selection of commanders and crew, to exercise a care which a sense of responsibility, and the dictates of humanity, in all other cases demand of them in vain.' For his part, Chevalier draws attention to the fact that such 'accidents do

Anon 1840: 29-37. Ends with a quote from the secretary: 'If half the citizens of this country should get blown up, and it should be likely to affect injuriously the trade and commerce of the other half by bringing to justice the guilty, no elective officer would risk his popularity by executing the law, without some alternative which should weigh stronger on his mind than the loss of office ...' Anon 1840: 29-42.

124 McDermott 1998 [1964]: 28-29.

Chevalier 1967 [1837]: 203-219. The age of boilers and engines was a significant problem for machinery was commonly salvaged and recycled from sunken or damaged boats.

Anon 1840: 34.

not occur in well-managed boats, on which no reasonable economy has been spared in the purchase of the machinery and the wages of the engineers.' Moreover, and contextualising the many dangers and risks with respect to frontier and commercial attitudes, he writes that, because the steamboat is as necessary to the West as is blood to the human system, '[t]he West will beware of checking and fettering it by regulations of any sort.' 'The time is not yet come,' adds Chevalier, 'but it will come later'.¹²⁷

Throughout the antebellum period of western steamboat history boiler explosions and their often deadly consequences was a possibility faced by each passenger, businessmen and crew member. Explosions were not the only dangers that steamboat travel entailed, but they were the most dramatic and headline-grabbing, and they quickly became an image associated with western steamboat culture. Indeed, the prevalence of such an association – fuelled by the many newspaper reports, articles and editorials, as well as so-called disaster anthologies – is reflected in the narratives of travellers, who repeatedly raise the issue of safety.

But the dangers of western steamboat travel were but one of the many topics raised and discussed by the early nineteenth century travel writer. In proffering this new means of transport to the (reading) public of America, and perhaps more particularly of Europe, they provided testimony to many aspects of its culture: from representations of daily activities and on-board society, its character and composition, its behaviour, manners and recreations (drinking, smoking, gambling); to the appearance and comforts of accommodation, details of the technology involved in propulsion and navigation, and the work of its officers and crew. They likewise offered more anecdotal remarks and observations of climate, scenery and conversation. On the one hand, coupled with contemporaneous press-coverage and technical reports, such representations illustrate the history of the western steamboat's changing design and construction (its appearance and mechanics — in particular the topographical arrangement of its space, of cabin arrangement and the introduction of

¹²⁷ Chevalier 1967 [1838]: 216-217.

staterooms). On the other hand, those same representations supply essential information on the experience of travel. In light of the many aspects raised and discussed, not to mention the volume of narratives themselves, the following two chapters are devoted to an examination of everyday, on-board society, and the circumstance of cabin passage.

CHAPTER TWO

SOCIETY AND MANNERS

"The morbid hatred of you British to the Institutions of our country, is as-TONishin!"

So long as our souls are doomed to inhabit bodies, these bodies, however gross and unworthy they may be deemed, must be taken care of. [...] But at the same time, as we have a higher and nobler nature, which must also be cared for, the necessary labor spent upon our bodies should be as much abridged as possible, in order to give us leisure for the concerns of this better nature.²

If we look into the nature of wealth [...] we shall find that nothing can be more favorable to its growth than good roads and canals.³

PORTRAITS OF AMERICA

In the first half century of western steamboat travel countless foreign tourists committed their experiences of the Mississippi rivers to print. In most cases these river journeys were simply a part of larger tours – episodes of longer, broader expeditions, perhaps no more than a chapter in a larger narrative – which usually appeared in the form of travelogues reporting the author's day-to-day experiences, their trials and tribulations. In contrast, other authors offered up their steamboat experiences as part of a larger, more abstract work that sought a systematized and detailed examination of American society – not just its morals and manners, but its political, socio-economic, industrial project.⁴ The western steamboat, like the corollary and connected technological innovations of canal and railroad, was a function of this project. Read together,

¹ Dickens 1998 [1843-1844]: 462.

² Walker 1831: 124.

³ John C. Calhoun, quoted in Nye 2003: 149.

⁴ The line of differentiation, of course, is not so clear for the phrase 'morals and manners' ultimately becomes a generic (short hand) term that encompasses all these aspects, though it can still be set apart from the travelogue which similarly includes morals and manners. For a concrete example see the difference between two works of Harriet Martineau *Society in American* and *Retrospect of Western Travel* in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

all these works belie a contemporaneous fascination – a contest of ideology and representation – with the so-called 'Great Experiment' of the American nation.⁵

According to Thomas Ruys Smith, for many foreign tourists the Mississippi River was the iconic symbol of the Jacksonian nation, and, more often than not, became, 'for both good and ill, [...] their defining experience of America.' Indeed, it was the western steamboat that supplied their most vivid contact with America's 'experiment' of democracy, bringing before their gaze the unique circumstances of frontier society in the Mississippi Valley. The results of such encounters, as Ray Allen Billington has shown, 'varied from ecstatic praise to vitriolic denunciation', a disparity attributed principally to false expectations: 'Visitors [...] saw not what was there, but what their experiences, beliefs, prejudices, and convictions convinced them should be there. Their books [moreover] reflected their diverse personalities, dissimilar backgrounds, conflicting ideologies, and individual loyalties.' As such, representation painted the West as either 'a cradle of freedom' or composed of 'crudity and barbarism'; 'a cultural backwash, peopled by tobacco-spitting, dollar-grabbing illiterates'.

The western steamboat, far from simply serving as the means, or indeed the very site of such experiences, was itself part of the picture – a potent symbol and practical force whose textual representation witnessed a formal tripartite confluence of signification: nature, society

⁵ Americans, according to Smith 'more frequently described their encounters with the Mississippi in magazine sketches, or journals, or brief letters home now largely lost and unpublished.' Smith 2007: 83.

⁶ Smith 2007: 80.

⁷ Billington 1985: 73-76. Billington elaborates on this polarity in terms of 'two diametrically opposed pictures of the successive Wests:' that of a dual image governing the impression of 'landscape, the Native American peoples, and the frontiersmen themselves'. Thus he divides between, novelists and hostile travellers who 'projected' the western frontier as a 'Land of Savagery'; and 'promoters and idealists' who 'envisioned' a 'Land of Promise.' Nor were these representations static but altered in relation to the ever shifting frontier line; from the Eastern forests to the Midwest prairies: from the Midwest prairies to the plains and deserts of the Far West. Indeed, each new terrain, each new vista, stirred different reactions in those who described them. The foundations of these prejudices, convictions and affiliations were rooted, not only in prevailing cultural patterns of thought but were also governed by representations of America propagated by novelists and promotional agents; by speculation companies, immigration guides, emigration newspapers - expectations derived from material consulted prior to travel (material either read or heard). Thus, for example, the traveller would attempt to 'classify [their experience of landscape] within existing aesthetic criteria', seeking to describe it by means of a common vocabulary of the sublime and the picturesque. Smith 2007: 81. Nor were they necessarily content to keep their affiliations in the background, frequently making their intentions and commitments patently clear. Hence, according to Billington, each traveller arrived 'determined to prove or disprove'; armed with a set of 'fixed views, for or against, and both consciously and subconsciously selected evidence to prove their cases.' Billington 1985: 75.

(culture) and industrial power (machine technology). There were, of course, various practical factors that shaped experiences of travel, whether it was the simple matter of when (season) or where (which river) a journey occurred, the stage in steamboat evolution, or the characteristics of the steamboat – of its offered comforts, luxuries, and amenities. Nor should it be forgotten that the simple fact the author had the means to travel (or 'Tour') and subsequently to write, implies membership of a particular social class; membership that might determine not only their mode of travel (cabin passage on steamboats), but the company they kept, entertained and were received by.⁸

More critical however is the imprint of contemporary debates over the societal effects of industrialization – the cultural, moral and economic consequences of the Machine Age. In his study, Leo Marx examines the major tenets (and international nature) of this 'debate' with reference to Thomas Carlyle's essay, 'Sign of the Times' (1829) and Timothy Walker's reply, 'Defence of Mechanical Philosophy' (1831). The contrast is useful not only in stressing the perceived benefits, as well as detrimental effects of mechanization, but the rhetoric (language) employed in the communication of such beliefs. For his part, Carlyle's 'commitment' to what Marx labels 'a traditional humanist idea of a proper balance of human life', raises doubts about the emerging 'new industrial order'. He writes how, 'mechanical genius' is not only managing 'the external and physical world', 'discrediting' old modes of exertion ('old natural methods'), but 'the internal and spiritual' too. Thus, though he 'does not deny the genuine advantages of machine production', he fears that, 'Men are grown mechanical in head and in heart, as well as in hand'; '10 and that, although 'Mechanism, wisely contrived, has done much for man in a social and moral point of view, we cannot be persuaded that it has ever been the chief source of his worth or happiness.' (Note the use of 'moral' and 'happiness'.)

⁸ In a connected way, particular cultural practices effected what an individual might experience, most notably if that traveller was a woman, who, unlike her male counterpart, was more restricted or 'confined' in her movements, and hence circumscribed in her activities and resulting representations. See Chapter 3 of this thesis.

⁹ Published respectively in the *Edinburgh Review* and the *North American Review*.

¹⁰ Carlyle 1955 [1829]: 22-25.

¹¹ As Marx contends, it was not that Carlyle viewed technology as being 'inherently evil, but rather as a threat to the necessary balance in the human situation', wherein lives and behaviour become 'increasingly determined [...] by invisible, abstract, social forces unrelated (or alien) to their inward impulses.' Marx 2000 [1964]: 175-176.

Walker's reply, in which he not only denies 'the evil tendencies of Mechanism', but 'doubts the good influence of his [Carlyle's] Mysticism', is testament to 'pervasive attitudes toward [...] new machine power'. He argues that, far from causing 'injury', mechanization is bringing society the benefits of economic abundance and the rewards of intellectual progress. Indeed, far from causing a cultural, moral or spiritual decline he champions the machine as an instrument of 'improvement'; that technology, by alleviating the burdens of physical toil, is contributing to cultural evolution, 'emancipat[ing] the mind, in the most glorious sense'. He writes; 'if machines could be so improved and multiplied, that all our corporeal necessities could be entirely gratified, without the intervention of human labor, there would be nothing to hinder all mankind from becoming philosophers, poets, and votaries of art.' But there is equally a democratic, almost utilitarian hint to his argument, such that, 'The *smaller the number* of human beings, and the less the time it requires, to supply the physical wants *of the whole, the larger* will be the number, and the more the time left free for nobler things.' 12

But Walker's idea of technological 'improvement' needs to be understood in the larger arena of contemporary American and European thought about Nature, and, more specifically, the reconciliation of machine technology with America's self-created image or 'myth' (to use Henry Nash Smith's term) as a 'garden'. On the one hand, as Billington shows, the increasing manifest benefits of industrialisation resulted in a dramatic 'transformation in popular taste' as regards to Nature. Unlike 'the adoration lavished by eighteenth-century romanticism', that saw Nature equated with beauty, Nature became 'weak and impotent [...] useless until it had been made useful by man'. Such a 'mood', continues Billington, witnessed the image of the frontier change from a 'beckoning Eden' to 'forbidding barriers to progress – hostile arid, unwanted – existing only to be destroyed'. The metamorphosis is evocatively announced in Dickens's representation of 'the Valley of Eden' in *Martin Chuzzlewit*: 'A flat morass, bestrewn with fallen timber; a marsh on which the good growth of earth seemed to have wrecked and cast

¹² Walker 1831: 122-136. *Emphasis added*.

¹³ Billington 1985: 81.

away, that from its decomposing ashes vile and ugly things might arise; where the very trees took the aspect of huge weeds, begotten of the slime from which they spring ... '14

On the other hand, the 'new god' of technology was being integrated by Americans into 'a new mode of belief', which, 'so far as they shared an idea of what they were doing as a people, actually saw themselves creating a society in the image of a garden.'16 (For example Marx argues that Thomas Jefferson saw 'the machine [...] blend harmoniously into the open countryside of his Native land ... of the middle landscape'.) In his study, America as Second Creation (2003) David E. Nye has examined this cultural phenomenon, analysing the roles of technology in American narratives of nation, identifying a consistent pattern of signification – a diachronic (overlapping) series of narratives – centred on the technological transformation of the wilderness 'into a prosperous and egalitarian society'. ¹⁷ In general (Walker is an example par excellence), Nye confirms 'mainstream' narratives portrayed this transformation less as a violation of the landscape and more as improvements expressing 'the latent pattern in it', that, essentially, the natural world was seen as incomplete and awaiting fulfilment through human intervention. Thus, while Walker writes of the relation of technology and nature as a matter of 'economic abundance', 'corporeal necessity', of the physical labour of 'man' or the fertile and mineral rich land, it is also about routes of communication (commercial and cultural): thus 'improvement' is synonymous with the contraction of time and space. 18 He writes;

Where she [Nature] denied us rivers, Mechanism has supplied them. Where she left our plant uncomfortably rough, Mechanism has applied the roller. Where her mountains have been found in the way, Mechanism has boldly levelled or cut through them. Even the ocean, by

¹⁴ Dickens 1998 [1843-1844]: 325.

¹⁵ Billington 1985: 80.

¹⁶ Marx 2000 [1964]: 143. According to Marx, for example, Walker 'expounds the doctrine of unlimited economic development as if American people always had been committed to do it, as if there had always been a place for the machine in the myth of the garden.'

17 Nye writes of a 'complex narrative system'. Nye 2003: 12.

¹⁸ Nye quotes John C. Calhoun: 'Let us ... bind the Republic together with a perfect system of roads and canals. Let us conquer space.' Nye 2003: 147. Grund, in discussing the matter of internal improvements, raises the issue of seeing distance as a question of time. 'Distance', he writes, 'is a relative idea, and is not properly measured by the number of miles, at which one place is situated from another; but rather by the time which is required to move from on to anther. This is so far true, and so popular a view of the subject, that the notion of expressing distance by time has become familiar to all people'. Grund 1968 [1837]: 316.

which she thought to have parted her quarrelsome children, Mechanism has encouraged them to step across. As if her earth were not good enough for wheels, Mechanism travels it upon iron pathways.¹⁹

'Counter-narratives', on the other hand, presented events from the viewpoint of the indigenous community and / or emphasized the detrimental ecological effects; how dams not only flooded fields, but prevented fish migrating upstream.²⁰ The form of each transformation however, whether axe, mill, canal, railroad, or irrigation dam,²¹ signalled a variation in the relation of natural world and technological 'tool' or machine.²² For instance: 'The narrative of the axe was about the creation of an agricultural landscape; the narrative of the mill explained the origins of cities and towns, justifying them as natural outgrowths of unexploited rivers and streams [...] In this view, rivers, streams, and waterfalls were providentially located at convenient locations awaiting the hand of man.²³ In contrast, the intrusion of the railroad resulted in the birth of 'new cities and massive growth for entire regions.' It likewise proved a more violent and contentious affair, epitomized in the paradigmatic (and literary) trope of 'the pastoral design' (to use Leo Marx's characterisation), pervading contemporaneous culture, and notable in the work of such authors as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville and Mark Twain.²⁴

With respect to the western steamboat this 'complex narrative system' told stories of settlement and expansion, promoting land speculation, the birth and or rapid enlargement of new towns, the growth of commerce, and the greatly increased facilities of communication. 'Counter-narratives' on the other hand, told of exaggeration and fraud (wild-cat towns), that saw settlers purchase lots in non-existent towns, the dangers of travel (mismanagement and river) and the geographical and seasonal limits to navigation.²⁵ Nor did the steamboat itself

¹⁹ Quoted in Marx 2000 [1964]: 182-183.

²⁰ Nye 2003: 15.

²¹ Nye's study extends beyond the nineteenth-century.

²² See also David E. Nye's American Technological Sublime.

²³ Nye 2003: 109.

²⁴ See Marx's reading of key scenes in Walden, Moby Dick and Huckleberry Finn.

²⁵ For a brief consideration of 'counter-narratives' see Chapter 1 of this thesis.

escape a medley of unfavourable characterizations that focused on the many discomforts of travel, whether those discomforts came from the noise and vibrations of the machinery or the unpleasant nature of society on board. One issue of note, is that, unlike the canal or railroad that involved a transformation of the landscape, the ecological impact of the steamboat was principally restricted to the natural resources it required for construction and propulsion and river improvements.²⁶

With these ideas in mind, this chapter focuses on several representations of the western steamboat and western steamboat travel as pictured by early nineteenth-century travellers and essayists; from its implications for American society and culture to personal details of onboard activities and behaviour; of societal interaction and etiquette. On the one hand, it engages with authors who represented the positive influences of the steamboat at a personal and national, social and commercial level; of its positive role in the economic and cultural consolidation and social equalisation of contemporary American society. Pivotal to this examination is Francis J. Grund's, *The Americans in their Moral, Social, and Political Relations* (1837) and Michael Chevalier's, *Society, Manners, and Politics in the United States* (1838). On the other hand it contrasts such sympathetic portraits with the more antithetical ones of, among others, Charles Dickens, as expressed in *American Notes for General Circulation* (1842), his subsequent (serialised) novel *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843-1844), and in his personal correspondence.

FRANCIS J. GRUND: EQUALITY AND CONSOLIDATION

In the moral, social and political reflections of Francis J. Grund, the western steamboat is, and serves as, an instrument of / for equality and national consolidation. It achieves this distinction in several ways; most tellingly as part and parcel of a larger process of internal improvements (roads, canals, and (later) railroads) designed to increase the facilities of intercourse: an aspect

²⁶ 'Counter-narratives', as Chapter 1 of this thesis has shown, also included the various dangers of travel. One exception in particular was the construction of canals to bypass hazardous parts of rivers, most famously, the Fall of the Ohio.

of stability, duration and unanimity between the States of the Union. Grund of course, was not alone in expressing such positivism, debates over the need and benefits of 'improvements' had become a matter of some interest with the birth of the New Republic. As early as 1787 James Madison had argued that better transportation was the means of binding the nation politically, commercially and militarily. As Nye has shown such attempts, however, made little headway as American's 'balked at the expense' of such improvements and showed themselves unused to thinking 'in national terms, identifying instead with states and communities'. 27 Indeed, it was precisely because such 'improvements' extended development from the local to the national level that matters became so hotly contested, with resistance proving constitutional, sectional or competitive.

Opposition, for example, came from those concerned that the constitution did not explicitly authorize the federal government's right to build such improvements or those who held a jealous regard for state's rights. Nye writes: 'As a national narrative that envisioned population growth and movement to the west, it was most strongly embraced by the western states, [...] and most strongly opposed by older, notably southern states. The latter,' he continues, 'rejected liberal constructions of the Constitution, high tariffs on imported goods, and plans to spend funds collected from such tariffs on internal improvements.' Meanwhile, states that had already invested their money (for example Kentucky, which had constructed a canal around the Falls of Ohio), resisted federal funding for competing states. Thus, despite the numerous technological accomplishments that saw America become 'more closely linked then ever before', what was missing, according to Nye, was the vital 'sense of collective agency'. As a result the New Republic witnessed an increase of 'sectional animosity'.²⁸

In Chapter 10 Grund sets out to address and repudiate such attitudes, especially those 'prophesying the dissolution of the Union', arguing for the unifying power of shared interest and societal awareness consequent of the 'increased facilities of intercourse', which cannot

²⁷ Nye 2003: 147-148. ²⁸ Nye 2003: 147.

fail to 'produce the happiest results'. His argument focuses on five specific areas of influence. First, that the increase of facilities 'lessen the expenses of travelling, and enable emigrants from Europe and the eastern states, to proceed south or west at a trifling expenditure of time and money'. Second, 'by shortening the distances which exist between town and city', they 'enhance the value of real estates'. Third, they open a market for western produce and increase the level of commerce. Fourthly, they have assisted in the spread of 'civilisation and learning', placing the 'wilderness of the west' in contact with the science and art of the East. Finally, and for Grund most importantly, they have the effect of amalgamating into 'a large homogeneous whole' the different populations (the differences of peoples), and thereby strengthening 'the bond of the union'.²⁹

More specifically, Grund argues how improvements such as the western steamboat have diminished prejudice and smoothed over differences in manners, customs and opinions through 'habitual intercourse and exchange of thought'. Indeed, far from instilling a sense of division and difference, it is the continued motion of Americans, their continual movement between north and south, which functions as a 'constant moderator', where intercourse 'prevents the formation of those habits which belong exclusively to either, and are eminently calculated to diminish [...] moral and physical differences.' As illustration Grund directs the reader's attention to the visibly diminished animosity of England and France whose intercourse has engendered mutual respect and imitation of one another's virtues. 'What,' he rhetorically asks, 'may we not hope for' from a people 'joined to an extensive internal commerce which affects all interests, [...] strongly assisted by the ties of consanguinity, [...] and the same language?'

The western steamboat, however, far from simply facilitating this national pattern of intercourse, serves as a site where such interaction is possible. In fact it is the very lack of any alternate means of transportation in the West that forces members of different classes to mix

²⁹ Grund 1968 [1837]: 315.

³⁰ Grund 1968 [1837]: 315-320.

together. So it is that the steamboat functions as a site of personal, societal enlightenment – a space where the intercourse of the 'lower' and 'wealthier classes' causes 'a mutual loss and compensation [to] take place'. For the former, the opportunity of travel exerts an 'incredible influence': widening their (parochial) sphere of experience; facilitating the observation (and hence unfailing adoption) of manners belonging to different people – to those more polite orders of society. For the latter, should they happen to meet 'mechanics or traders', or similar individuals, there results 'an exchange of thought and sentiment [...] often profitable to both parties.' In this way, while the lower orders acquire 'manners', the wealthier, higher classes receive 'valuable instruction' which passes successively from one individual to another until ultimately 'reaching the halls of congress'. This, then, is what Grund means when he writes of 'a mutual loss and compensation', and of an 'equalizing [of] conditions'. ³¹

To stress the intimate nature of this act Grund elaborates on the various amenities and conveniences that help to create a suitable environment for social interaction. Among these advantages are the steamboat's spacious accommodations, 'the elegance of the furniture', the presence, on many boats, of both 'state and drawing rooms', as well as 'all the conveniences of the best hotels'. Wedded to such luxuries is the presence of one or two waiting women for female travellers, a barber for men, and a well-furnished bar which tenders 'the juice of the grapes of all climes'. A number of the larger boats, he declares, have a circulating library and newspapers, or even pianos and other musical instruments. Interestingly, Grund also conjures up an harmonious, pleasurable representation of daily activity, describing how after dinner the ladies are accompanied to their apartment by their respective gentleman, while those without such 'sweet incumbrance' 'indulge in the luxury of a cigar, or take a solitary stroll on deck.' 33

31 Grund 1968 [1837]: 324.

³² In general, Grund will confirm how western steamboats, 'are of a very superior construction, both as regards speed and elegance of accommodations for passengers'. Grund 1968 [1837]: 325.

³³ Grund 1968 [1837]: 325-326. Grund's description of a western steamboat is interesting for a number of reasons. Firstly, the topographical layout belies a boat before structural standardization. He writes; 'The ladies' cabin [...] is usually on deck.' Second, he confirms the universal fact of a separation of the sexes (See Chapter 2 of this thesis). Third, there is the matter of etiquette and societal practices: 'At breakfast, dinner and tea, the ladies are invited down to take their seats at the head of the table, (meals being generally served in the gentlemen's cabin,) after which the gentlemen are permitted to take theirs; and the usual ceremonies being passed, active

There are several reasons, however, to suggest that Grund's representations of on board society is more the product of vested interest than direct personal experience, driven more by a calculated agenda and governed by larger political commitments. On the one hand, as Grund's preface makes clear, his intentions are the repudiation of travel accounts, whether American or English, and the gross 'misrepresentations' of Americans. In particular, he wishes 'to correct [the] prejudices' of authors such as Frances Trollope and Basil Hall with the specific object of inspiring the English with more just conceptions of American worth, and increase the respect and friendship of America for England'. ³⁴ Indeed, Grund's depiction of the western steamboat needs to be read as orchestrated to confront European criticism of 'the anomalies of conduct of American travellers', of the many 'unjust' and 'prejudicial' comparisons made with European passengers. His contention is that such accounts make no allowance for the notable difference in passenger composition, arguing rhetorically how, should European boats contain a similar conglomeration of 'small traders, hawkers, journeymen, mechanics and operatives of all descriptions' and those of the 'polite and wealthier classes', 'I [...] would not wish to witness "the solecisms of deportment" of which they might be guilty.'

Such a contention is interesting not only because it belies a criticism of the inequalities of European society, where such a commingling does not occur, but, simultaneously, functions as a tacit celebration of American ideals and society. Grund likewise implies that such prejudices may also be a question of the 'tender sensitivities of the English tourist' unfamiliar or unused to the hardiness of frontier society. Nor is he content to argue that these tourists were unaware 'of the class of society with whom they journeyed', but rather recognises an implicit positive assertion in these criticisms, suggesting that, when Europeans mistake the members of these classes for gentlemen it 'furnishes proof that the dress, language and manners of the inferior Americans partake so much of the characteristics of education.'³⁵

operations are commenced on all sides with an activity of spirit, which allows no one to remain for a long time an indifferent spectator of the scene.' Grund 1968 [1837]: 325.

³⁴ Grund 1968 [1837]: 10.

³⁵ Grund 1968 [1837]: 324-325.

On the other hand, as Robert F. Berkhofer Jr. shows, Grund's representations perhaps owe much to his political affiliations at this time as well as a keenness to celebrate the values of the New Republic. For example, Berkhofer Jr. refers to the author being a committed democrat, not only writing 'a campaign biography of Martin Van Buren for German readers', 36 but believing that 'American ideals and practices ought to be and were to be the ideals and practices of all peoples.'37 He also opines that Grund's work resembles a dedicated defence of the United States, one that frequently lapses into party politics and slides all too easily from praise of 'democracy in Jacksonian America' into extolling the 'Democracy of Jackson'. Indeed, one review characterised *The Americans* as possessing an 'air of advocacy', in which Grund often comes across like a 'counsel of defence'. 38 (Grund at one point declares: 'The seed of liberty found in Europe no soil favourable to its germination; but it flourished luxuriantly in America; and has since so multiplied that there is no fear of its ever becoming extinct.')³⁹ Similarly, *The Times* of 25 February 1837, gives the opinion that 'many parts of his book are sufficiently eulogistic to warrant the conclusion, that he is at least a partial examiner: and if his judgment be not absolutely distorted into commendation, he certainly does not always furnish his reader with sufficient facts to enable him to arrive at the same results.'40 More damaging, however, is Berkhofer Jr.'s suggestion that Grund's experiences of travel at this time extended perhaps no further south than Philadelphia.⁴¹

³⁶ His political affiliations would however oscillate. See Berkhofer Jr., in Grund 1968 [1837]: xxi-xxii. ³⁷ Berkhofer Jr., in Grund 1968 [1837]: vii.

³⁸ Berkhofer Jr., in Grund 1968 [1837]: xix-xx.

³⁹ Quoted by Berkhofer Jr., in Grund 1968 [1837]: vii. Born in Austria in 1789, Grund studied Mathematics and Philosophy in Vienna before coming to America in 1827. Over the next ten years, prior to publishing *The Americans*, he spent much of his time as a teacher of Mathematics and French at Chancery Hall School in Boston.

⁴⁰ The Times, Saturday, February 25, 1837. p. 6.

⁴¹ Berkhofer Jr., in Grund 1968 [1837]: xix. Doubt can raised as to the extent of Grund's personal acquaintance with the western steamboat in that he refers to them as being 'principally built on the low pressure principle.' One reason for the mistake could be that in seeking to contrast European boats with American he conflates the western steamboats with those plying the coastal rivers, as he does in this particular passage. Grund 1968 [1837]: 325. In his introduction, Berkhofer Jr., suggests that this date, like much in Grund's biography is uncertain. He writes, 'Most authorities claim he lived in the United States for a decade before the publication of *The Americans*, but in the book itself he claims fourteen years. [...] Contemporary reviewers accepted [...] [his] credentials. Today's reader, however, notices that his concrete references are more often to New England and to German experiences than to customs in the Southern or Western states or to life in England or France.' Berkhofer Jr., in Grund 1968 [1837]: xix-xx.

MICHAEL CHEVALIER: EQUALITY AND LIBERTY

One European who recognised the significance and potential of the western steamboat was the French economist and Saint-Simonian disciple, Michael Chevalier.⁴² Chevalier's official task – he was commissioned by the French Government – was an inquiry into America's continuing construction of canals and railroads with a mind to their application in France. His self-appointed purview however ran to its ideological assertions: liberty, equality, democracy. It was, in short, an opportunity to pursue his own interest in what might be termed the industrial organization of society. In fact, so convinced was Chevalier of America's process of maturation, its growth and advancement, that he not only believed that France should study America 'to see how it might adapt its own traditions to the necessities of the future', ⁴³ but that America was 'a matter of deepest interest to the whole human race.'

In the assessment of John William Ward, Chevalier understood the significance 'of the communications and industrial revolutions in American society, [of] the transforming effect of the application of machine power to production and to movement through space.' Like Grund, he understood the equation of 'the means of communication' and 'national consolidation' – of 'the nationalizing, consolidating power of the machine'; that the exponential growth of freight tonnage, of railway routes and canal construction, like the increasing speed of communication, were making American society more and more 'closely knit, and interdependent'. Indeed, for Chevalier, America was 'a model of industry'; 'a gigantic commercial house'; a nation whose emerging form was typified by a drive toward industry; and whose national character he labeled one of 'haste and dispatch'. In fact, so preoccupied did America appear with

⁴² Ward's contention is that Chevalier's analytical probing of American society, the very mettle of his intellectual rigour and attitude, remained tinctured with Saint-Simonian ideology, with what Ward has characterizes as the 'attempt to fuse the scientific positivism and belief in progress of the eighteenth-century enlightenment with the emotions and conservatism of the French religious tradition.' Ward in Chevalier, 1967 [1838]: vi.

⁴³ Ward in Chevalier 1967 [1838]: v.

⁴⁴ Chevalier 1967[1838]: 3.

⁴⁵ Ward in Chevalier 1967 [1838]: ix-xi. Commercially, it was an ongoing expansion that created a bodily flow of arteries that connected the sources of production and the places of consumption and thus established a series of trading conduits between the plantations of the south, producing cotton, tobacco and sugar, with the consumer cities of the north. Socially and demographically these same arteries facilitated the swelling tide of *westering* migration and re-settlement, exploration, and humble recreational journeying.

⁴⁶ Chevalier 1967 [1838]: 333.

attempts to save time that he offered as its 'most suitable emblem [...] a locomotive engine or a steamboat.'⁴⁷ However, more than its obvious power to effect a commercial consolidation, it was the western steamboat which 'promote[d] a real, positive, and practical liberty': the steamboat that served to reduce, not only geographical, but also social, class difference. For the Saint-Simonian, the western steamboat had effected nothing short of a revolution in 'the great valley of the Mississippi.'⁴⁸

In chapter 21, dedicated to 'Western Steamboats', and scripted as a letter dated January 8, 1835, Chevalier makes the following explicit statement:

To improve the means of communication, [...] is to promote a real, positive, and practical liberty; it is to extend to all members of the human family the power of moving about and using the world which has been given to all as a common patrimony; it is to increase the rights and privileges of the greatest number as truly and as amply as could be done by electoral laws. I would go further – it is to establish equality and democracy. The effect of the most perfect system of transportation is to reduce the distance not only between different places, but between different classes.⁴⁹

The passage is important for a number of reasons. Of especial interest is the seeming relation of equality and democracy that offers the equation of equality as a democratic right: that the democratic right to the liberty of movement is both a testament and a practical instance of equality. In turn, equality is accounted for in terms of opportunity, wherein the potential for 'upward' class mobility implicit in 'the reduction of class difference' is the vanguard of that equality: that is, because all have an equal chance at improvement, all should be treated equally. Chevalier's choice of language is also suggestive, employing as he does overtly democratic phraseology, 'the greatest number', 'all members of the human family', and where the use of the word 'power' to signal the condition of enfranchisement hints at a corollary challenge to anti-democratic imposition and the promotion of individual self-determination.

⁴⁷ Chevalier 1967 [1838]: 60.

⁴⁸ Chevalier 1967 [1838]: 204-206.

⁴⁹ Chevalier 1967 [1838]: 204.

Thus, like Grund, Chevalier believes that by permitting the members of different classes (rich and poor) to travel together machine technology can effect, or perhaps more correctly, provides, an opportunity for engendering social equality. As an example he offers a comparison with the railroad system of Great Britain where, as he observes, the mechanic or labourer 'have the right, if they will [and can] pay for it, of sitting in the same vehicle, on the same seat, with the baronet or the peer and duke, [and] feel their dignity as men and touch, as it were, the fact that there is not an impassable gulf between them and the nobility.' Once again, it is opportunity itself which pays the way for liberty, where the enactment of practical liberty is bought consequent of an individual's right of opportunity. That is, because the low rate of fare has rendered 'a river voyage [...] one of the easiest things in the world', the expression of liberty, and the opportunity to socialize with members of 'differing' classes, has never been easier. But it is not simply a matter of the labourer and aristocrat mingling in the social space of the western steamboat, rather that the steamboat, as in Grund's conception, forms a connection, physical and intellectual, practical and cultural, with 'the rest of the world'. In Chevalier's eyes the steamboat becomes a conduit where every travelling clerk is a missionary of 'ideas' just as the steamboat itself is a conveyor of commerce: serving as both a means and a site for 'communication'.⁵⁰

But while both authors concur in endorsing the national economic and cultural benefits of the western steamboat, Chevalier's assessment of on board society, specifically the issue of manners and behaviour, is more conservative than Grund's rebuttal of such anti-democratic sentiments as those of Frances Trollope. Chevalier writes: 'when the first feeling of curiosity is once satisfied, a long confinement in one of them has little to attract a person of a cultivated mind and refined manners.' In fact, he readily concedes that most 'Europeans of social polish'

⁵⁰ Chevalier 1967[1838]: 205-211. This having been said, Chevalier is keen to emphasize that those changes effected by industrialisation, especially in the branch of social class equality, be understood as limited and pervious to corruption and finally failure without the presence of religion. Indeed, because for Chevalier social class equality, or more precisely, 'the improvement of the condition of the lower classes ... [is] essentially a moral question,' any sought consummation of equality will only come from a 'moral remodelling of society.' Only religion, he writes, 'can move the hearts of all classes deeply enough, and enlighten the minds of all strongly enough, to cause the rich and the poor to conceive new ideas of their mutual relations and to realize them in practice.' Chevalier 1967 [1838]: 352.

and eastern, upper class Americans, 'on escaping from one of these floating barracks, would not feel disposed under the first impulse of ill humour to certify the correctness of Mrs. Trollope's' observations.⁵¹ However, what is of particular interest are the reasons he gives for such circumstances, notably the social context of frontier living.⁵²

In particular, and echoing the ideas of Timothy Walker and likeminded Americans who saw in machine technology the future rewards of cultural enlightenment, Chevalier identifies the hardships of frontier living as the cause of such manners. He writes, 'it is not from choice' that the 'man' of the West appears 'ill-bred' for he aspires to be considered 'a man of breeding', but rather from his being 'obliged to occupy himself much more with the cultivation of the earth than himself'. Indeed, precisely because his time is spent working the land he lives on, and from which he earns his living, 'he has not had time to soften his voice and cultivate the grace of manners'. Indeed, he adds, it is not only inevitable but natural that the first generation should display 'the impress of [...] severe labors'. It is perhaps significant that it is here, while discussing the opinions entertained by Europeans of western society, that Chevalier enlarges on the equality visible on the frontier:

There is in the West a real equality, not merely an equality to talk about, an equality on paper; everybody that has on a decent coat is a gentleman; every gentleman is as good as any other and does not conceive that he should put himself out to oblige his equal. He is occupied entirely with himself, and cares nothing for others; he expects not attention from his neighbour and does not suspect that his neighbour can expect any from him. In this rudeness, however, there is not a grain of malice; there is on the contrary an appearance of good humor that disarms you. The man of the West is rude, but not sullen or quarrelsome. He is sensitive, proud of himself, proud of his country, and to excess, but without silliness or affectation. Remove his cover of vanity and egoism and you will find him ready to oblige you and even generous. He is a great calculator, and yet he is not cold; he is capable of enthusiasm. He loves money with a passion, yet he is not avaricious and is often prodigal.⁵⁴

There is then, in the portraits of Grund and Chevalier a distinct, positive (qualified in the case of the latter), endorsement of the western steamboat. Such representations however,

⁵¹ See Chapter 3 of this thesis.

⁵² Chevalier 1967[1838]: 212.

⁵³ Chevalier 1967[1838]: 212-213.

⁵⁴ Chevalier 1967[1838]: 212.

are not free from challenges posed by the reported experiences of other travellers, nor are they in themselves unproblematic. On the one hand, their representations imply a tacit approval of the manners, civility and deportment of the 'wealthy classes'. Not only are the codes and values of that class, implicit in their behaviour, to be applauded and offered as the mark of aspiration, but, in a manner of speaking, they authorize as normative their cultural and intellectual constitution. More generally, there is the assumption that both classes harbour the desire and inclination, or indeed recognise a need for change. Alternatively, and because a sense of class or group identity and authority are (to a degree) predicated on maintaining social difference – because difference is both authority and its solidification – the process of equalization may prove none too inevitable. For example, the noted anxiety entertained by the middle-classes with respect to the emulation of manners or propriety as being merely affectation and / or so hypocrisy: that the adoption of such qualities is but disguise and concealment of a true identity for the express purposes of swindling, extortion, and confidence trickery.

On the other hand, the existence of numerous traveller testimonials undermines or even flatly contradicts such positive evaluations. Some of these 'counter-narratives', testify how, far from being a convivial domain of social betterment, the western steamboat was (over)crowded by a socially parochial group of passengers whose manners and behaviour was far from that advanced by Grund and more pervasive in its rakishness than acknowledged by Chevalier. To put it another way, authors such as Basil Hall, Frances Trollope, Charles Dickens in particular, tended to represent manners and behaviour as typically generalized, even homogenized, to a point at which no discernable distinction was possible. Other authors, not all belonging to the

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⁵⁵ It is implicit in the 'wealthier classes' portion of the exchange, which, though potentially benefiting the 'lower class,' it nevertheless confirms the existent hierarchical structure. That such is potentially the case is implicit in Chevalier's consideration of class equalization in relation to the Southern states, where, he writes, 'the white democracy has a pedestal, slavery. [That t]o realize its own elevation,' he continues, 'it is not obliged to be continually engaged in lowering the superior classes; it exercises it authority on what is beneath and thinks less of attacking what is over it. In the South, society is divided into masters and slaves; the distinction of higher and lower class is there of secondary importance, particularly at the present time, when the alarming state of their relations with the blacks obliges all whites to act in concert.' Chevalier, 1967 [1838]: 393.

'upper classes' (and read alongside other printed media), attest to the societally fragmented nature of the steamboat – to a clear class division between 'upper' and 'lower' deck. That is, in their representations of western steamboat travel, many authors prioritized the experiences of society and conditions of cabin passengers to the detriment of all those travelling as 'deck passengers' on the deck below, where conditions were markedly unequal to those above.⁵⁷

For the most part, deck passengers, tended to be either poor Americans or immigrants, either 'Kentuckian' flatboatmen returning from New Orleans having delivered their wares, dismantled and sold their boats for timber, or (usually) German or Irish families or individuals relocating in the hope of a better life.⁵⁸ The attraction was principally the cheapness of travel with passage often costing only one-fifth or one-sixth of cabin fare (though it did occasionally rise to as much as one-third or one-half).⁵⁹ Such 'cheapness', of course, proved crucial to the growth and consolidation of settlement. Meanwhile, for the individual already accustomed to life on the frontier, travel was perhaps an opportunity for sociable society.⁶⁰ However, because the area of the main deck was designed around the transportation of freight, and housed all the steamboat's machinery, accommodation was both unpleasant and dangerous. Not only were deck passengers only accorded a nominal amount of space – typically a small area comprising a few tiers of bunks cut from rough lumber – but subjected to the discomforts of the noise and heat of the paddlewheels and furnaces, and the operations of the crew. In addition to such hazards they were vulnerable to the elements of wind, snow and cold, as well as the dangers of collision, explosion and snagging.⁶¹ Finally, conditions on the main deck were frequently

⁵⁷ Louis C. Hunter writes how 'Never was the contrast between well-to-do and poor thrown into sharper relief than on the larger finer steamboats of the western rivers. [...] In the deck quarters of the steamboat the American boast of a classless society found plain denial; equality, as in the old world, was shown to be a function less of humanity than of property.' He similarly refers to how 'The conditions of deck passage [...] were so largely ignored in contemporary accounts of steamboat travel.' Hunter 1993 [1949]: 419-422.

⁵⁸ By the early 1820s, deck passage was 'so cheap that flatboat hands had discontinued returning by land.'

⁵⁸ By the early 1820s, deck passage was 'so cheap that flatboat hands had discontinued returning by land.' Indeed, the cost of travel could be reduced by the individual working during his passage bringing on corded wood every time the boat stopped at one of the many wooding places or 'wood-piles'. See Hunter 1993 [1949]:420-426.

⁵⁹ Passengers could reduce the price of passage by assisting in the process of 'wooding up'.

⁶⁰ See the comments of Henry B. Miller. McDermott 1998 [1968]: 83-86.

⁶¹ Hunter refers to an article that appeared in the Cincinnati *Gazette* dated 27 December 1851 which reported how, caught in an intense spell of cold 'at least ten of her [*Saranac*] deck passengers were so badly frostbitten that they lost the use of their limbs, and that several were frozen to death.' Hunter 1993 [1949]: 428. McDermott

characterized as unsavoury and unsanitary, typified by filth and stench, conditions that only made the threat from diseases such as cholera, especially during summer months of heat and humidity, ever greater.⁶²

Two brief examples may be offered to illustrate the type of conditions faced by deck passengers. The first, and more positive experience belongs to Henry B. Miller and his voyage downstream from St. Louis to Natchez on board the *Alton* in 1838. For the most part Miller is amenable, recording how he and a friend secured a bunk to sleep on, how they carried their own provisions, consisting of 'Bread, Crakers [sic], boiled Ham, Pies, Coffee, Tea, & Sugar,' and how his friend (Mr. Pitman) cooked and washed. He also records the dominant presence of Dutch, Irish, and Germans – the Germans smoking pipes and tobacco with gravity and composure, while the Irish, who drank whiskey, were agitated, tumultuous, disorderly and noisy – and how these were 'the greatest of times'. Indeed, Miller is keen to admonish those who believe that such a method of travel is disagreeable and that no respectable man, unless compelled by necessity, would opt to undertake it. That being said, Miller repeatedly refers to the over-crowded conditions to which he and his companion were subjected, a condition that only deteriorates as the journey continues and the number of people swell, and to the increasingly disagreeable stench that comes from the horses and mules travelling on board.⁶³

1998 [1968]: 60-63. It was a space from which escape was most difficult, the deck being so close to the water line.

⁶² Hunter quotes from the Louisville *Journal* 21 May 1849: 'Boats have passed here [...] within whose narrow decks from three to five hundred human beings have been densely stowed or packed. The filth and stench on such boats are almost insupportable. The food used is of the most unwholesome kind, and the atmosphere which is breathed is impure in the extreme. Under such circumstances, nothing but disease and death can rightfully be expected. All the laws of health are put at defiance. As well might you expect health in the Black Hole of Calcutta when crammed with human beings, as on the deck of a steamboat, where hundred are huddled so thick that those who are well in passing to and fro tread on the wretched sick who cannot get out of the way.' Hunter 1993 [1949]: 430. See also Gillespie 2001: 149-150.

⁶³ McDermott 1998 [1968]: 84-85. Miller was travelling in October of 1838 from St. Louis to Natchez. His journal was published in the *Missouri Historical Society Collections*, Vol. 6. 1931. pp213-287. Travelling in 1838 David Stevenson draws a comparison between the main and upper deck. The former he writes as 'covered in, and occupied by the crew of the vessel and the deck passengers, generally presents a scene of filth and wretchedness that baffles all description.' Meanwhile the latter, by contrast, is 'fitted up in a gorgeous style; the berths are large, and the numerous windows by which the cabin is surrounded give abundance of light, and, what is great consequence in that scorching climate, admit a plentiful supply of fresh air.' Quoted in Kane 2004: 67.

Travelling some nine years earlier (1829), the comic actor Joseph L. Cowell would subsequently (1844) offer an account of his voyage on the *Helen McGregor*.⁶⁴ At that time (or on this particular boat), deck passengers were accommodated upon deck where the saloon would later be established, collected in what he terms a 'man-pen', crowded on a boat he classifies 'a high-pressure prison'. The space itself, like the deck of the *Alton*, is over-crowed, 'filled to overflowing with men, women, and children, chiefly Irish and German labourers, with their families, in dirty dishabille [sic],' and furnished with but 'a stove, for warmth and domestic cooking'. There are also 'two large, empty shelves, one above the other, all round, boarded up outside about four feet high' for sleeping, while protection from the elements took the form of a 'tattered canvass curtains between the pillars'. Situated on the hurricane deck above was a multitude of cabbages and at least fifty coops of fighting cocks; the cabbages 'making sourkrout of themselves'; while the 'notes of defiance' from the cocks combined with 'the squalling and squeaking of women and children' enough to drown out the noise of the engine.⁶⁵

THE EPONYMOUS MARTIN CHUZZLEWIT &

THE AMERICAN NOTES OF CHARLES DICKENS

A key scene in Charles Dickens's *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843-1844) occurs in chapter 34 where the titular Martin encounters the 'Honorable Elijah Pogram, Member of Congress', on board a steamboat heading east, and the two men engage in a debate about American manners. The

⁶⁴ McDermott 1998 [1968]: 58. Taken from his autobiography *Thirty Years Passed among the Players in England and America*, first published in 1844. McDermott however quotes from the 1853 edition. The *Helen McGregor* blew up at Memphis on her return trip.

⁶⁵ On this boat, there were no state-rooms, no wash-room, and no social hall – the cabin itself located on the lower deck abaft the boilers. In Cowell's assessment it was a time when there were few American merchants at New Orleans and those there were generally left their families in the North. Consequently, this absence of women – to whom Cowell attributes the power to restrain 'barbarous' behaviour on the part of men – placed '[a]ll moral and social restraint [...] in the shade,' and rendered 'Republicanism [never] more practically republicanized.' The cabin itself contained some thirty-two births and a supply of surplus mattresses and blankets stacked up during the day and spread about the floor, on and under the dining-tables. Those unable to find a space would invariably drink, smoke, gamble or grumble. With regard to personal ablutions the boat offered no more than a chunk of yellow soap on a stool, two chained basins and a barrel of water. McDermott 1998 [1968]: 58-69.

debate is triggered by Martin's reaction to the table manners of a passenger seated opposite, who having sucked his knife clean employs it to cut the butter. Pogram begins: "Well! The morbid hatred of you British to the Institutions of our country, is as-TONishin!";' to which Martin replies; "A man deliberately makes a hog of himself, and *that's* an Institution!".' This sarcastic and condemnatory retort simply draws forth Pogram's protestation: "We have no time to ac-quire forms, sir".' Once again Martin objects, arguing that it is not a question of 'acquiring anything', but rather that of not 'losing the natural politeness of a savage, and that instinctive good-breeding which admonishes one man not to offend and disgust another".' To Martin, the offending passenger is guilty of 'stubborn neglect' – that while he 'naturally knows better', he 'considers it a very fine and independent thing to be a brute in small matters?".'66

In their arguments both men presuppose an established correlation between man and nature. For Pogram his fellow passenger is 'a child of Natur [sic], and a child of Freedom,' synonymous with the broad, boundless American prairies (Perearers) and uncontaminated ('unspiled') by 'withering conventionalities'. In this context, 'withering conventionalities' is arguably a reference to the aging institutions and practices of the old world; institutions and practices which, it may likewise be inferred, are hollow (no more than 'forms'). Moreover, that it is an absence of time to acquire 'forms', is equally an implicit testament to the industry of American preoccupations and practices, that if they weren't purposely industrious they could readily adopt such conduct. For Martin, on the other hand, nature equips the individual with knowledge of appropriate behaviour amongst 'man': with instinctive propriety and good-breeding. Thus he interprets the passenger's behaviour as wilful 'neglect': as exhibition – that he purposefully chooses to act against natural, instinctive inclination to demonstrate openly 'his equality against all comers'. The individual, in his natural state, and the effect of civilisation on him, is thus conceived of differently in each case. Or rather, what Martin deems

⁶⁶ Dickens 1998 [1843-1844]: 462.

natural propriety, his interlocutor holds as superficial conventionalities that threaten 'the model' of Americanness.⁶⁷

But the focus and import of Martin's criticism is far more wide reaching and consequential, and offers an ironic inversion of Grund's 'profitable exchange of thought and sentiment', where the ideas and opinions of the 'lower class' find their way to the halls of congress. On the one hand, not only is Pogram a member of congress and guilty of bad manners, but, in his resenting all criticism made of such 'social offensives', whatever their origin, he is, in Martin's estimation, abetting those culpable of such acts. On the other hand, Martin argues that the neglect of little observances, of what are but matters of 'common, decent, natural, human politeness', are the root of a larger, more insidious cancer, and that disregarding small obligations leads 'naturally' to disregarding great ones. To put it another way, Martin attributes the larger shortcomings of a nation, the 'effect' of bad government, to the 'cause' of bad manners.⁶⁸

The precise position of Dickens in this exchange is difficult to gauge, though his disappointment and disenchantment with America, and particular American traits, is well documented, and perhaps in no small way responsible for his representation.⁶⁹ Even before plans for an American sojourn were realised, Dickens writes of being 'haunted by visions of America' – visions that may have assumed the shape and form of his firmly held radical ideas and Whig convictions.⁷⁰ (The recent publication *Barnaby Rudge* and anonymous items in the *Examiner* testifying to exactly just how radical in nature his sentiments were.)⁷¹ He had

⁶⁷ Dickens 1998 [1843-1844]: 460-462.

⁶⁸ Dickens 1998 [1843-1844]: 462.

⁶⁹ In his study *Innocent Abroad – Charles Dickens's American Engagements* (1990) Jerome Meckier observes that Dickens, the utopian idealist, travelling in search of the perfect democratic republic, returned disillusioned and feeling betrayed, not only by such men as Rousseau but by moral optimists like David Hume and Adam Smith. The 'chief culprit' amongst Rousseau's works, for example, was, opines Meckier, *The Social Contract* (1762) 'with its thesis that happiness belonged to man in the state of nature, that is, before the growth of civilisation corrupted his natural goodness and increased the inequality between men.' Meckier 1990: 244nb9. In a similar vein, Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) had argued that, 'when Nature formed man for society, she endowed him with the desire to please and instilled in him an original aversion to offend his brethren.' Meckier 1990: 11.

⁷⁰ He tells Forster that he was 'haunted by visions of America' Ackroyd 1991 [1990]: 353.

⁷¹ Ackroyd 1991 [1990]: 345-346. In his biography Ackroyd writes how Dickens's 'fierce "Radicalism" while writing *Barnaby Rudge* also played a part in his decision.' Adding, 'Would he not be visiting a country which

certainly given the possibility of seeing America a good deal of thought, had even entertained the prospect of its being the subject of future publication, ⁷² researching the subject by perusing the myriad of contemporary works: 'Marryat's, Fidler's, and Hall's, and other travels and descriptions of America.'73 Moreover, that Dickens had cause for entertaining sympathetic feelings towards America is visible, not only in encouraging correspondence from literary men such as Washington Irving, but equally from the popular positive reception of his work.⁷⁴ Indeed, the receipt of letters had him responding with enthusiasm: 'your expressions of affectionate remembrances and approval, sounding from the green forests on the banks of the Mississippi, sink deeper in my heart and gratify it more than all the honorary distinctions that all the courts in Europe could confer.⁷⁵

The reasons for Dickens's disappointment with what he witnessed are communicated in his private correspondence and American Notes, although there is a noticeable ambivalence in some of his remarks. Among these reasons is the issue of international copyright that exploded in the press, or the persistent and overwhelming attention demonstrated by the public: 'I can do nothing that I want to do, go nowhere where I want to go, and see nothing that I want to see. If I turn into the street, I am followed by a multitude. If I stay at home, the house becomes, full with callers, like a fair. His disillusionment is similarly apparent in a letter to Albany Fonblanque, where, having complimented Americans for their general kindness, generosity, hospitality and affectionateness, Dickens declares a 'yearning for English Customs and English manners, such as you cannot conceive.'77 Moreover, while he is unable in the present 'compass' to offer his reasons 'in what respects America differs from my

remained untainted by all the Tory tricks and unhampered by any aristocratic burdens? He would, in a sense, be visiting a country which was very much like himself 'Ackroyd 1991 [1990]: 353.

⁷² Ackroyd 1991 [1990]: 352-353.

⁷³ Reported by a visitor to Dickens's home prior to his visit to America, and quoted by Patricia Ingham, who also confirms how, after Dickens's death, when his library was sold, copies of works on America were found by Frances Trollope, Harriet Martineau, and Frederick Marryat. Ingham in Dickens 2000 [1842]: xi.

⁷⁴ Forster 1927: 1, 171.

⁷⁵ Slater 1979: 3-4.

⁷⁶ Forster 1927: 1, 197. The issue of slavery, something that Dickens found repugnant is arguably not such a factor in that Dickens was aware of the institution prior to travel.

⁷⁷ House 1974. The letter is dated 12 March but was most likely completed on 21 March.

preconceived opinion of it, [...] between you and me – privately and confidentially – I shall be truly glad to leave it.'⁷⁸ Opaqueness and ambivalence is similarly visible in a letter to John Forster, where he confesses how, despite everything to the contrary,

I don't like the country. I would not live here, on any consideration. It goes against the grain with me. It would with you. I think it impossible, utterly impossible, for any Englishman to live here, and be happy. I have a confidence that I must be right, because I have everything, God knows, to lead me to the opposite conclusion: and yet I cannot resist coming to this one. As to the causes, they are too many to enter upon here ... ⁷⁹

Equally, he writes, 'I still reserve my opinion of the national character – just whispering that I tremble for a Radical coming here, unless he is a Radical on principle, by reason and reflection, and from the sense of right. I fear that if he were anything else, he would return home a Tory.'⁸⁰ Finally, in a letter to W. C. Macready, Dickens confirms his unchanged secret opinion of America's follies and vices and grievous disappointments, writing of the American Nation as 'a body without a head; [...] the arms and legs [...] occupied in quarrelling with the trunk and each other, and exchanging bruises at random.'⁸¹

In the debate between Martin and Pogram, where many of these sentiments are echoed, there is a strategy of signification traceable, not only in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, but likewise in *American Notes* and Dickens's epistolary communiqués. Indeed, far from being a purely didactic exercise, the exchange is part of a larger intratextual network that includes

⁷⁸ House 1974: 3, 120.

⁷⁹ House 1974: 3, 135.

⁸⁰ Forster 1927: 1, 199.

House 1974: 3, 177. According to Meckier, the Dickens who returned to England was deeply committed to radical reform, more so than when he had left, yet 'his estimate of man's capacity for reform, of the extent to which individuals and institutions could be improved, had changed.' Indeed, Meckier continues, 'once Dickens saw flaws crudely similar to those in England quickly emerging in the American character, he was bound to decide that *all* social orders are extensions of men's characters and personalities, hence defective; they constitute a rein on the individual's fallen nature but are also an indication of it, possibly an exacerbation.' Bearing this in mind, the scene played-out between Martin and Pogram, in its relation to its author, holds much of value. Firstly, in light of Dickens's sentiments to American manners, his position is, Meckier argues, closer to the latter, for while Pogram brazenly dismisses 'forms', the idea that they are innate can no longer be up-held. Secondly, while America clearly lacks England's established institutions, it exhibits no shortage of vices. Thirdly, and 'latent' in Dickens's anti-American satire, 'is his [Dickens's] discovery that human nature's perennial shortcomings are obligatory flaws in any society's building materials: [that] [...] institutions are rapacious because selfishness [...] is necessarily part of the permanent foundation on which they are raised.' Meckier 1990: 3-13.

representations of cleanliness and hygiene, of manners in general, and those particular to eating; in notions of social homogeneity (or 'sameness'); and in the use of animalistic metaphors.

For example, Pogram, someone who embodies all three facets, is first observed 'sitting on a low camp-stool, with his legs on a high barrel of flour,' ruminating 'over his tobacco-plug like a cow'. His complexion is depicted as 'naturally muddy', and rendered all the more so 'by too strict an economy of soap and water.' His apparel is of a similar condition. Nor in fact is he alone in his general disorderliness or masticating habit, quite the contrary. Although Martin discerns a 'peculiar air of sagacity and wisdom' that differentiates Pogram from the other passengers, he is nevertheless very much of that homogeneous crowd, united in their having seemingly had 'a difference with his laundress, and [...] left off washing in [...] early youth.' 'Every gentleman,' adds Dickens, 'was [also] perfectly stopped up with tight plugging, and was dislocated in the greater part of his joints'. Similarly, the passenger seated opposite Martin and Pogram wears a beard 'composed of the overflowing' of tobacco – a sight so common as to barely attract the formers' attention.⁸²

Such representations of 'uncleanliness' are also evinced in *American Notes* where Dickens writes that 'American customs, with reference to the means of personal cleanliness and wholesome ablution, are extremely negligent and filthy.' Without doubt, the 'real' sources of this provocative literary portrait are Dickens's own canal- and steamboat experiences as he journeyed west to St. Louis and back east. On the canal boat he writes: 'the gentlemen thrust the broad-bladed knives and the two-pronged forks further down their throats than I ever saw the same weapons go before, except in the hands of a skilful juggler.' And records how, sleeping in cramped accommodations, the male passengers would expectorate in their dreams: '[a]ll night long, and every night, on this canal, there was a perfect storm and the tempest of spitting; and once my coat, being in the very centre of a hurricane sustained by five gentlemen [...] I was fain the next morning to lay it on the deck, and rub it down with fair water before it

⁸² Dickens 1998 [1843-1844]: 457.

was in a condition to be worn again.' He is equally as bleak in his representations of the boat's washing facilities, which he labels primitive: 'There was a tin ladle chained to the deck, with which every gentleman who thought it necessary to cleanse himself (some were superior to this weakness), fished the dirty water out of the canal, and poured it into a tin basin, secured in like manner. There was also a jack-towel. And hanging up before a little looking-glass in the bar, in the immediate vicinity of the bread and cheese and biscuits, were a public comb and hair-brush.'⁸³

On board the steamboat *Messenger* facilities prove 'a little better' than those 'primitive' accommodations on the canal boat, 'but not much'. ⁸⁴ That such was the case is corroborated by statements made in Dickens's correspondence, where he admits that the conditions on board the steamboat proved 'a little more civilized' than those of the canal boat, but that speaking generally, 'bad is the best'. ⁸⁵ As best as he can make out, 'the ladies, under most circumstances, are content with smearing their hands and faces in a very small quantity of water,' while the men, who fare no better, merely add to such a mode of ablution 'a hasty use of the common brush and comb.' ⁸⁶

Dickens was, of course, not the only traveller to draw attention to issues of personal hygiene and inadequate toilette facilities. Harriet Martineau, to whom Dickens refers in his private correspondence,⁸⁷ had some years earlier, observed how 'the accommodations for washing are limited in the extreme' and wondered, '[h]ow ladies of the cabin can expect to

⁸³ Dickens 2000 [1842]: 144-166. Dickens also confirms the cramped conditions of sleep, describing them in terms of 'three long tiers of hanging book-shelves, designed apparently for volumes of the small octavo size. Looking with greater attention at these contrivances (wondering to find such literary preparations in such a place), I described on each shelf a sort of microscopic sheet and blanket; then I began dimly to comprehend that the passengers were the library, and that they were to be arranged, edge-wise, on these shelves, till morning.' Dickens 2000 [1842]: 165.

⁸⁴ Equally, on a night steamer on the Potomac River, Dickens observers that 'The washing and dressing apparatus for the passengers generally, consist of two jack towels, three small wooden basins, a keg of water and a ladle to serve it out with, six square inches of looking-glass, two ditto ditto of yellow soap, a comb and brush for the head, and nothing for the teeth. Everybody uses the comb and brush, except myself. Everybody stares to see me using my own; and two or three gentlemen are strongly disposed to banter me on my prejudices, but don't.' Dickens 2000 [1842]: 146-147.

⁸⁵ The context of authorship has an effect on the lack of censorship, from the personal, private correspondence to the specific intent of published account.

⁸⁶ Dickens 2000 [1842]: 175-179.

⁸⁷ House 1974: 3, 179.

enjoy any cheerfulness during a voyage of four or five days, during which they wash merely their faces and hands.'⁸⁸ The subject resurfaces in the later work of Mrs. Houstoun, *Hesperos: or Travels in the West* (1850) in which she elaborates on the wont of comforts she was forced to endure. For example, she comments on the absence from her berth of either basin, jug or towels, or indeed any 'of the appliances or means by which the most commonplace toilet is effected.' Nor, she adds, is her appeal for assistance met with the slightest degree of alacrity or friendliness, but rather sarcasm and 'spitefulness'. Instead she is apprised of the boats' washing-room facilities where 'only *three* can go in at once'. Her curiosity however is piqued, and she determines to investigate where the majority of her fellow, female passengers carried out their 'scanty ablutions'.⁸⁹ 'Oh, horror of horrors!,' she writes, '[t]here stood the vaunted *three* basins, *there* the *one* towel, and, suspended against the wall, was *the* comb!'⁹⁰

In *Martin Chuzzlewit* the issue of manners and social etiquette, as met with on board the western steamboat, is contained in the passage that witnesses passengers gather for dinner. The scene begins with commotion as passengers struggle to enter the main cabin but remain trapped behind Pogram who, in his haste, neglects to close his umbrella and becomes pinned by the door frame. Meanwhile, those who have successfully found a seat are 'in deadly peril of choking themselves in their unnatural efforts to get rid of all the meat before all these others came.' Having finally found a space, Pogram's conformity with other passengers is again emphasised as Dickens describes his 'four minute' meal as an 'unusually protracted dinner'. The central image of this meal however, is the (above mentioned) passenger who sucks his knife before cutting at the butter, and whose beard is 'composed of the overflowings of'

⁸⁸ In her work *Society in America* Harriet Martineau writes: 'In steam-boats, the accommodations for washing are limited in the extreme; and in all but the first-rate hotels, the philosophy of personal cleanliness is certainly not understood. [...] On board steam-boats which have not separate state-rooms, there are no means of preserving sufficient cleanliness and health. How the ladies of the cabin can expect to enjoy any degree of vigour and cheerfulness during a voyage of four or five days, during which they wash merely their faces and hands, I cannot imagine. It is to be hoped that the majority will soon demand that there should be a range of washing-closets in all steamboats whose voyages are longer than twenty-four hours.' Martineau 1837: 180.

⁹⁰ Houstoun 1850: 6-8. Interestingly, she makes reference to Trollope, and testifies that her work, along with that of likeminded writers and the march of civilisation, have meant such conditions have become scarce on the better class of steamer.

tobacco. There is even a genuine visceralness about Dickens's use of the word 'juicyness'. There is also the visible proliferation of animalistic metaphors in the description of this repast, not only in relation to the offending passenger that 'deliberately makes a hog of himself', and 'might have sickened a scavenger', but similarly Pogram (already equated to a cow), who is likened to a raven. ⁹¹

In *American Notes*, when Dickens comes to remark on diet, dining and conversation, he observes how, though there were a great many small dishes, they all had very little in them, and of how those that ate several times a day 'usually suck their knifes and forks meditatively, until they have decided what to take next: [and only] then pull them out of their mouths; put them in the dish; help themselves; and fall to work again.' During these proceedings there also reigns a deathly, wake-like silence, passengers rapidly 'bolting' their victuals – 'no conversation, no laughter, no cheerfulness, no sociality, except spitting; and that is done in silent fellowship round the stove, when the meal is over.' And, as in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, Dickens describes this behaviour as 'animal observances', as so many fellow-animals rapidly emptying each 'his Yahoo trough'. Indeed, meals are but 'social sacraments stripped of everything but the mere greedy satisfaction of the natural cravings.' ⁹²

Infamously, Trollope had already made similar representations in *Domestic Manners*, where she cautions travellers wishing to 'receive agreeable impressions of American manners' against commencing on board a Mississippi steamboat:⁹³

[t]he total want of all the usual courtesies of the table, the voracious rapidity with which the viands were seized and devoured; the strange uncouth phrases and pronunciation; the loathsome spitting, from the contamination of which it was absolutely impossible to protect our dresses; the frightful manner of feeding with their knives, till the whole blade seemed to enter into the mouth; and the still more frightful manner of cleaning the teeth afterwards with a pocket-knife.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Dickens 1998 [1843-1844]: 461-462.

⁹² Dickens 2000 [1842]: 176-189.

⁹³ Trollope 1997 [1832]: 18.

⁹⁴ Trollope 1997 [1832]: 20.

As if to add insult to injury, Trollope confesses with all 'sincerity' that she 'would infinitely prefer sharing the apartment of a party of well conditioned pigs.⁹⁵

A similarly colourful representation of steamboat dining is given by Charles Joseph Latrobe. His account is interesting not so much for the details he offers, though more comprehensive then most, as for the tone and language in which it is given. The table itself, he begins, 'is spread with substantials, both in profusion and variety' and that 'considerable impatience' is generally observed by those seeking to locate a place. 66 'There is little or no conversation,' he adds, 'excepting of the monosyllabic and ejaculatory kind which is absolutely necessary,' and the process itself also requires but ten minutes to accomplish: 'the necessary act of eating is [...] stript [sic] of all the graces under which supercultivation contrives to shroud its sensuality, and is reduced to the plain homely realities of bestial feeding.' It is an act where no quarter is given, and pretensions to delicacy are of little worth: 'Woe to the poor gentleman of habitually slow and careful mastication-he who was taught to 'denticate, masticate, champ, chew and swallow!'.',97

When it comes to representing his fellow passengers Dickens's recorded experiences are typified by a remarkable absence in the diversity of character: 'The people are all alike, too.'98 For example, his first steamboat experience of American Notes is characterised by homogeneity, by a dominant impression of 'sameness'. He generalises how '[t]hey travel about on the same errands, say and do the same things in exactly the same manner, and follow in the same dull cheerless round. All down the long table, there is scarcely a man who is in anything different from his neighbour.' Dickens however never discloses what these 'same' errands / things are, or what this manner is, even when he later repeats this characterisation on his leaving Cincinnati,99

⁹⁵ Trollope 1997 [1832]: 18. Trollope attests that 'The gentlemen in the cabin [...] would certainly, neither from their language, manners, nor appearance, have received that designation in Europe.' She also writes that the accommodations for ladies were dismal enough, and though both gentleman's and ladies' cabin were carpeted, she exclaims, 'oh! that carpet! [...] it requires the pen of a Swift to do it justice.' Trollope 1997 [1832]: 18-20.

⁹⁶ McDermott 1998: 32.

⁹⁷ McDermott 1998: 32.

⁹⁸ Dickens 2000 [1842]: 176.

⁹⁹ Dickens 2000 [1842]: 176-177. Emphasis added.

[t]he arrangements [...] were like those of the Messenger, and the passengers were of the *same* order of people. We fed at the *same* times, on the *same* kind of viands, in the *same* dull manner, and with the *same* observances. The company appeared to be oppressed by the *same* tremendous concealments, and had as little capacity of enjoyment or light-heartedness. I never in my life did see such listless, heavy dulness [sic] as brooded over these meals: the very recollection of it weighs me down, and makes me, for the moment, wretched. Reading and writing on my knee, in our little cabin, I really dreaded the coming of the hour that summoned us to table; and was as glad to escape from it again, as if it had been a penance or a punishment.¹⁰⁰

This last confession marks an unequivocal testament of Dickens's experience of discomfiture and dejection, and brings to the surface what is otherwise plainly visible in his private correspondence. Here, the overriding expression of 'sameness' leaves little if no room for individuation of steamboat society, the absence of 'character' literally personified in the absence of 'characters', and the sense of heavy torpidity. 101 The repeated use of the word 'same' may even be in mockery of America's declaration of societal equality. In his private correspondence to John Forster, however, Dickens gives specificity, personality and character to his experience of being imposed upon, as well as of finding reprieve, if not comfort, in his stateroom. 102 The first and chief culprit of this unsolicited and unwanted attention is 'a persevering bore of a horrible New Englander' who pursues Dickens wherever he happens to be. For example, although occupied with writing, in a cabin where others are playing chess, some sleeping, some talking around the stove (all spitting), the man persists in talking incessantly in his ear, droning 'like a gigantic bee': 'He drones, and snuffles, and writes poems, and talks small philosophy and metaphysics, and never will be quiet, under any circumstances.' A second bore, and the New Englander's travelling companion, is both a doctor and phrenologist, and between the two, the level of annoyance rises to a proverbial cat and mouse chase as Dickens confesses to 'dodg[ing] them about the boat'. Indeed, he

¹⁰⁰ Dickens 2000 [1842]: 189 Emphasis added.

Two exceptions are the Choctaw chief Pitchlynn and the anecdotal tale of 'a little woman' and her 'little baby'. Dickens 2000 [1842]: 192-193.

¹⁰² The letters are dated 1, 2, 3 and 4 April, and written on board the steamboat to Cincinnati.

confesses how, whenever he went on deck, he would 'see them bearing down upon me-and fly.' Moreover, when the New Englander invites him one evening to "form a magnetic chain", Dickens excuses himself on the pretext of letter-writing. A third 'character', a 'weazen' faced general, and another 'bore', 'perhaps *the* most horrible bore in this country', 'is acutely gentlemanly and officer-like'. So sated has Dickens become in his annoyance that he declares to his correspondent that the true meaning of that word 'bore' cannot be fully appreciated until one has visited America.

In a revealing passage Dickens admits to seldom seeing any of the other passengers on board except for mealtimes. Indeed, apart from the occasional stroll on deck, Dickens appears to pass most of his time in the relative comfort of his stateroom. In that cramped space (it is both 'den' and 'crib'), a room rendered habitable through his imposition of the 'neatest order' and the introduction of two (smuggled in) chairs, he passes his time reading or 'writing on a book upon my knee.' In this desire for seclusion Dickens is equally aided by topography, for access to the room he and his wife occupy, is either through the ladies' cabin or via a small gallery in the stern of the boat that is rarely visited – not six times a day will another passenger come near it. Thus secluded, he and his wife enjoy the scenery and pleasant weather, passing their time reading, writing and talking. The obvious inference here is that Dickens finds the society of his fellow voyagers, whether it is their manners or their dull conversation (with one or two exceptions), disagreeable, if not objectionable.

Taken together, Dickens's represented personal experiences stand in dramatic contradistinction to the portrait of profitable exchange offered by Grund; not only in terms of the character of the assembled society, the mix of different classes, but in the effect of equalisation. Indeed, Dickens's representation of 'sameness' suggests a universal level of unculturedness in which no mutual beneficial exchange can occur for the simple reason that all

¹⁰³ House 1974: 3, 181.

are of one (and the same) class. On the contrary, as Martin's encounter with Pogram in *Martin Chuzzlewit* makes plain, if the western steamboat operates as a site for the equalization of societal conditions, it is more than likely that those standards would be lowered rather than raised up. Moreover, while more optimistic (or idealistic) authors such as Chevalier foresaw not only the positive aspects of steamboat travel, but the eventual achievement of a richer cultural state, Dickens's portrait sees the barbarity of the West as ultimately undermining the cultural East – after all, is not Pogram already a Member of Congress.

The western steamboat was, of course, divided along class lines – if only because one class could afford to travel as cabin passengers, while another had little alternative but to travel and find room on the deck below. But this division or separation was not the only kind visible on board the western steamboat, for, within the space of the main cabin, passengers themselves were divided into two groups: into women and men, the ladies' cabin and gentlemen's cabin or saloon. For the most part, male authors demonstrated but slight interest in this particular space, or the activities that occurred within (note, for instance, the extent to which Dickens's wife, Catherine Hogarth, is a part of his narrative). However, there were a number of female authors who not only experienced western steamboat travel during the antebellum period but similarly committed those experiences to print. As such, the next chapter refocuses and enlarges on these portraits of travel around the representation offered by two British authors: Frances Trollope and Harriet Martineau.

CHAPTER THREE THE SEPARATION OF THE SEXES

This Tour would comprehend but a small part of the great, 'Far West'; but it will furnish to the traveler a fair sample, and being part of it which is now made so easily accessible to the world, and the only part of it to which *ladies* can have access, I would recommend to all who have time and inclination to devote to the enjoyment of so splendid a Tour, to wait not, but make it while the subject is new, and capable of producing the greatest degree of pleasure.¹

A STEAMBOAT DIVIDED

At any stage in the structural evolution of the western steamboat female cabin passengers were allocated a suitably furnished and separate space of their own. When no uniform arrangement of cabin quarters existed, this space, the ladies' cabin, could be found in a number of locations; from inside the hull with the cargo and machinery to the stern of the 'main deck'. As builders began adding a second storey in the 1820s a more permanent position was found aft this new 'upper' or 'boiler deck', leaving the gentleman's cabin aft the machinery on the 'main deck' below. By the mid-thirties, and steamboat structural standardization, an evident, ideologically inscribed (class, race, gender) differentiation of space for all travelling passengers existed on western boats. In these arrangements, the main deck, with its machinery and freight, was the main province of deck passengers; the partitioned upper deck accommodated the 'wealthier' passenger into a long gentleman's cabin and smaller ladies' cabin aft (so positioned because it was furthest from the danger and unpleasant heat produced by the operation of the boilers); and finally the open 'hurricane deck', that, before the adoption (and expansion) of the Texas, served as a promenade for the wealthy during the day and a sleeping space for deck passengers

¹ George Catlin quoted in Smith 2007: 79.

² Hunter 1993 [1949]: 390-418. In this particular instance they are the ladies' cabin on board the steamboats *Vesuvius* (1814) and the *Washington* (1816) respectively. On the *Caledonia* (1824) for example, the ladies' cabin was placed below the 'gentleman's cabin', which itself occupied one-third of the main deck aft.

at night. Entry into or movement between these spaces was a matter of culturally sanctioned codes of propriety and regulation, not least that which governed communication between the gentleman's saloon and ladies' cabin.³

On the one hand, differentiation was realized through partitioning or demarcation. In the years before the general adoption of staterooms this division was constituted by a physical barrier, usually folding or sliding doors, which opened to unite both cabins into a single, long apartment. With the introduction of staterooms the majority of boats removed these partitions to create a permanent single saloon, indicating the line between the two spaces by having the gentleman's cabin remain uncarpeted. In her 1841 travel narrative, *A Summer Journey in the West*, Eliza R. Steele records the topography of the upper deck of the *Monsoon* as 'thrown into three apartments; the ladies cabin at the stern having state-rooms around it, opening upon the deck or into the cabin; from this folding doors lead into the dining-room surrounded with gentlemen's berths; beyond is the bar-room, from which you pass into an open space where, around two smoke pipes, the male passengers assemble to smoke and chat.' 5

On the other hand, differentiation of space was reflected in the steamboat's décor and furnishings; denoted by activity; and (re)enforced by regulations. For example, although both saloon and ladies' cabin were suitably furnished to entice the travelling public – on 'first class' boats this typically meant ornamental mirrors, paintings, draperies, chandeliers and mahogany furniture – some features were particular to each space. Thus, along with the tables necessary for dining, gentlemen were provided with a bar at the furthest end of the saloon, serving wine and whiskey. Women meanwhile, were offered additional furnishings such as sofas, rocking

³ For example, access to the upper deck was determined by nothing more than the traveller's ability or willingness to pay, unless she or he was a free women or man of colour.

⁴ Hunter 1993 [1949]: 393. There is however an inconsistency or rather ambiguity in Hunter's discussion for not three pages on he refers to the saloon as having, '[r]ich carpets, preferably Brussels.' Hunter 1993 [1949]: 396. ⁵ Steele 1975 [1841]: 208. In her description Steele also offers a brief contrast with the steamboats of the east, boats that have 'cabins and saloon [...] upon the same deck with the machinery, and dining rooms below, while above is a fine long promenade.' Steele 1975 [1841]: 208.

chairs and even, on occasion, a piano.⁶ The respective size of each space, the former being far greater than the latter, was, of course, the clearest indication of structural difference.

As regards day-to-day activity, travel narratives commonly associate the gentleman's saloon with drinking, smoking and card playing (typically gambling), while the ladies' cabin was characterized by the more leisurely pursuits of reading and letter writing – an impression of 'domesticity' augmented by the presence of chambermaids who washed and ironed and attended the traveller's needs. (When it came to personal ablutions, early boats afforded no more than simple, crude, rude facilities: washrooms containing a pair of tin basins on a bench, 'common jack or roller towels', a supply of river water, brush, comb, and every now and then, a communal toothbrush. By the 1850s however, washstands and bowls were being placed into individual staterooms within the ladies' cabin, and finally, throughout the whole saloon. Soon, some boats even witnessed the introduction of bathrooms or bathhouses and washrooms that had cold and hot water.)

With respect to movement between the 'private' space of the ladies' cabin and the more 'public' space of the saloon or promenade area, most boats apprised passengers of regulations by means of a publicly displayed list. Thus, alongside rules forbidding 'any gentleman to go to table without his coat, or any garb to disturb the company' or that any 'gentleman was to lie down in a berth with his boots on', there was one stating that 'none enter the ladies' saloon

⁶ In one of her descriptions Steele writes: 'The ladies' cabin is handsomely furnished with every convenience, and in some instances with a piano.' Steele 1975 [1841]: 208.

⁷ Houston 1850: 2: 20. Larger boats would also, occasionally, use this space to provide a variety of diversions, from lectures and sermons to musical entertainment, typically 'a pianist and fiddler or small orchestra'. Hunter 1993 [1949]: 410.

⁸ According to Thomas Buchanan this role was usually fulfilled on southern boats by women of colour. Buchanan 2004: 53-80. For example, Steele writes how one of her fellow passengers, 'a Kentucky woman, who has been living several years upon the river [...] so rejoiced to see a slave again, that soon she and Violette, our chambermaid, became quite intimate friends. She frequently borrowed her pipe to have a comfortable smoke out upon the guards, where, with Violette beside her, she would smoke and chat for hours.' Steele 1975 [1841]: 167.
⁹ Hunter 1993 [1949]: 398. According to Hunter, the introduction of washstands and bowls was visible on some boats in the early forties. 'At least one steamboat, built just before the Civil War, provided hot and cold running water in every stateroom. In this as in the provision of bathing facilities steamboats offered about the same service as the city hotels of the period. Closets of the back-yard variety, built into the wheelhouses or over the stern, were long the usual equipment on steamboats. By 1850 some new steamboats were being supplied with water closets.' Hunter 1993 [1949]: 398.

without permission from them.'10 Indeed, as many travel narratives confirm, entry into the ladies' cabin was forbidden to any gentlemen without an invitation from one of the women present, or, and even if, he were traveling with his wife. 11 Conversely, women would usually only enter the dining portion of the gentleman's cabin, the only portion which they might with propriety frequent, during those times allotted for meals, and to which they were customarily summoned by the steward. Such practices are announced by Frances Trollope as she embarks up the Mississippi River on board the Belvidere: 'This room is called the gentlemen's cabin, and their exclusive right to it is somewhat uncourteously insisted upon. The breakfast, dinner, and supper are laid in this apartment, and the lady passengers are permitted to take their meals there.' Additional evidence of such practice is communicated on the journey itself where she writes of being informed by the steward that it was her 'duty' to remain in the ladies' cabin "till such time as the bell should ring for meals." 13

That such practices were applied and insisted upon, indeed that the ladies' cabin, with its luxuries, amenities and comforts, was a part of western steamboat culture, was the result of contemporary American ideology regarding the 'place,' 'status' and 'role' of women in society. That ideology, according to Keith E. Melder, was commonly articulated as 'The Appropriate Sphere of Woman', or 'women's sphere'; an ideology founded on the belief of a 'natural order in society' in which an 'inequality of the sexes was ordained [... by] God.'14 Initially endemic to the urban middle-class woman of the East, the 'sphere' was both spatial (professional and public versus domestic and private) and cultural (qualities, responsibilities, virtues), driven by a 'response to drastic social, economic and political changes.' In general, interpretations would

¹⁰ Steele 1975 [1841]: 155-156.

¹¹ Steele makes reference to the boat's printed rules, printed 'upon a piece of pink satin, framed, which hung against the wall,' and one of which stated that 'no gentleman was to [...] enter the ladies' saloon without permission from them.' Steele 1975 [1841]: 155-156. ¹² Trollope 1997 [1832]: 17.

¹³ Trollope 1997 [1832]: 138.

¹⁴ As Mary Kelley argues, American woman was not only 'isolated from and generally denied participation in their country's public life,' but also 'nurtured as private, domestic beings, conditioned to live as private individuals and directed to accept women's domestic role [...] She was to stand in the background, out of the way [...] Her voice was to be soft, subdued, and soothing. In essence, hers was to remain an invisible presence.' Kelley 2002 [1984]: 111.

emphasize a woman's 'moral superiority', 'her role as guardian of the nation's virtue'; how her very exclusion from the 'acquisitive and materialistic' sphere of men made her more capable in 'forming the manners and regulating the customs of society.' ¹⁵

Nation of course was synonymous with home, which was where women's true 'power and influence' resided. A woman might, for example, become vocal in either the temperance, abolitionist or women's rights movement (or all), but her primary, culturally inscribed 'image' would remain that of a wife and mother. On the one hand, her role was that of comforter and pacifier, not only making sure her husband received 'the peace and quiet missing in the public world,' but 'Who, like a guardian angel, watches over his interests, warns him against dangers, comforts him under trial; and by ... pious, assiduous, and attractive deportment, constantly endeavors to render him more virtuous, more useful, more honourable, and more happy.' On the other hand, and regarded as women's 'crowning glory', was the (educational) role and responsibilities of motherhood; as the contemporary Hannah Mather Crocker imparted in 1818; 'It is woman's appropriate duty and particular privilege to ... implant in the juvenile breast the first seed of virtue, the love of God, and their country, with all the other virtues that shall prepare them to shine as statesmen, soldiers, philosophers and Christians.'

But if such ideas of 'women's nature' were indigenous to the urban East, the opening decades of the nineteenth-century saw its influence spread not merely to women of different classes and backgrounds, but 'all over the country' through women's magazines and improved transportation.¹⁹ Indeed, alongside continued fears over the transformative repercussions of industrialization authors emphasized the threat posed to such ideas by western migration; that

¹⁵ Melder 1977: 8. Melder quotes W. R. DeWitt's *Woman: Her Excellence and Usefulness* (1841). For example, women became vocal in the abolition and temperance movements. According to Julie Roy Jeffrey, the work of women such as Sarah Hale and Catherine Beecher, 'and numerous others 'developed and publicized a sexual analysis which claimed women had a significant cultural and social responsibilities.' Jeffrey 1979: 5.

¹⁶ See Melder 1977: 62-112.

¹⁷ Jeffrey 1979: 5. That latter quotation is Jeffrey is citing the words of 'one popular preacher'.

¹⁸ Quoted in Melder 1977: 9. Melder is here quoting Crocker's *Observations on the Real Rights of Women, With Their Appropriate Duties Agreeable to Scripture, Reason and Common Sense* (1818). Melder confirms, 'in bearing, nursing and rearing [...] her offspring she [woman] could most fully carry out the responsibilities of her appropriate sphere.' Melder 1977: 9.

¹⁹ Jeffery writes how the spread of ideas was facilitated by 'geographic mobility, aided by improved transportation.' Jeffery 1979: 9.

a change to the representation of frontier living resulted in 'a blurring of sexual boundaries'. 20 The uncertainty of what such a transplantation might entail is arguably reflected in the myriad diverse representations of a woman's role and responsibilities. For example, according to Julie Roy Jeffery, emigration literature of the 1840s and 1850s portrayed women as 'burdens' ('at best irrelevant and at worst in the way') or as becoming 'robust, hardy creatures' with 'tough, crucial duties': that a woman had not only to 'develop male characteristics of strength and resilience, and resourcefulness to survive the trip [... but] also rely on their female qualities to soothe and socialize men, and to ensure social stability on the way west.' 'Popular literature' on the other hand, tales of Daniel Boone, Davy Crockett, and other versions of 'the hunter story' provided conflicting portraits of what women might expect: portraying them as either 'hand-maidens in rearing a nation in the wilds of the West,' or continually under threat from 'sexual vitality and violence'.21

In contrast, 'women's literature' frequently reconstituted the women's sphere around the pioneer wife and mother, someone who was both domestic and heroic, who wielded both influence and power: a 'benevolent heroine' (with 'a delicate sense of propriety') for whom 'Danger, privations, and trials, [...] became a means of realizing the female sphere.' This new version however, while acknowledging the inevitable collapse in the conventional division of labour necessitated by frontier living equally insisted that gender boundaries were unaffected. As Jeffrey has shown, representation rendered unequivocal the need for women to retain their 'appropriate tasks' (and her beauty) if she was to exercise her 'just influence and power'; and reassured that the frontier would in fact provide, "the truest and noblest life," with well-bred and marriageable youths, snug homes, and happy children, and the likelihood of a prosperous future.'22

²⁰ Jeffrey 1979: 11.

²¹ Jeffrey 1979: 11-24. See also Sandra L. Myres's Westering Women and the Frontier Experience 1800-1915,

specifically, pp 12-36.

²² Jeffrey 1979: 23. Jeffrey draws especial attention to the works of Caroline Kirkland, which appeared in the 30s, 40s and 50s. Jeffrey writes: 'Women could expect, in time, to shape the lives and habits of their new companions. The "silent influence of example," she wrote, "is daily effecting much towards reformation in many particulars." Moreover, those who missed the comforts and niceties of civilized life could be "the first to attempt the refining process, the introduction of those important nothings on which so much depends." Finally, there was merit in

As a pivotal tool in opening up the West to settlement and establishing new arteries of communication – of people, goods, merchandise and ideology – the western steamboat played its part in the transplantation and spread of these ideas. More simply, because the steamboat had also to accommodate the different 'classes' of society and their constitutive practices and ideology, it needed to find suitable accommodation for women ('lady') passengers for what in all likelihood was a 'confined' trip of several days. Thus it needed to negotiate the division of public and private space as well as the social activities that defined it. For example, space had to be found for everyday activities such as dining and social intercourse, sleeping and personal ablutions, while all the time maintaining the separation of the differing, culturally sanctioned habits, pastimes and preoccupations of men and women. As regards the dominant ideology of 'women's sphere', such accommodation only became more pronounced as the frontier, and the western rivers in particular, became the site of an American 'Tour'.

For the travel writer keen to communicate their experiences and appraisal of American society, the western steamboat then, proved crucial not only in granting access to a frontier (as George Catlin observes) otherwise 'inaccessible' for the woman traveller but served in-and-of-itself as a site of cultural interest. On the one hand, with its long meandering path between the larger cities of, for example, New Orleans and Cincinnati or St. Louis, the steamboat afforded an opportunity, however restricted and however brief, to observe and interact with life on the frontier, as well as the disparate, but growing number of boom towns. On the other, because it was home to an amorphous microcosm of American society, the steamboat similarly enabled social intercourse with not just those moving, or more importantly living in the West, but also of America in general. In either case, the observable variants of 'women's sphere', though perhaps bearing but slight resemblance to the actuality of individual lives, precisely because they 'established the behavioural context for those who tried to reject them as much as for

being free "from restraints of pride and ceremony." Too often women ensnared in genteel conventions lost sight of their true sphere and obligations. The West was a challenge for which true women were well equipped.' Jeffrey 1979: 22.

those who attempted to realize them,' are invaluable in understanding the cultural context framing such observation.²³

But the existence of such an ideology may similarly be used as a frame of reference for reading travel accounts of American society, and in particular the narratives of women authors. Indeed, in contrast to the representations of western steamboat travel offered by men, accounts where the ladies' cabin is typically only rendered in terms of conditions and décor, this chapter seeks not only to reflect the experiences of the female traveller, but also to elaborate that space as a social environment with its own distinctive features, and as shaped by the activities and personalities of its temporarily domiciled passengers. Thus, and using specifically the recorded experiences of the British authors Frances Trollope and Harriet Martineau, it not only confers details of this physical space, but likewise the sentiments felt and associated with such a mode of travel; with each author's experience of society in the cabin, and the broader society of the boat. Moreover, it places these experiences within the larger context of the (early) nineteenth century female traveller and, as presented by either author, the position and role of women in America, or the American women.

FRANCES TROLLOPE AND DOMESTIC MANNERS

In her travel narrative *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832) Frances Trollope provides details of three separate western steamboat journeys: New Orleans to Memphis, (Nashoba); Memphis to Cincinnati; and finally, after a two year residence in Cincinnati, from Cincinnati to Wheeling.²⁴ In their printed form these three short voyages translate to less than two dozen written pages, serving up a mix of critical and anecdotal information: from the character and

²³ Jeffery 1979: 10. To what extent representation of the West matched individual experience, or whether the ideology of 'women's sphere' was (universally) accepted across America is unclear. If it signalled the 'standard' or 'norm', as Jeffrey argues, 'it often bore slight resemblance to the actuality of individual women's lives.' Yet, 'norms were important because they established the behavioural context for those who tried to reject them as much as for those who attempted to realize them.' Jeffery 1979: 10.

²⁴ The commune at which she intended to stay with Fanny Wright.

composition of onboard society – language, manners and appearance – to the wearing scenery of the Mississippi River. In many respects Trollope's representations reflect what became a pattern of cultural signification typical of early nineteenth-century accounts. In fact, the 'popularity' of her work makes it the plausible template for countless subsequent steamboat travel narratives (certainly a dominant cultural referent, whether it was simply to endorse or repudiate).²⁵

At the heart of Trollope's portrait is the issue of societal conduct and propriety, a subject about which her censure proves unequivocal: 'Let no one who wishes to receive agreeable impressions of American manners, commence their travels in a Mississippi steam boat; for myself, it is with all sincerity I declare, that I would infinitely prefer sharing the apartment of a party of well conditioned pigs to the being confined to its cabin.' Much of her abhorrence and aversion was aimed at the distasteful, 'voracious' table manners or incessant, 'remorseless spitting'; though she equally found time to criticise the language, manners and appearance of the so-called 'gentlemen', as well as that species of equality which witnessed the adoption of, mostly military, 'honours'. What is perhaps most interesting, however, are her comments regarding the separation of the sexes during her final voyage to Wheeling: that, 'The separation of the sexes, so often mentioned, is no where more remarkable than on board the steam-boats.' 28

Trollope began her work with modest aspirations, gathering material some six months after her arrival on Christmas Day at the mouth of the Mississippi (1827): 'I amuse myself by making notes, and hope some day to manufacture them into a volume. This is a remote corner of the world [...] and I think that if [Auguste] Hervieu could find time to furnish sketches of scenery, and groups, a very taking little volume might be produced.'²⁹ By 1830 this 'amusing'

²⁵ See previous chapter on Grund. Twain would of course make reference to Trollope's work in *Life on the Mississippi*.

²⁶ Trollope 1997 [1832]: 18.

²⁷ Trollope comments that these 'gentlemen' would not 'have received that designation in Europe' though she soon learns that 'their claim to it rested on more substantial ground, for we heard them nearly all addressed by the titles of general, colonel and major.' Trollope 1997 [1832]: 20.

²⁸ Trollope 1997 [1832]: 138.

²⁹ Trollope writing to her son Tom, quoted by Pamela Neville-Sington in Trollope 1997 [1832]: xix.

process had grown to become a source of comfort in her travels, so much so that each new portion of her journey afforded the opportunity to gather more information, from anecdotes and observations, to cures for maladies and descriptions of the American landscape.³⁰ Finally, and having returned to the comfort of her English home she secreted herself away in an effort to finish her work.³¹

The finished work, containing twenty-four illustrations, was published in two volumes on 19 March 1832: the first volume focusing principally on her stay in Cincinnati and the lives of its citizens; the second, more like a conventional travel book. Its reception proved largely polemical. In England, for example, it was regaled by the Tory press and (Tory) establishment, pleasing 'such eminent Tories as Wordsworth and Southey', receiving widespread publicity through Basil Hall's enthusiastic comments in the *Quarterly Review*, which praised its author as 'an English *lady* of sense and acuteness'. It equally brought Trollope fame in aristocratic society and herself into the centre of 'the literary and theatrical world of London', applauded by the likes of Lady Charlotte Lindsay and Lady Louisa Stuart.³² On the other hand, it was attacked by English liberals and radicals, the most vigorous of which was William Empson, whose article in the Whig *Edinburgh Review* (July 1832), not only questioned the strength of Trollope's political convictions (her 'activities and opinions in the 1820s were diametrically opposed to those expressed in her book on America'), but likewise criticised the limited scope of her study.³³ He argued, for example, that Cincinnati 'can just as much represent the United States as a new flourishing port in the Orkneys would represent Great Britain.³⁴

The American response to Trollope's work (a 'cheaper', pirated edition with fewer illustrations), had more in common with Whig than Tory press. For instance, the reviewer for

³⁰ Trollope 1997 [1832]: xix. In her introduction Neville-Sington points out that Trollope travelled in the company of a familial entourage that included, besides her son Henry and Fanny Wright, her two young daughters, Cecilia and Emily, aged eleven and nine, a manservant and a maid. The entourage also included a thirty-three-year-old French artist, Auguste Hervieu. Neville-Sington in Trollope 1997 [1832]: xiii.

³¹ Trollope was at this time residing at Harrow.

³² Mullen 1994: 120.

³³ Mullen 1994: 78.

³⁴ Quoted in Mullen 1994: 120. The article was entitled 'The Americans and Their Detractors' and appeared in the *Edinburgh Review* Vol. 55, Jul, 1832. Empson would become the editor of the *Edinburgh Review* in 1847.

the American Ouarterly Review (1832) wrote: 'Her mistakes are numerous; but rather, we are disposed to think, the fault of her education – which appears to have been French and flippant, and by no means calculated for a comprehensive survey.' Moreover, her complaints related primarily to 'evils of the tea-table and the toilet – subjects, we grant, of infinite importance among the young and budding of her sex.'35 Her critics similarly thought her 'unladylike' and 'vulgar', for she 'saw many things which no refined Englishwoman would have seen, or seeing would have understood - still less have written and published.'36 Despite, or indeed because of such criticism, her book proved popular. As one recent critic has observed; 'The commotion it created amongst the good citizens is truly inconceivable ... and the tug of war was hard, whether the "Domestic Manners", or the cholera, which burst upon them simultaneously, should be the more engrossing topic of conversation.'37

To appreciate the discourses affecting Trollope's work, a brief consideration of her original 1832 preface, and its relation to the 'unpublished preface from the rough draft', is revealing.³⁸ For example, the 1832 preface is composed in the third person and, at the shrewd recommendation of her publisher and fellow travel author Basil Hall, announces its political affiliation with a clear, sober directness: 'The chief object she has had in view is to encourage her countrymen to hold fast by a constitution that ensures all the blessings which flow from established habits and solid principles. If they forego these, they will incur the fearful risk of breaking up their repose by introducing the jarring tumult and universal degradation which invariably follow the wild scheme of placing all the power of the state in the hands of the populace.'39 Inserting these lines unmistakeably aligns Trollope with Tory politics, using the current market's fervent preoccupation with parliamentary reform (Reform Bill), perhaps as a means to sell her book. 40 In sharp distinction, the unpublished draft contains no such explicit

³⁵ Quoted in Mullen 1994: 121. Mullen provides no specific date of publication nor the name of the author.

³⁶ Neville-Sington in Trollope 1997 [1832]: xxxi.

³⁷ Mullen 1994: 123.

³⁸ A different preface appears in the fifth edition (1839), Trollope 1997 [1832]: 321, (Appendix B). Trollope 1997 [1832]: 319, (Appendix A). 39 Trollope 1997 [1832]: 7-8.

⁴⁰ Parliamentary Reform Bill of 1832.

political agenda, is written in the first person, and is especially deferential in its tone: 'I greatly doubt if my book contains much valuable instruction; nay, I should not be much surprised if it were called trifling.' Trollope equally, subtly lays claim to a 'space' for the woman traveller as author: 'How is a man whose thoughts are fixed on the philosophy of government to find time for such tiny observations as my notes are filled with? And yet the world is made up of atoms, and though I may dole them out one by one, they are still part and parcel of the great machine we are all so fond of examining.'⁴¹

The latter two statements are particularly useful to readings of early nineteenth-century female travel narratives. The first, in its deferential tone, echoes culturally ascribed qualities which portrayed women as passive, frivolous and emotional (men were active, thoughtful and serious), 42 and hints at what L. K. Worley terms the 'anxiety of authorship'. 43 On the one hand, because societal expectations were in keeping with male travel and any writing that resulted from that travel, any women who did likewise was effectively moving beyond 'the postulated 'female' sphere' of domestic life (the 'interior realm') and into culturally ascribed masculine territory and, professionally, a male-dominated discipline. Equally, because society presented and represented the woman traveller as in need of protection and observation while travelling, the lone female traveller was ultimately viewed with suspicion. On the other hand, as Worley observes, women who travelled 'may have been prevented from writing [...] or publishing [...] due to a feeling something akin to the "anxiety of authorship": [...] "an anxiety built from the complex and often barely conscious fears of that authority which seems to the female artist

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⁴¹ Trollope 1997 [1832] 319-320.

⁴² Jordanova also writes of the metaphorical extensions resultant of gendered body parts, of the polarities of active versus passive, muscles versus nerves, action verses experience, public versus private/domestic, subject versus object, self versus other, seeing versus seen, reason versus passion/ desire. Jordanova 1989: 59.

⁴³ Worldy 1986: 40. In the opening paragraph of her essay Worldy draws attention to the so called 'historically

⁴³ Worley 1986: 40. In the opening paragraph of her essay Worley draws attention to the so-called 'historically determined subject-object relationship, the double focus inherent in travel narratives;' that 'a travel narrative can be utilized to reveal the culturally determined subjectivity of the traveller as well as information about the land and people visited.' Worley then adds that an aspect of this complex subject-object relationship 'is related to the prevalent ideology which assigned to women the role of passive mirrors of their men and of the world. [That] [s]ince women were presumed to be the passive/receptive mirrors of the world, then these travellers should logically have been seen (and perhaps even saw themselves) as ideal observers of foreign lands. One may postulate that a different subjectivity is at work in women's travel narratives than in men's accounts.' Worley 1986: 39-40.

to be by definition inappropriate to her sex".' In this current context of nineteenth-century women's travel writing, it would, according to Worley, prove to be 'a double anxiety': the woman author uncomfortable, not only with her "male" role as traveller', that her activities 'were diametrically opposed to [...] the nineteenth-century feminine ideal', but also with her "male" role as author.'⁴⁴ Such anxieties, quintessentially tensions between expectations and actions, she suggests, would inevitably be reflected in the narrative itself.⁴⁵

In her second statement, albeit in a deferential manner, Trollope is arguing the cause for the work she has undertaken – that her observations, though perhaps not as significant as matters of government, nevertheless contribute to a more thorough understanding of a society and the fabric of everyday living. Such an assertion can be read in conjunction with one made in her notebook while writing: 'The study of manners, though greatly important, is not too profound for their [women's] capacity, and the minutiae of which it is composed, suits better the minute lynx-like optics of the female, than with the enlarged and elevated views of things taken by the male traveller.' Taken together these comments more than hint at the value of such travel accounts to both contemporaneous studies and modern historical sociology. That is, although not as explicit as Martineau was to be only a few years later, Trollope identifies the domestic space as a subject worthy of consideration and offers that field of investigation as one to which a woman is especially suited.

Applied to western steamboat travel such convictions entail the elaboration of a woman's experience of her journey, accommodation and activities on board, and where, in its restricted or 'closed off' nature, the ladies' cabin is analogous to the 'domestic sphere'. Indeed, while the narratives of women travellers included much of the information common to the travel narratives of their male counterparts – of scenery and society at dining – they also concern themselves more specifically with their experiences of the ladies' cabin and its, and

⁴⁴ Worley expands and qualifies, adding, 'for not only had she ventured out of the domestic circle into the wide world, but the very act of writing-especially a travel narrative with its strong autobiographical element-might reveal an unwomanly preoccupation with the self.' Worley 1986: 40.

⁴⁵ Worley 1986: 40-41.

⁴⁶ Quoted in Harper 2001: 108.

also their, relation to the society of the remainder of the boat. Thus, not only do these accounts provide details of cabin fixtures, features and activities, but more significantly, the travellers' personal, private experiences and emotions of everyday pleasantries and discomforts. They also elaborate these particularities in relation to the society of men, and sometimes to the rest of the steamboat passengers or crew and officers.

In short, Trollope's comments are an invitation to read her work as a consideration of the role and 'place' of women in society, in American society in particular (though her presentation is often made with direct reference or in implicit relation to women in British society), and specifically in their relation to men. These comparisons are generally made to the detriment of American society (even in considering access granted women in the House of Representatives, Trollope will favour the English system, contending how the presence of women has been found distracting to the governing men).⁴⁷ She also makes a differentiation between women living in the Eastern states and those residing on the frontier and larger frontier cities, as well as the cultural differences implicit in class stratification, the differences consequent of geographic local and class difference.⁴⁸ It is, of course, prudent to read these comments as shaped by Trollope's own personal conceptions of womanhood: the 'liberal' and intellectual environment of her up-bringing, her clergyman father, the Reverend William

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⁴⁷ In writing of the gallery reserved for women in the House of Representatives, and comparing it to the practice in England, Trollope argues that women are kept from the House of Commons with good reason, for 'their presence was found too attractive, and that so many members were tempted to neglect the business before the House [...] it became a matter of national importance to banish them.' Indeed, she goes on to speculate that the American legislature will find themselves drawn to passing the same law for the same reason. Trollope 1997 [1832]: 171.

In Land of Savagery Land of Promise Billington provides a number of useful statements pertinent to this difference and useful to clarification. Firstly he writes how 'Europeans were repeatedly reminded of the unbalanced ratio between men and women-five to one in the western states in the 1830s, twenty to one in the Far West a generation later-and just as repeatedly told of the veneration that ladies enjoyed as males competed for their company.' He adds that 'In the American West a woman's job was "to make a home and to make little Americans." The men did all the rest.' Moreover: 'This difference was reflected in the respect paid women in the United States, and particularly in the West. Aristocratic visitors could scarcely believe their eyes and ears as they saw females treated as equals, offered the choice seats on stagecoaches, ushered first into dining rooms, and listened to with courtesy and respect. This was madness. How else explain the man who gallantly offered a lady his seat on a stagecoach even though he would have to wait a week for the next [...] Just as ununderstandable was the frontier code that decreed that all women must be protected against danger, insult, and even crudities, particularly when travelling alone.' He provides the following example, 'A passenger on a Mississippi steamboat was chased from the table by the knife-wielding captain when he used an oath before a lady.' Billington 1981: 258-260.

Milton, who inspired a passion for Dante and Petrarch; and the 'At Homes' that witnessed eclectic crowds of 'political radicals' and 'literary and theatrical figures', ⁴⁹ and where she met the reformer, and future travelling companion, Frances Wright. ⁵⁰

THE SEPARATION OF THE SEXES AND THE WESTERN STEAMBOAT

The subject of womanhood, and the more specific topic of gendered societal separation, is one that Trollope confronts openly in explicit statements and that surfaces repeatedly as she writes of her personal experiences of women's daily lives. Some of her most critical observations are made during her two year residence in the booming frontier city of Cincinnati. At the time of her arrival (1828) the city was a 'prosperous port city' that boasted some 20,000 citizens: an 'industrial and commercial port' that shipped flour, whiskey and pork 'to the West Indies and South America' and manufactured everything from 'steam-engines to hats'. The city had also imported a variety of East coast cultural attractions, institutions, and habits, including 'music societies, theatres, a Mechanics Institute [...], a medical college and hospital, schools, churches, newspapers and circulating libraries.' ⁵¹ Despite this level of development, Trollope's assessment falls on the detrimental effect of frontier living: on how the lack of 'little elegancies and refinements' has a corresponding, 'levelling' effect on 'the minds and manners of the people'. ⁵²

The circumstance is only heightened through the public and private relation of the sexes. Perhaps her most well known statement is proffered when describing the 'violent sensation' excited on the occasion of Miss Wright's public lecture in Cincinnati, a sensation she ascribes to the fact that women in America are 'guarded by a seven-fold shield of habitual

⁴⁹ Mullen 1994: 78. 'Italian political exiles, actors, artists, writers.' Neville-Sington in Trollope 1997 [1832]: x.

⁵⁰ It was Fanny Wright who swayed Trollope, then suffering growing financial strife, to accompanying her to America at her planned commune.

⁵¹ Neville-Sington in Trollope 1997 [1832]: xiv.

⁵² Trollope 1997 [1832]: 38-39. Martineau also visits Cincinnati during her American sojourn, and devotes an entire chapter to her experiences in her travel account *Retrospect of Western Travel*.

insignificance.'53 The sentence itself is ripe with ironic meaning, drawing on values that see women as in need of protection: 'shield' calling up the iconographic image of chivalry, 'sevenfold' a sign of its repeated augmentation (folded). But in Trollope's evaluation, it is no longer men who shield women but the condition of her insignificance: that, while the dominant cultural values and structures have been successful in reducing women to insignificance, somuch-so it has become habitual, it is that insignificance which now 'protects' them. Other aligned generalisations of American society see Trollope observing how, with the exception of dancing, all the enjoyments of men in America 'are found in the absence of the women' – that men will dine, or play cards, or have musical meetings and suppers 'all in large parties, but all without women.' Indeed, all over America, with only a few exceptions, custom confines women, the wives and daughters of the opulent, to 'the sordid offices of household drudgery which they almost all perform in their families.' Such a situation, contends Trollope, 'precludes the possibility of their becoming elegant and enlightened companions.'54

The subject is also visible in daily conversations and at social events. For example, Trollope records how conversation at social gatherings in Cincinnati is 'paralyzed' for the simple reason that the women 'herd together' at one end of the room while the men stand at the other, and only the possible intrusion of music is capable of achieving 'a partial reunion'. 55 Other customs entail women absenting themselves from public places like the theatre, whose attendance is deemed by a considerable portion of resident women as being 'an offence

⁵³ Trollope 1997 [1832]: 56.

⁵⁴ Trollope 1997 [1832]: 118. Trollope is arguing, essentially, that if it wasn't for the strength of custom it is impossible to conceive that men would not have the ingenuity to spare their wives and daughters the drudgery of domestic duties. Trollope 1997 [1832]: 118. Interestingly, Trollope's turn of phrase 'elegant and enlightened companions' suggests complementarian rhetoric, that while women are both recognised and acknowledged as valued and indispensable sources of societal influence, the form of that influence doesn't deviate from culturally assigned qualities consequent of biology. However, such questioning of women's status nonetheless recalls and targets the evaluations of American society proffered by European social observes like Alexis de Tocqueville who asserted that America's 'singular prosperity and growing strength' stemmed from "the superiority of their women".' In his work Jerome Meckier will attribute the same act to Martineau. Meckier 1990: 76.

⁵⁵ Trollope writes: 'But, whatever may be the talents of the persons who meet together in society, the very shape, form, and arrangement of the meeting is sufficient to paralyze conversation. The women invariably herd together at one part of the room, and the men at the other [...] Sometimes a small attempt at music produces a partial reunion.' Trollope 1997 [1832]: 49.

against religion'. ⁵⁶ Similarly, when Trollope raises the idea of a 'pic-nic' [sic] party, the response from her young companion is far from encouraging: "I fear you will not succeed; we are not used to such sort of things here, and I know it is considered very indelicate for ladies and gentlemen to sit down together on the grass." ⁵⁷ When the subject resurfaces later on in the narrative, Trollope seizes the opportunity to confirm how the defining characteristics of the two sexes mixing during the day (for any great part of it), are those of 'restraint and ennui', and that such activities as picnics are not only 'contrary to their general habits', but forestalls the enjoyment of the gentlemen's favourite indulgences of smoking cigars and drinking spirits. ⁵⁸ Nor is she reticent in confirming that such behaviour is not particular to the West:

The arrangements for the supper were very singular, but eminently characteristic of the country. The gentlemen had a splendid entertainment spread for them in another room of the hotel, while the poor ladies had each a plate put into their hands, as they pensively promenaded the ball-room during their absence [...]

This arrangement was owing neither to economy nor want of a room large enough to accommodate the whole party, but purely because the gentlemen liked it better. This was the answer given to men, when my curiosity tempted me to ask why the ladies and gentlemen did not sup together. [...]

I am led to mention this feature of American manners very frequently, not only because it constantly recurs, but because I consider it as being in a great degree the cause of that universal deficiency in good manners and graceful demeanour, both in men and women, which is so remarkable.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Trollope 1997 [1832]: 106.

⁵⁶ Trollope 1997 [1832]: 59.

⁵⁸ Trollope 1997 [1832]: 233. The situation is typified in a carefully crafted passage that succinctly reveals the daily, incessant tedium of a wealthy Philadelphian women, whose every day is defined by regularity, routine and ordered repetition from the moment of dressing to the reception at tea of a young missionary and three members of the Dorcas Society. Trollope 1997 [1832]: 217-219.

⁵⁹ Trollope 1997 [1832]: 117. But Trollope is not simply concerned with the relationship that exists between men and women; she naturally finds a place in her narrative for the public interaction of women themselves, giving details of their public and private amusements, or rather the lack thereof. Much of Trollope's criticism surfaces during her protracted two year residence in Cincinnati where she has the opportunity of becoming more accustomed or 'integrated' with local society. However, for all her well-intentioned concerns for the limitations of female sociability, her observations on occasion seem more symptomatic of her own class prejudices, as when emphasising the preoccupation of women with domestic duties or such occupations to the disadvantage of 'parading in full dress for morning visits.' Trollope 1997 [1832]: 59. Similarly, any shared belief in the spirit of republicanism is tempered by sentiments of imposition and privacy – in the lack of privacy and sense of imposition she feels for having to keep her door open to the 'perpetual,' lengthy, 'vexatious interruptions' she had to endure, and whose frequency she found so distressing. She writes, 'No one dreams of fastening a door in Western America; I was told that it would be considered an affront by the whole neighbourhood.' Trollope 1997 [1832]: 79. Trollope also exposes further failings of social Cincinnati when she observes that the city affords little by way of public arenas for women to meet and socialise, that it lacks any public gardens or any 'lounging shops

In all her American experiences regarding the separation of the sexes however, it is when Trollope finally leaves Cincinnati on board the *Lady Franklin*, for the town of Wheeling, that she observes the extremity of this circumstance. It is possible to hazard some exposition as to the reason or cause of Trollope's statement.

Speaking generally, the situation is most likely the consequence of several mutually reenforcing factors. On the one hand, it is reasonable to assume that one factor was the lack of
alternative transportation in attempting journeys of any great distance in the west; that because
the stage-coach was impractical and railways (were) not yet constructed, the traveller was
unavoidably confined to the physical, spatial limits of the steamboat, potentially confined for a
number of days. On the other hand, and more central, was the broader cultural circumstances
existent in America with regards to the relation of the sexes; that the western steamboat was
merely a floating slice of America, and so subject to the same dominant patriarchal, socially
embedded conditions, structures and patterns, that must be accommodated. That these
structures / patterns were specifically American is clear in the specificity of Trollope's
criticism, particularly in those passages where she reflects on how social arrangements would
differ if such travel were possible in Europe. The practical object of boat builders, then, was to
reconcile societal attitudes with the confined, protracted experience of travel that lasted
several days, or to put it another way, how to accommodate attitudes with a form of travel
whose length exacerbates the differentiation of public and private space?

Trollope's first steamboat experience on the *Belvidere* (New Orleans to Memphis), attests to one early result of these necessities, evoking a contrast between the gentleman's cabin and 'the room destined for the use of the ladies'. On the one hand, the former is 'a very handsome apartment' with a 'double line of windows', each with 'a neat little cot [...] arranged in such a manner as to give its drapery the air of a window curtain.' On the other

of fashionable resort.' Indeed, she suspects that 'were it not for public worship and private tea-drinking,' the women of the city would end up becoming 'prefect recluses.' Trollope 1997 [1832]: 60.

hand, although the boat is large and handsome enough, the ladies' cabin is 'dismal' and, it would appear, stuffy and dim, 'its only windows were below the stern gallery'. Moreover, while both spaces are 'handsomely fitted up' and the latter 'well carpeted', Trollope's blunt exclamation, 'but oh! that carpet!', more than implies her disgust at its condition. Further details of this experience are offered on a subsequent trip (Cincinnati to Wheeling), where she alludes back in contrast, describing the conditions of her confinement in no uncertain terms: 'we were stowed away in a miserable little chamber close aft, under the cabin'. The words 'stowed', 'little' and 'chamber', not least combined with the earlier 'dismal', belie an obvious sense of oppressiveness.⁶⁰

Trollope was by no means alone in her characterisation of confinement, nor in having to suffer the effects of confined conditions, as evinced in the later accounts of Mrs Houstoun, *Hesperos* (1850), and E. Steele. In the former narrative (Houstoun was travelling south in the hostile month of November), the author at one point complains of racking headaches that she attributes to a combination of forces. For the most part, the chief source of her discomfiture were the 'pernicious' fumes generated by the stove, kept burning of necessity all day, and that filled the ladies' cabin because the dividing door to the gentleman's cabin could not remain open. The reason for this situation proves equally simple, and Houstoun is quick to denounce it, pointing to the inappropriateness of the gentlemen's activities and amusements, their gambling, smoking cigars, drinking and using violent language, morning, noon and night.⁶¹ In the latter narrative, Steele's seemingly agreeable sojourn is rendered unpleasant from the constant 'practice of ironing', as the chambermaids tend to the property of the boat, crew, and frequently the passengers as well. She writes: 'All the ironing [...] is done in the ladies' small sitting room, the steam and perfume of the wet clothes, charcoal furnace and of the ironer is extremely disagreeable. In one instance I knew this to be the case all night, the girls taking it

⁶⁰ Trollope 1997 [1832]: 18.

by turns; and I never traveled one day without this addition to the heat and other discomforts of a steamboat.'62

But the general impression of Trollope's first steamboat experience is by no means dominated by a sense of confinement, as she describes enjoying the warm and bright weather seated 'agreeably' on the gallery that runs round the cabins, or venturing off the boat to explore a field of sugar cane, the shore when the boat stops for wood and, briefly, a cotton plantation. Likewise, the narrative detail is concerned more with the general aspects of travel, providing descriptions of scenery, table manners and table talk. However, given close examination the sense of confinement is discernable in the compartmentalized structure of the boat and with regards to the narrative itself, where the content of her account reflects the substance of her experiences, of the confined or restricted perspective, view or scope of her experiences. For example, in her voyage from New Orleans, apart from some cursory description of the boat and the evocation of scenery, all first-hand experiential information is limited to moments when cultural attitudes permit interaction (dining permits awareness of manners), or are acquired by proxy from other sources (learning of the Kentuckian deck passengers via a man servant). Other information, information pertaining to the matter of 'honours' or to the horrific crocodile attack, 63 are received from other sources: the first an undisclosed English friend, the second, but a matter of hearsay. Yet while these details might be read as substituting for the lack of direct personal experience, the manner of their inclusion, their non-specificity, gives authority (however tall a tale the latter proves to be) to Trollope.

In Trollope's narrative, the full extent of this segregated condition is contained in her steamboat voyage to Wheeling, where she is both explicit and allusive in her criticism. On the one hand, she writes of a sheltered balcony located before the ladies' cabin adorned with comfortable chairs and sofas, which, despite the earliness of the season, attracted the majority

62 Steele 1975 [1841]: 211.

⁶³ Trollope recounts a story of how a husband and father awakes one morning to discover his family being devoured by an 'enormous crocodile.' Trollope 1997 [1832]: 22-23. [Alligators and not crocodiles inhabit the Mississippi].

of female passengers who 'passed their whole day there'. No indication is proffered as to whether the choice is purely voluntary or made in the absence of any alternative, the comment is simply a statement of fact. That this choice is more akin to seclusion is, however, intimated by Trollope's affirmation that 'we saw nothing' of the male passengers 'excepting at the short silent periods allotted for breakfast, dinner, and supper, at which we were *permitted* to enter *their* cabin, and place ourselves at *their* table.'

On the other hand, Trollope makes the explicit, categorical statement that 'The separation of the sexes [...] is no where more remarkable than on board the steam-boats.' To best illustrate her claim she anecdotally tells of a man's anxious separation from his 'invalid' wife as the couple travel to Wheeling. In her brief description the husband is shown perpetually stationed by the dividing door separating the gentleman's cabin from the ladies', registering something akin to anxiety in his behaviour as he dotes on her attentively, or, as far as 'regulations permitted', entering the cabin only when she was present and starting 'guiltily' before vanishing whenever another women entered. In the telling of this narrative, as is the case for most of her steamboat experiences, there exists ample evidence exposing the existence of territorial restrictions, of a steamboat mapped out in terms of space and barriers wherein the cultural / societal structures become physically embodied in wood.

However, it is more than simply a question of narrative content. What is also suggestive are the semiotic properties of the passage itself: its employment of words, tropes and motifs that speak of communication and concealment, of constraint and restriction, seen and unseen. For example, not only does Trollope identify the ladies cabin as a 'forbidden' space, one marked out by a 'forbidden threshold', 66 but re-enforces that depiction through words like 'duty', 'regulations', 'permitted', and 'permit'. More conventional is the resonance elicited from opposing words like, 'our' and 'their', which, though perhaps unavoidable,

⁶⁴ Trollope 1997[1832]: 137-138 Emphasis added.

65 Trollope 1997[1832]: 138.

⁶⁶ She writes of Mr and Mrs Hall and how neither entered the ladies' cabin at anytime in their journey, Mr Hall having secured a state-room for their passage.

nevertheless add weight to the sense of differentiation through their repeated use. (Comparable semiotic signifiers are present in Houstoun's narrative when she criticises, or expresses a hint of disapprobation at male behaviour. The first is the use of a parenthesized interrogation mark (?), which appears after the word gentleman's: 'gentlemen's (?)'. The second is the use made of italics when designating (thus accentuating the differentiation from womanhood), the so-called amusements of these gentlemen, i.e., writing; '*Their* amusements'.)⁶⁷ There is then, an essential ambivalence, with women being kept in, just as the men are kept out.

Something analogous is contained in Trollope's rumination when she expresses the situation in terms of 'the peculiar arrangements [...] thought necessary to the delicacy of the American ladies, or to the comfort of the American gentlemen.' There are several noteworthy points of interest here, not least the explicit reminder that these are American men and women, for, as elsewhere, Trollope augments her criticism by contrasting her observations with the more congenial social practices of Europe. Firstly, the sentence is characterised by ambiguity and ambivalence through the phrase 'thought necessary' and in the contrast between 'delicacy' and 'comfort'. The former (in conjunction with 'peculiar'), contains the sentiment that it is 'thought necessary' by American cultural attitudes / practices, an implicit criticism of those attitudes / practices and (combined with the ambivalence of delicacy / comfort), an implicit intimation at the particular patriarchal nature of American society. The latter, and what might cursorily be read as no more than evoking cultural stereotypes, less equivocally, implies a dual-edged tension. On the one hand, it argues for due or appropriate deference to be shown toward the female sex, thus freeing her from the various 'impleasantries' of men by granting her a space for her retirement. On the other hand, at the same time, it argues for her physical exclusion and invisibility to allow men the liberty, or certainly the privacy, for the comfortable indulgence of their own 'affairs', of their drinking and gambling.⁶⁸ To put it differently, the

67 Houstoun 1850: 20.

⁶⁸ Trollope 1997 [1832]: 138. Trollope will add that the 'strict exclusion' of women is attributable, more specifically, to the gentlemen's penchant for gambling and the constant drinking of spirits – that while they fail to flinch in expectorating in front of women, 'they generally prefer drinking and gaming in their absence.' Trollope 1997 [1832]: 139.

statement questions whether separation exists for the pleasure of men to the detriment of women; that implicit in the placing of women aloft, as if on a pedestal, is the desire for men to keep their own company and the liberty to indulge in their vices.

As if to further underline this 'remarkable' situation of separation Trollope offers a hypothetical comparison of a similar steamboat trip undertaken in Europe, were such a mode of travel possible there. In contrast, she opines, the voyage or 'excursion' (thereby stressing the tranquil nature of proceedings), would prove 'perfectly delightful'. She writes: 'parties would be perpetually formed to enjoy them. Even were all the parties strangers to each other, the knowledge that they were to eat, drink, and steam away together for a week or fortnight, would induce something like a social feeling in any other country.' Thus, rather than people seating themselves 'in two long silent melancholy rows' and consuming as much coffee and beef-steak as was possible in ten minutes, the gentlemen's cabin would provide space for 'a dance', while the ladies' cabin would be used for refreshments. And when darkness finally covered all, instead of all the passengers reluctantly creeping into their cots, with only the 'ceaseless churning of the engine' for company, the night would be a picture of 'song and music [...] borne along by the midnight breeze.' Trollope's musings here unmistakably and unapologetically reflect a particular level of societal status and class ideology, one that supports and promotes the cultural attitudes and practices of the upper classes visible in the British Isles, and whose deployment would effect a transformation that modified dining manners amongst Americans and encouraged a greater social harmony.⁶⁹ Such a cultural transformation is consolidated through her literary (re)presentation, which silences or finally changes the harsh sound of the engine into the rhapsodic melody of culture and nature.

But it is not simply a matter of social niceties like 'excursions' and 'dances'. Trollope attributes to these attitudes and patterns of sexual separation between American men and women many of America's social ills, especially the manners and behaviour of men, which she contends would be alleviated, if not remedied, were women to acquire the status and position

⁶⁹ Trollope 1997 [1832]: 139-140.

accorded to the women of Europe. ⁷⁰ Nor is she vague in her exposition, drawing a comparison with the women of Philadelphia and Europe very much to the detriment of the former; that although these women are 'among the handsomest', 'wealthiest', 'most distinguished of the land', they possess nothing like the comparative level of influence in society as those women of a similar station in Europe. More generally, she rhetorically observes how, if the women of America were ever to discover and seize the power they might possess, to unite common duties with the cultivation of their intellectual pursuits, then 'much improvement might be hoped for.' There would, for example, be witnessed not only a transformation in the character and social conduct of men, who would assuredly no longer enter public society where such women were present smelling of whiskey, or with lips blackened with tobacco, ⁷² but would likewise concede their preconception that the lot of women signalled the domestic duties of cooking, cleaning, darning and nursing. In short, for Trollope, the patent lack of social refinement and healthy moral status visible in much of American society is consequent upon the low esteem in which women are held.⁷³

HARRIET MARTINEAU AND HOW TO OBSERVE MORALS AND MANNERS

In contradistinction to Trollope's unpleasant voyage up the Mississippi, Harriet Martineau characterises her experience as one of pleasure: 'If there be excess of mental luxury in this life

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⁷⁰ Trollope writes: 'With the priests of America, the women hold that degree of influential importance which, in the countries of Europe, is allowed them throughout all orders and ranks of society, except, perhaps, the very lowest; and in return for this they seem to give their hearts and souls into their keeping.' Trollope 1997 [1832]: 60.

⁷¹ Trollope 1997 [1832]: 217.

⁷² Trollope is arguing not only that the absence of women from dinner parties results in the absence of refinement and that men would not act or behave as they do in the presence of women, but that women would effect a change in the manners of men. Trollope 1997 [1832]: 263.

⁷³ As Billington generalizes: 'women were recognized to be the advance agents of civilization, guaranteed by their mere presence to temper the roughness of an all-male society, at the same time elevating both the moral tone and real-estate prices.' Billington 1981: 259. This concern over the education of women equally surfaces in Trollope. As Neville-Sington observes: 'Girls may attend 'collegiate institutions' and even obtain 'academic degrees', but they invariably marry early, and 'It is after marriage, and when these young attempts upon all the sciences are forgotten, that the lamentable insignificance of the American women appears, and till this be remedied, I venture to prophesy that the tone of their drawing-rooms will not improve.' Neville-Sington in Trollope 1997 [1832]: xxiii. See Trollope 1997 [1832]: 221.

it is surely in a voyage up the Mississippi, in the bright and leafy month of May.'⁷⁴ Travelling within a few years of Trollope's published account, within a decade of her actual ascent, Martineau's journey, as it appears in *Retrospect of Western Travel* (1838), is a voyage of leisure and repose, of generally amenable society, during which she found time to read and write and gaze at the passing scenery. Unlike Trollope's more didactic account, Martineau's is filled with everyday incident and activity.

In contrast to Trollope, Martineau travelled as a professional working woman: as the organiser and director of her own travels. She was, 'by inheritance' a 'political radical and dedicated dissenter', a Unitarian⁷⁵ influenced by the utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham and James Mill, and with 'a lasting commitment to necessarianism'. She was also a woman who made 'no secret of her sympathy with the Whig party against the Jacksonian democrats' or her opposition to slavery (a position only strengthen by seeing the institution itself). At the time of her American voyage, Martineau had already acquired a modicum of professional repute and authority through the publication of her twenty-five volume work *Illustrations of Political Economy*, but there was arguably greater authority to be gained in the discourse of direct experience and of travel outside England. Not that she conceived of her American sojourn as anything other than a temporary reprieve from her exhaustive labours, but was, at the last minute persuaded by Lord Henley to combine pleasure and business and, 'to examine some points of social policy and morals, honourable to the Americans and worthy of our emulation, but generally overlooked by European travellers.

The literary fruit of her travels saw not only the publication of two extensive accounts, Society in America (1837) and Retrospect of Western Travel but also a methodological treatise

⁷⁴ Martineau 2005 [1838]: 25.

⁷⁵ It was Martineau's Unitarian connections that aided her in her travels, providing her with introductions.

⁷⁶ Oxford DNB 2004. 37: 13-19. Gayle Graham Yates characterises necessarianism as 'a doctrine of causation that held that everything was a consequence of what had proceeded it, that there is no free human action, no free will, but a necessary sequence of effects brought about unavoidably by what had gone before them.' Yates 1985: 10.

⁷⁷ Harper 2001: 100. ⁷⁸ Yates 1985: 40.

How to Observe Morals and Manners (1838), begun on the voyage out. Of the three, Society and Retrospect reflects that seemingly irreconcilable need to be, respectively, rigorous and authoritative, profitable and entertaining: the former work was informational or 'factual', a study in search of scientific status and authority; the latter 'sentimental', 'literary', anecdotal, designed more to ensure reputation and sales. How to Observe, on the other hand, is described by Lila Marz Harper as 'a call for travellers to exercise a more disciplined regimen in their travel writing', and render it an instrument of sociology and anthropology via a science of observation: 'an important tool, producing the data needed for a universal understanding of important moral issues.' Whatever their individual merits, collectively these works were responsible for a 'transformation' in the travel writing genre, evidence that travel writing was developing into 'a more focused investigative tool of what would become the social sciences, a changing area of natural history where the provinces of sociology, anthropology, and political science overlap.'

Crucial to this transformation was the newly incorporated concern for 'women's issues and [...] the domestic sphere': the domestic offered as an essential constituent of society. Indeed, what is visible in Trollope's unpublished preface, implicit in the work itself, becomes explicit in Martineau's contention that authoritativeness of any social group requires the close, intimate awareness of all its aspects, of the 'generally overlooked or dismissed' importance of the feminine experience. Like Trollope, this meant an intimacy with the domestic sphere and

While some distinction is here given to the different nature, form and content of these texts space does not permit a detailed enquiry or repeated differentiation when discussing their respective qualities. For a fuller discussion that ventures more into these differences see Lila Harper's chapter on Martineau. Harper 2001: 82-132.

⁸⁰ Harper 2001: 106.

⁸¹ Harper 2001: 83. In her characterisation, or more properly, categorization of Martineau's work, Harper will draw on the studies of Susan Hoecker-Drysdale and Michael Hill. Harper 2001: 101. (Equally, Hill provides a useful introduction in the Transaction Publishers edition of Martineau's *How to Observe Morals and Manners*.) Harper characterises the book as making 'a call for travelers to exercise a more disciplined regimen in the travel writings to serve the needs of developing sociology and anthropology. [...] Martineau proclaimed that travel writing was an important tool, producing the data needed for a universal understanding of important moral issues, especially "the domestic [which] are the primary interests among all human beings". This stance justified her travel and raised its status from entertainment to that of providing data and valid scientific generalizations. However, she was still careful to indicate that others, men presumably, would provide the speculation and shape the final conclusions after the travel observations are somehow absorbed.' Harper 2001: 106.

its associated details: household maintenance and the many daily occupations. Historically, such an approach could be 'justified with appeals to complementarist rhetoric', which posited man and woman as 'complementary opposites' and not physical and moral equals; women as having their own unique part to play, 'as mothers and nurturers'. It is also akin to Trollope's opinion of 'the minute lynx-like optics of the female', and that women possess a deeper awareness of family life and 'are more capable of sympathetic observation'. Similarly, because male attendance in such areas is effectively circumscribed or limited, and because women are more likely to engage openly with other women, the role of woman as sociologist would be vouchsafed. Martineau contends as much when she records how, as a female traveller, she had been privy to 'more of domestic life than could possibly have been exhibited to any gentleman travelling through the country.' Paradoxically, of course, such a position effectively confirms woman's correlation with the domestic sphere / space. That being said, employed as a textual strategy it rendered her work less threatening and more palatable to the 'intellectual establishment'. 82

What all this means with respect to western steamboat travel is that, as with Trollope, 'domestic concerns' can be read, not only as those aspects of social activity occurring within the ladies' cabin, but equally those commonly negated (or more likely dismissed as trivial, by male authors). Nor is it simply a question of the décor and furnishings of this 'private' physical space, and its shared, lived-experience, but the incidents and activities that shape the broader experience of the female passenger, and the very perspective of the voyage. For example, there is a notable absence in *Retrospect* of any technological or structural details, of the steamboat's overall appearance and layout, and any specific or even general reference made to society in

Harper 2001: 83-109. Amongst the advice that Martineau offers she cautions against the observer making peremptory decisions, hasty generalisation, and the dangers inherent in extrapolating from one to the universal. Martineau 2003: [1838]: 17-21. Also important was Martineau's self-consciousness as regards the objectivity of observation and evaluation, of the suspicion with which some travellers might be held, especially as a British traveller in America where reception had proved hostile to the accounts of Captain Basil Hall and Frances Trollope. So it is that she stresses the need for unreserved sympathy on the part of the traveller; for only openness will be met with openness, warmth with warmth, and that insufficient feeling will more than likely result in deception. Likewise, she cautions against opening oneself up to charges of belief in the existence of an unchanging universal order or 'Moral Sense,' of making peremptory decision and hasty generalisations, of evaluating any society and its culture on the false, conceited conviction in the superiority of one's own.

the main (gentleman's) saloon, other than the cursory. Even the society of dining, so much a staple of other narratives, remains for the most part unnoted. On the other hand, amongst its details are the private and seemingly 'domestic scenes' that take place in the ladies' cabin: of the 'indefatigable', screaming children, who keep 'up the squall nearly the twenty-four hours round'; of their pining after new toys at Vicksburg, their attempted placation by mother and servants, and of those toys being wrecked, as their colours are 'sucked into an abominable daub'. There are also details of conversations and activities pertaining to dress-making, of how two 'slave women' implore a friend of Martineau's, 'to cut out a gown for each of them like the one she wore', and even a scene that witnesses one woman, who 'After undressing, [...] had put on her life-preserver, and floundered on the floor to show how she should swim if the boat sunk. Her slaves had got under the table to laugh.'

In their use of textual strategy, Martineau's work demonstrates an awareness of its likely readership, of possible responses and criticism. 85 As Harper observes, Martineau not only avoids any explicit statement that she sought to initiate a new field of study or the

⁸³ The one especial exception is breakfast on the '8th morning' that describes a scene of impropriety concerning 'the scarcity of milk'. Martineau 2005 [1838.2]: 14.

⁸⁴ Martineau 2005 [1838.2]: 8-22. Martineau's narrative also includes a number of interesting representations of both scenery and (river) frontier life. The overall impression, despite the plantations and personal dwellings that appear during the course of the voyage, is one of isolation and solitariness. For example, of the several woodingplaces at which the boat stops is characterized by 'desolation and abominable dirt', a place 'grown over with the rankest grass and yellow weeds.' Indeed, Martineau continues, '[t]he ground was swampy all about, up to the wall of untouched forest which rendered this spot inaccessible except from the river. [...] The bell from the boat tinkled through the wilderness like a foreign sound.' A second dwelling however, proves more hospitable, where '[t]he children were decently dressed [...] [with] piles of wood [...] betokening that there were many stout arms in the household.' Other striking ('iconic' is perhaps a better word) images see; 'Many dusky gazing figures of men with the axe, and women with the pitcher, [that] would have tempted the pencil of an artist.' With respect to the relation of landscape, the individual and river activity, Martineau's representation is interestingly equivocal. For example, she writes how the flatboats, though seeming 'at the mercy of the floods [...] are so picturesque [...] and there is something so fanciful in the canopy of green boughs under which the floating voyagers repose during the heat of the day, that some of us proposed building a flatboat [...] and floating down to New Orleans at our leisure.' Thus, '[t]he vastness of the river [...] bear[s] upon our imagination', qualifies Martineau. However, not four pages on, the scenery becomes 'very wild', where the 'hundreds of miles of level woods, and turbid, rushing waters, and desert islands, are oppressive to the imagination. [...] We went on shore [...] [but] could penetrate only a little way [...] and we saw nothing.' Finally, Martineau, contrasts the solitariness of the river frontier with the crowds of passengers, indeed the boat itself, as an indicator of industry continuing unobserved elsewhere. She writes: 'What a spectacle must our boat, with its gay crowds, have appeared to such a solitary! [a lone female canoeist] what a revelation that there was a busy world still stirring somewhere; a fact which, I think, I should soon discredit if I lived in the depths of this wilderness, for life would become tolerable there only by the spirit growing into harmony with the scene, wild and solemn as the objects around it.' Martineau 2005 [1838.2]: 8-23. For a fuller discussion see Harper 2001: 111.

preparation she herself had undertaken for field work, ⁸⁶ but insured her argument proceeded implicitly and through unemotional rhetoric in order to avoid making the authorial voice 'a dominating presence'. Too much of either would jeopardize her credibility and authority or any scientific acknowledgement she sought. This 'dignified and professional' authorial voice also downplayed any sense of her personal bravery, silenced any hint of an adventurous stance, and emphasized the positive aspects or simply omitted what might be perceived as dangerous altogether. ⁸⁷ Martineau likewise avoids the self-denigration discernable in similar female travel narratives and sidesteps charges of traveling with publication in mind by not stressing the extent of her preparatory reading and research. ⁸⁸

Martineau's concerns are plainly borne out by the reception of her first work *Society*, which, while well received by more liberal readers, drew attacks from Tory critics, and attracted such appellations as 'maiden malcontent'.⁸⁹ Among such criticism is an anonymous review that appeared in *The Times* on 30 May 1837 which characterised the book as being 'very absurd' and 'somewhat dull' and censured its author on the grounds of accuracy and originality:

She explains how everything occurred, and announces how everything must happen. With no learning, and, as we suspect, with very limited reading—with no experience of human nature derived either from books or men, armed only with absurd axioms of an arbitrary scheme of verbiage [...] she hurries over vast regions [...] analyzing, resolving, defining, dividing, subdividing, and mapping out "the morals" of America, [...] not as they appear to her or to any other chance speculator, but as they ought to figure according to the principles which she

⁸⁶ Harper explains, 'be it in terms of past publications, personal questions or mandates from others.' Harper 2001: 101. Harper qualifies that it was commonly the case that travellers introduced their institutional affiliations, 'and explained the specific reason for [...] [their] travel in order to substantiate and legitimize [...] [their] narrative authority.' Harper 2001: 101

⁸⁷ For example, the threat of cholera is dealt with in different ways. On the one hand, Martineau makes no mention of the epidemic that raged through New York in 1834. On the other, while traveling up the Mississippi River, where the threat was constant (a passenger dies during her first night onboard and is buried the following morning), it is made to seem unexceptional.

⁸⁸ Harper 2001: 101-103.

⁸⁹ Quoted in Harper 2001: 116. The effect a work's possible reception might have on its structure, on both its from and content, and especially with regards to nineteenth-century female authorship, is touched upon by Neville-Sington in her introduction to the Penguin edition of Trollope's *Domestic Manners*, and which work she characterizes as a very carefully constructed text in terms of the self-censorship that is self-imposed. Neville-Sington in Trollope 1997 [1832]: xxxi.

imbibed before her visit, and the crude meditation of which probably amused her outward voyage. 90

Yet as Harper observes, response to Martineau's work also reveals a preference for the less abstract aspects of her work: it was *Retrospect* that proved the most popular of her travel books on America. But while the book appears formally identical to the myriad of published accounts, it nonetheless intimates a number of textual strategies. Firstly, it employs a dignified narrative voice structured to give the impression of control and authority, which depicts its author as sympathetic, independent, and a 'levelheaded intelligent individual'. Secondly, it portrays its protagonist in a manner to rival the dominant trend that depicts women travellers as timid, resistant to 'change or hardship', and offers her not only as having a genuine interest for what she sees but as having 'an open mind to new experiences'. It is, in Martineau's own words, a work designed 'to communicate more of the personal narrative, and [...] the lighter characteristics of men, and incidents of travel. So it is that she grants narrative form to her experiences of western steamboat travel, chronicling (dramatically) her trip from New Orleans to Smithland (and eventually Cincinnati), incorporating subjects like class, religion and race into a form rooted in observations of the everyday.

This sense of authority and control, of openness and independence, can be contrasted by criticisms regarding the situation and status of American women raised in *Society*. ⁹⁴ For example, like Trollope, Martineau address the so-called chivalric treatment of women which, she argues, is used as an excuse for the marginalisation of a woman's intellect, and the denial of any occupation save that of marriage and motherhood. Not only are women indulged at the expense of their morals and their health, and ultimately justice, and all 'on no better plea than the right of the strongest,' but that precisely because a woman is seen to have no need for an enlarged education, because her culturally / societally ascribed role makes no such demands

⁹⁰ The Times May 30, 1837. Also quoted in Harper 2001: 117.

⁹¹ Harper 2001: 118-119.

⁹² See the preface to *Retrospect*. Martineau 2005 [1838].

⁹³ There are however, other, more didactic passages, like the succeeding chapter on the Missouri compromise.

⁹⁴ Martineau 1837: 1, 156-184.

on her education, that 'education is not given'. ⁹⁵ Instead, women are taught only what serves 'to fill up time, to occupy attention harmlessly, to improve conversation, and to make women something like companions to their husbands, and able to teach their children somewhat.' As such, all marriages are far from being a partnership and are therefore subject 'to the troubles which arise from the inequality of the parties in mind and in occupation.' Indeed, it is fair to say that the stress put on marriage in Martineau's exposition betokens its pre-dominance in America's cultural values for women.

However, Martineau implies the same is true of England, were women 'are driven back upon marriage as the only appointed object in life: and upon the conviction that the sum and substance of female education [...] in England, is training women to consider marriage as the sole object in life, and to pretend that they do not think so.' That having been said, her studies also reveal how marriage, not only assumes a different aspect in other parts of America, but is itself threatened by migration to the west. For example, in *Society*, Martineau points out how the disproportion of the population in the west and south has resulted in early marriages and 'every woman [...] married before she well knows how serious a matter human life is.'96 In Retrospect, meanwhile, she tells of a conversation with a certain Dr. Drake who speaks of the pressures faced by newly arrived emigrants on the western frontier. 97 She records: 'He told me that, unless the head of the emigrant family be timely and judiciously warned, the peace of the household is broken up by the pining of the wife. The husband,' she continues, 'soon finds interests in his new abode; he becomes a citizen, a man of business, a man of consequence, with brightening prospects; while the poor wife, surrounded by difficulties or vexed with hardships at home, provided with no compensations for what she has left behind, pines away, and wonders that her husband can be so happy when she is so miserable.'98

⁹⁵ As an example, Martineau refers to the fact that philosophy may be pursued 'fancifully' and even then under pain of ridicule, while science is pursued 'only as a pastime, and under a similar penalty'. Martineau 1837: 157-158

⁹⁶ Martineau 1837: 157-163.

⁹⁷ In this case Cincinnati.

⁹⁸ Martineau 2005 [1838]: 2, 39.

Ultimately, in her estimation, marriage in America has achieved a level of treatment that falls short, not only of its own proclaimed democratic principles, but even of some parts of the Old World. She offers the following assessment:

While woman's intellect is confined, her morals crushed, her health ruined, her weaknesses encouraged, and her strength punished, she is told that her lot is cast in the paradise of women: and there is no country in the world where there is so much boasting of the "chivalrous" treatment she enjoys. That is to say, -she has the best place in stage-coaches: when there are not chairs enough for everybody, the gentlemen stand: she hears oratorical flourishes on public occasions about wives and home, and apostrophes to woman: her husband's hair stands on end at the idea of her working, and he toils to indulge her with money: she has liberty to get her brain turned by religious excitements, that her attention may be diverted from morals, politics, and philosophy; and, especially, her morals guarded by the strictest observance of propriety in her presence. In short, indulgence is given her as a substitute for justice.⁹⁹

Martineau regards this prevailing chivalric attitude, not only as being 'greater than is rational', but also beneficial to neither party, a custom undeniably injurious to women. When travelling, for example, women 'present all the characteristics of spoiled children', will from time to time scream and tremble in anxiety of danger, and worse, will 'accept the best of everything at the sacrifice to others' with a cool selfishness. She observes: 'They are like spoiled children when the gentlemen are not present to be sacrificed to them; —in the inn parlour, while waiting for meals or the stage; and in the cabin of a steam-boat.' She adds:

I never saw any manner so repulsive as that of many American ladies on board steam-boats. They look as if they supposed you mean to injure them, till you show to the contrary. The suspicious side-glance, or the full stare; the cold, immovable observation; the bristling self-defence the moment you come near; the cool pushing to get the best places,-everything said and done without the least trace of trust or cheerfulness,-these are the disagreeable consequences of the ladies being petted and humoured as they are. ¹⁰¹

Such are the statements and evaluations offered by *Society*, and their explicitness fits unobtrusively with criticism of similar ilk. The representation of western steamboat travel in

⁹⁹ Martineau 1837: 157-163.

¹⁰⁰ Martineau 1837: 148.

¹⁰¹ Martineau 1837: 148.

Retrospect however, is less forthright, the overall impression is that of a pleasurable nine day journey passed in the company of passengers who prove 'amiable', 'mindful', 'a privilege to meet anywhere'. 102 That having been said, the twenty or so page description of Martineau's voyage up the Mississippi, subtly re-enforces a number of the author's pronouncements of the position and role of women in American society, in which the steamboat mimics (more than most narratives), the domestic sphere and where the women present are shown to be engaged in the duties of wife or motherhood. Within this context she seemingly adopts two roles. The first is the role of the observer, where she merely seems to report the activities and behaviour of her fellow female passengers, both in the private space of the ladies' cabin and in the larger public arena of the main saloon, or up on the hurricane deck. The second, and indirectly, that of a mobile and independent protagonist free to roam, socialize and experience the rest of the boat; a role that allows her to accentuate her observations, and so the nature of such activities and behaviour, through placing them in relation or contrast to her own. Moreover, this latter adopted role can be considered in contradistinction to the representations of Trollope, and the general sense of her confinement.

THE OBLIGING FEMALE COMPANION

With respect to the public activities and behaviour of the married couples Martineau observes during her voyage, two couples in particular standout. First, there is an 'amenable elderly' couple from New York, a Mr. and Mrs. B., who show 'themselves not the less mindful of the people from taking great care of each other.'103 Two incidents in particular demonstrate the dynamics of their relationship. The first centres on Mr. B. and his desire, despite the threat of cholera, the heat, and the wishes of the captain, to see him and his wife attempt to 'mount the bluff' at Memphis, where the boat has paused to bring on supplies. In this scenario, Mrs. B. is

¹⁰² Martineau 2005 [1838]: 2, 7. ¹⁰³ Martineau 2005 [1838]: 2, 7.

observed by the passengers to 'yield' to her husband's request and so 'dragged [...] about one third of the way up' with the assistance of her husband. However, having got thus far, Mrs. B. gets 'stuck', leaving 'her husband holding her up by one arm, and utterly at a loss what to do next.' They are finally relieved through the assistance of a stout boatman. Martineau neatly concludes the scene with: 'Heated and flurried as she was, she was perfectly contented with having tried to *oblige* her husband. This was her object, and she gained it.' 104

The complement to this scene appears a few days later, when Mrs. B. communicates her wish to see the merging of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers, informing her husband it is 'his turn to gratify her, and must come for her in good time to see the spectacle.' The reason for requiring an escort is presumably because in all propriety she can not venture out of her stateroom at that hour unattended. Her plans however are thwarted for at the allotted hour her husband simply puts 'his head into his wife's room to tell her that the cabin floor was so completely covered with sleepers that she could not possibly make her way to the deck, and [...] shut[s] the door before she could open her lips to reply.' Martineau quotes directly the woman's 'lament' of displeasure: "It is a bad thing on some accounts to be married. If I had been a single woman, I could have managed it all for myself, I know." 105

The second couple, and members of her 'party on board', are the E.s, and Martineau uses their relationship to set out the dominant, patriarchal codes pertaining to the relation of the sexes, emphasising the embedded chivalric attitude of men toward women. ¹⁰⁶ Mr. E. is assigned this role from the beginning, declaring how he always remains awake through the night that he might secure a boat on the 'first alarm' and conduct all his charges to safety: 'we were particularly under his charge, his first thought in a time of danger would be of us.' But there is a intimation of sarcasm in Martineau's presentation: 'He had a life-preserver, and was

¹⁰⁴ Martineau 2005 [1838]: 2, 21. Emphasis added.

¹⁰⁵ Martineau 2005 [1838]: 2, 24-25.

¹⁰⁶ Gillian Thomas argues how, in her evaluation of the condition of women in America, Martineau 'is acerbic about the social "chivalry" extended to women as a fraudulent deception and attacks the fallacy that the role of men is to "protect" women. She points out that male "protection" is useless against the real trials that any individual woman must face: "He can neither secure any woman from pain and grief, nor rescue her from the strife of emotions, nor prevent the film of life from cracking under her feet with every step she treads, nor hide from the abyss which is beneath, nor save her from sinking into it at last alone".' Thomas 1985: 42.

an excellent swimmer, so that he had little doubt of being able to save us in any case. He only asked us to come the instant we were called, to do as we were bid, and to be quiet.' That such is the prevailing attitude is underlined when she later relates his recounted tales of his heroic exertions on board steamboats. In the first story, as the boat begins to sink, Martineau reports how 'Mr. E. roused his lady from her sleep, made her thrust her feet into his boots, threw his cloak over her, and carried her up to the deck, not doubting that [...] she would be the first to be accommodated in the boat.' On finding the boat in the possession of some gamblers unwilling to return to assist, Mr. E. shouts to an old gentleman on their boat 'to shoot the wretches if they would not come.' The gentleman holds his unloaded pistol to the head of the steersman and the boat returns to retrieve 'not only Mrs. E., her party, and their luggage, but everybody else.' Throughout this misadventure, Mrs. E. is said to have remained 'perfectly quiet and obedient to the directions [of her husband] the whole time.'

The second incident witnesses the vessel the E.s happen to be on pierced by a snag causing the water to rush 'in by hogsheads'. In this instant, the ever calm Mr. E. runs to the spot, where he learns the news to be true and sets to work: 'Mr. E. handed the men a pole, and bade them thrust their bedding into the breach, which they did with much cleverness, till the carpenter was ready with a better plug.' While the men work, news of the boat's sinking has however been overheard, and met with 'uproar above and below': 'the screams of the ladies were dreadful'. In either case it is unclear which words belong to Mr. E. and which to Martineau, but both portray the figure of the woman as submissive to the authority of the male and conforming to cultural stereotypes as either passive or 'hysterical' and in need of protection. Martineau however, reserves a touch of irony in her presentation of Mr. E., recording how, when having asked him to wake her in the early hours that she too might witness the merging of the two great rivers, Mr. E. falls asleep.

¹⁰⁷ Martineau 2005 [1838]: 2, 6.

¹⁰⁸ Martineau 2005 [1838]: 2, 11-12.

In relation to these specific characterisations Martineau posits not only the actions and behaviour of the other female travellers, but more pertinently, her own activities on board. As in Trollope's account, the daily activities of most of the women is characterised by separation, the women content to pass their mornings 'in their own cabin, working collars, netting purses, or doing nothing.' In contrast to Trollope's complaint of tedious and melancholy nights however, the women on the Henry Clay amuse 'themselves all evening dancing or talking in the other cabin. 109 For her part, Martineau describes the pleasure which she derives from both the simple pleasures of observing the passing scenery and the grandeur of the river, and from the preoccupation with her own private activities. For example, she confesses to spending time alone on the gallery outside her window, occupied with either a book, work or writing, a privacy ensured with the help of a little deception: 'I apparently went to my stateroom'. It is a privacy further aided by the fortuitous conjunction of the location of her stateroom and the laundress's drying counterpane and sheets that not only offset the oppressive heat, but also ensure that nobody comes to that gallery. Indeed, even when her view is obstructed by these sheets the inconvenience proves so minor it cannot 'counterbalance [...] the privilege of retirement.' Thus concealed, Martineau passed 'some of the pleasantest mornings I have ever known.'110

But the pleasure of this privacy is further underlined in relation to the activities of the afternoon. At this time some of the passengers become more sociable and seat themselves in the gallery on the other side of the boat, but where the general impression is one of lethargy and of a sociability broached from a mutual sense of 'duty'. Even the topics of conversation themselves belie a sense of listlessness, moving between pleasantries and trivialities, between talk 'of the children' or perhaps 'the dullness of the river', or simply complaints about the heat. 111 Alongside this desire for privacy, however, and in notable contrast to the activities of the other women, Martineau herself is steered by a sense of her own independence, by the

<sup>Martineau 2005 [1838]: 2, 11.
Martineau 2005 [1838]: 2, 10.
Martineau 2005 [1838]: 2, 11.
Martineau 2005 [1838]: 2, 11.</sup>

pursuit of her own investigations and interests, sentiments that are reflected in the formal representation of the narrative itself. So it is that the narrative follows the ease of her movement around the boat, shifting from the ladies' cabin to her stateroom, from the social hall to the promenade on the gallery or hurricane deck. Like Trollope she even steps off of the boat itself, visiting Baton Rouge and a woodcutter's dwelling, the town of Natchez, and some three or four streets of Vicksburg. Nor is it simply a matter of movement, but equally of social intercourse and enthusiasm, of her liberty to choose, as well as her political, philosophical and religious erudition.

For example, Martineau differentiates herself from the remainder of the female travellers through the pleasure she gets from observing the scenery, 'surprised [...] to see that very few of the ladies looked out of the boat unless their attention was particularly called.' Similarly, she communicates how, during an evening of thunder and lightning, when she is enlisted by Mr. E. and two other gentleman for a game of cards, their activities are rebuked by a certain Mrs. H., who charges them with blasphemy on account of the storm. But her independence and conviction, like her erudition and desire for social engagement, is rendered more appreciably on the fifth day of her voyage, a Sunday, when she is engaged in conversation on the hurricane deck by a young man educated at West Point, and in her censure of a clergyman who, in defiance of the captain's wishes, and of many others on board, conducts a Sabbath service. In the former scene, Martineau demonstrates her authority through textual strategy, through not only withholding the information that the man furnishes her with, but in the casual, knowing way she presents the path of his discourse: 'His conversation was, however, of a host of metaphysicians as well as lawyers; and I thought he would never have tired of analyzing Bentham, from whom he passed on, like every one who talks in America

¹¹² The impression of Martineau's independence and enthusiasm is a feature visible throughout. For example, during her Atlantic crossing to America, when the ship runs foul of a hurricane and water pours into the ladies cabin – the crashing of glass, the complaining voices of the sick ladies – Martineau decides to leave the cabin for the deck. Having found the refreshing effects of the air she descends 'to implore the other ladies to come up and be refreshed; but no one would listen to me.' When she returns up on deck, she obtains 'the captain's leave to fasten [her]self to the post of the binnacle, [with a cloak], promising to give no trouble, and there I saw the whole of the never-to-be-forgotten scene.' Martineau 2005 [1838]: 1, 28.

about books or authors, to Bulwer, dissecting his philosophy and politics very acutely.' In the latter scene, she discloses how, in conversation with the young clergyman, he had exhibited his 'extreme ignorance of the religious feelings and convictions of Christians who differed from him' and a 'bitterness of contempt towards them', and consequently considered him 'the last person to conduct the worship of a large company whose opinions and sentiments were almost as various as their faces.' Such an intolerance for the beliefs of others is then illustrated with regards to herself and her Unitarian convictions and how, on learning of the fact, an old lady on board, was heard to utter: "She [Martineau] had better have done with that; she won't find it go down with us." Martineau's narrative response proves assured: 'It never occurred to me before to determine my religion by what would please people on the Mississippi.'

In many respects Martineau's representation of western steamboat travel differs from that of Trollope. On the one hand, Trollope prioritizes the issue of gendered separation, of the closed in (or the closing off of) female society from the majority of the boat and the remainder of its travelling society. Whether it is the circumstance of accommodation or the personal division of husband and wife, she uses her experiences as part of a larger critique of dominant American values that have and continue to shape its society along the lines of sexual separation. On the other hand, while subject to the same cultural values, and the same on-board regulations, Martineau's representation repeatedly demonstrates a sense of her own independence and liberty to move about the boat, and which consequently appears as a far less confining and demarcated space. Such an independence however does not conceal the presence of these values, be it in the attitude of men or the behaviour of women – characteristics heightened by the circumstances of protracted travel.

¹¹³ Martineau 2005 [1838]: 2, 19.

¹¹⁴ Martineau 2005 [1838]: 2, 19.

Where Martineau and Trollope are perhaps most in concurrence is in highlighting the marginalized status of women and the detrimental nature or effect of separation to society as a whole. For Trollope, the notable confinement of women on board the western steamboat not only epitomizes their larger societal 'insignificance', but intimates that their exclusion from male society is a matter of male 'preference,' most likely done for the freedom to pursue their vices. Her challenge is to advocate an improvement of the status of the American woman, of their 'becoming elegant and enlightened companions:' that if the sexes were to mix, not only would men discarded their bad habits and vices, but come to recognise that the lot of women was greater than domestic duties. In short, social interaction would help annul the 'universal deficiency in good manners and graceful demeanour.' (And yet, if the presence of women is offered as the solution, the social activity of dining is far from encouraging.) For Martineau, who sees the married American woman as being 'confined', 'crushed', 'petted' and 'humoured', as someone indulged rather than accorded justice, the circumstances of steamboat travel are more ambivalent. On the one hand, such an attitude toward women has the effect of rendering their manner objectionable, even 'repulsive', seeing her behave with suspicion, stand in cold immovable observation or coolly push to get the best place. On the other, as the more anecdotal representation of Retrospect makes clear, the experience of travel can also be mundane with dull conversation, passed in familial preoccupations and activities, or a pleasurable opportunity for leisurely respite.

CHAPTER FOUR

TRANSPORTATION AND FLIGHT

The fugitive slave literature is destined to be a powerful lever. We have the most profound conviction of its potency. We see in it the easy and infallible means of abolitionizing the free states. Argument provokes argument, reason is met by sophistry; but the narratives of slaves go right to the hearts of men. We defy any man to think with patience or tolerance of slavery after reading [Henry] Bibb's narrative. Put a dozen copies of this book into every school, district, or neighborhood in the free states, and you might sweep the whole north on a thoroughgoing liberty platform for abolishing slavery, everywhere and everyhow.¹

SLAVERY AND THE WESTERN STEAMBOAT

As a radically alternate perspective to the representations of the preceding two chapters, attention is here focused on the recorded experiences of the African American (fugitive) slave. Such a dramatic shift in perspective, while crucially retaining much of its original technological import, demands a corresponding shift in its cultural and historical, indeed, in its ideological framework – a recalibration that acknowledges not only the physical day-to-day reality of slavery, the violent, dehumanising circumstances of America's 'peculiar institution', but also the debates surrounding, supporting and challenging, that institution. Nor can it neglect the context of authorship; the creative and political acts of composition and publication – an 'act' which, according to Houston A. Baker Jr., marks 'the final stage in a geographical and psychological journey that carries them [the slave] from slavery to freedom to abolition.'²

On the one hand, this means recognising the correlation between the overarching 'form' (character and composition) of southern slavery, and the function of the western steamboat in creating and feeding that system. Indeed, just as new technologies saw the 'mechanization' of sugar and cotton production, so the steamboat not only assisted in the mass western 'migration' of farmers and their slaves that lead to the emergence of a 'new

¹ Charles Nichols quoted by Baker Jr, in Douglass 2000 [1845]: 9.

² Baker Jr, in Douglass 2000 [1845]: 12.

plantation system', but served as a means of transportation that kept plantations supplied with a ready work force. But the western steamboat also proved a source of employment, offering an alternative to the lot of the plantation slave. Of the many jobs, roles and duties that encompassed the general work culture, slaves were 'hired', and laboured as stewards, waiters, cooks, cabin boys, chambermaids, fire-men, or deck-hands; each allotted their respective tasks and responsibilities.³ (Such work proved equally invaluable in helping to establish and maintain a network of communication for families separated by slavery.) Finally, because steamboats made regular scheduled trips into the free northern states of Ohio, Illinois, Iowa, and Pennsylvania, they offered opportunities for slaves to seek and secure freedom, not just for those who laboured on board but also those working in more rural areas, who stowed away in the boat's hull, or concealed themselves amongst the deck passengers and freight.

There is within this general assessment a notable paradoxical association, a paradox reducible to the opposition of bondage and freedom, transportation and flight. In fact, such an association was heightened if the slave was a member of the steamboat's crew, where he or she was constantly reminded of their condition, and that of all African American slaves, by the sight (and brutal distinction between) the chained gangs of slaves and the liberty of everyone else. The prominence of such associations however, should in no way be allowed to obscure their correspondence to those discussed in previous chapters, that a simple shift in perspective entails a shift of signification. For example, what does it mean to represent the steamboat as material to national consolidation, of an internal economic, commercial trade, when that trade is in men, women and children, or indeed products of slave labour such as cotton and sugar? Or, what does it mean to represent the steamboat as a practical source of liberty when, while a means to escape subjugation, it is simultaneously the site and conveyor of human bondage.

On the other hand, then, there is the need, not only to re-contextualise the specific 'literary' context of representation, but the form of national debate regarding the issue of

³ For a comprehensive account see Buchanan 2004: 53-80, 'Below the Pilothouse: The Work Culture of Steamboats.'

slavery. Most crucial here is the so-called 'slave narrative' and the abolitionist movement or 'crusade' of which they were a fundamental part. As Baker Jr. argues, these 'narratives were [...] extensions of the active oratorical and dramatic roles played by exbondsman,' a corollary to the direct, public, platform presentation of testimony offered by the former slave whose presence served as a visual and verbal testament for the truthfulness of their experiences. As written texts these narratives could not only be longer, more detailed, and usually more personal, but equally orient themselves more around the 'tangible facts and events without as much of the general rhetoric and abstract philosophizing' that typified public oration.⁴

But Baker Jr. also draws attention to the need for recognizing 'the literary-historical conditions of the narratives' origins,' in particular the range of printed material that assisted in conceptualization and authoring (such as available 'narrative strategies'). There were, for example, 'the techniques and traditions of plantation novels, sentimental romances, sermons, reprinted lectures on self-improvement, rhymed moralizing verse, biographical accounts of great men, Sunday school moral tales, frontier travel accounts, Old Southwest humorous sketches such as those of Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, and other forms that constituted the mass reading of the day.' What makes these 'slave narratives' especially invaluable however, is the realistic, eye-witness portraits of slavery, and the emotive, ethical as well as psychological orientation of their represented experiences. Here, those

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⁴ Heermance 1969: 78-79. As a genre the 'Slave Narrative' also displays several basic stylistic approaches, that of enumeration, discussion and dramatization; and a number of salient commonalities: from the use of 'anti-democratic and anti-Christian ironies' and 'borrowed verse' to questions of miscegenation, and the unique experience of 'mulatto' slaves. Central, of course, are the considerations of selfhood; including the personal experiences ('the various aspects of general cruelty') of childhood and growing up; of descriptions / enumerations of masters and overseers, and the 'paraphernalia of slavery,' as well as questions pertaining to age and name, and to the relationship of the ex-slave with, and separation from, his / her mother. Heermance 1969: 80. For example, Frederick Douglass opens his narrative: 'I have no accurate knowledge of my age, never having seen any authentic record containing it. By far the larger part of the slaves know as little of their ages as horses know theirs, and it is the wish of most masters within my knowledge to keep their slaves thus ignorant. [...] A want of information concerning my own [age] was a source of unhappiness to me even during childhood.' Douglass 2000 [1845]: 281.

⁵ Baker Jr, in Douglass 2000 [1845]: 13.

⁶ Unlike public oration where the slave himself or herself testified verbally and visually for the truthfulness of their account, for the facts, events and incidents, the literary narrative, about which scepticism was possible (particularly in light of hoax narratives or the assistance of amanuenses), required a means of verification. It not only had to substantiate the truth of the story but that it was the slaves themselves who had written it, countering prevailing myths of African American unintelligence and inability to learn. Thus it is not uncommon to find narratives prefaced by introductions that set out to authorise or authenticate the details contained in that narrative. For example, in the introduction to the narrative of Henry Bibb, Matlack sets

experiences pertain to the slave's participation in, observation of, or subjection to, steamboat transportation and their respective attempts, successful or otherwise, of flight.

With respect to the larger national context surrounding the issue of slavery and its place in the developing American Republic, some account needs be given of the dominant discourses that shaped debate, and the far from homogenized, unified voice of those who sought an end to America's 'peculiar institution'. Thus, note should be made of how each side appropriated and deployed theological arguments for the 'justification' or 'refutation' of slavery in Scripture by God, from the 'lengthy exegesis' offered by the Proslavery camp to an emphasis on 'moral application' favoured by the Antislavery advocate. Connectedly, as Mason Lowance records, there were two opposing schools of 'scientific' thought, those who argued 'that humanity was descended from multiple original sources' ('the pseudoscientific argument' of polygenesis), and those who saw humankind as being 'derived from a unique, created original'. The former 'belief' became associated with Slavery, and argued 'that contemporary differences in ethnic and racial composition were the result of an intentional separation of the races at the time of creation. The latter was 'embraced' by many in the abolitionist movement who 'argued for full social and political equality for Africans'.

More pertinent is an acknowledgement of the diversified politico-historical context of opposition itself, not just of the distinction between an 'antislavery' philosophy and the 'specific, historical group action' of the 'Abolitionist movement', but equally between 'the demanding, hostile, and often uncompromising tone of some of the white abolitionist, such as William Lloyd Garrison', and the 'intensely personal story, often filled with pathos' of the slave. Nor is it simply a matter of tone or content, of a difference between the use of 'moral suasion' and a more militant stance whose 'logic', as John Thomas argues, 'pointed toward secession', but also of different activities; from the publication of newspapers (such

about the characteristic task of establishing the veracity of the work. After discussing the narrative value and power he adds 'all this is associated with unmistakable traces of originality and truthfulness.' Bibb 2000 [1849]: 427.

⁷ Lowance 2000: 49-52.

⁸ Lowance 2000: xx-xxi.

as Garrison's *The Liberator* in 1831) and the founding of The American Anti-Slavery Society, to the dangerous, illegal work of the 'Underground Railroad'.⁹

Lastly, note need be made of the political and legislative context that dominated the early nineteenth-century, and until the abolition of slavery by the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution. Underpinning it all is the American Constitution of 1787 itself, which, as Lowance argues, not only 'fail[ed] [...] to confront the question of slavery', but 'allowed it as a practice by disregarding the application of constitutional principles to chattel slaves of African American descent.' The Louisiana Purchase and other territorial expansions west, also became factors in contemporary debates as slaveholding states lobbied and succeeded in persuading Congress to 'grant slaveholding privileges' to some of these new territories. Indeed, the political power wielded by the slave states was connected to the 'institution' of slavery, which itself ensured and maintained their economic strength through, for example, cotton production. Finally, and arguably the most significant piece of legislation was The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 (part of the Compromise of 1850) that was specifically designed to curtail the work of the Underground Railroad and placate Southern politicians in Congress. Congress of the Compromise of 1850 (part of the Congress) and placate Southern politicians in Congress.

As regards to the representation of the western river steamboat, two accounts are of especial interest. Firstly, the *Narrative of William W. Brown, A Fugitive Slave* (1847) offers a unique and revelatory portrait of its author's steamboat experiences while working as a waiter on board the *Enterprize*, and as an assistant or 'handy man' to a slave-trader named James Walker. In each case he provides provocative details of the treatment and conditions of slaves during transportation, recording the specific, de-humanising, violent actions and behaviour involved. Secondly, the *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb* (1849) is instructive for its several dramatised escapes as he negotiates steamboat passage north to freedom and for the portrayal of his sentiments when captured and transported.

⁹ Quoted in Lowance 2000: xxxv.

¹⁰ Lowance 2000: xv. Although congress outlawed the importation of slaves in 1808, Lowance confirms how 'the laws were frequently disobeyed and Africans continued to be smuggled into the United States.'

¹¹ There were, of course, slave narratives that date back to the late eighteenth-century. For example, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789). Other narratives include James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw's *Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw* (1772). Barker Jr, in Douglass 2000 [1845]: 8.

Each narrative likewise elaborates on the aforementioned (paradoxical) association of bondage and liberty; of how the steamboat stirred up an ambivalent series of emotions / reactions. In an effort to best illustrate and better emphasize the role and significance of the steamboat in the lives of the southern slave, this chapter is divided not only by author, but equally by theme, drawing on a number of the above listed sources, and paying close attention to the language used.

NARRATIVE OF WILLIAM W. BROWN, A FUGITIVE SLAVE

Born into slavery, the son of Elizabeth Lee and George Higgins (half-brother of his mother's master), William Wells Brown is credited as being the first African American novelist and playwright; author of works such as *Clotel; Or, The President's Daughter; A Narrative of Slave Life in the United States* (1853) *Experience; Or, How to Give a Northern Man a Backbone* (1856), and *The Escape; Or, A Leap for Freedom, A Drama in Five Acts* in 1858. But Brown was not only a literary, or indeed oratorical, voice in the abolitionist movement, but a practical participant from the year of his escape in 1834, serving as a 'conductor on the Underground Railroad [...] and an agent of the Western New York Anti-Slavery Society. For nine years, from 1834 to 1842, he worked on a Lake Erie steamboat assisting slaves to reach Canada by making arrangements to carry them on board to either Buffalo or Detroit. These years also witnessed a process of self-education, his embracing of the temperance cause, and the welcoming of anti-slavery agents, lecturers, and fugitive slaves into his home (the latter as stopover passengers en route to Canada). He likewise attended meetings, read anti-slavery newspapers, ¹⁵ and

¹² Farrison 1969: 20-21. Heermance refers to *Three years in Europe...*, a work he classifies as 'the first strictly travel book ever written by an American Negro'. Heermance 1969: 19.

¹³ Farrison 1948: 14. A captain on the Trans-Lake Erie Submarine Line for Fugitive Slaves.

¹⁵ Farrison 1954: 307.

¹⁴ Heermance 1969: 11-12. Soon after he started working on the lake steamers, he began to carry fugitive slaves to Canada by way of Detroit and Buffalo. In his "lucrative situation on one of the lake steamboats" he found it convenient and often adventurous to hide fugitives from injustice, as they came to be called, and to convey them beyond the jurisdiction of the "person held to service or labor" clause in the United States Constitution, Article IV, Section 2, and the Federal fugitive slave law of 1793. Farrison 1954: 300. Between the first of May and the first of December, 1842, he carried sixty-nine fugitive slaves to Canada. For a description of his work see Brown 1999 [1863]: 25-26.

began speaking throughout the Buffalo and western New York area on the subject of American Slavery.¹⁶

In 1847 Brown became an agent and popular abolitionist lecturer for the New England Anti-Slavery Society, addressing its Annual Convention in Marlborough Chapel¹⁷ – it was also the year he published the first edition of the *Narrative of William W. Brown, A Fugitive Slave*. Two years later he travelled as a representative of the American Peace Society to an International Peace Congress in Paris, and sought to secure continued British support for the anti-slavery movement in the United States. With the passing of the Fugitive Slave Law,¹⁸ he was effectively forced to remain in England for fear of being arrested and re-enslaved, never having been legally manumitted. During this time, with lecturing providing but a limited source of income, he combined his activities as reformer with that of newspaper correspondent, becoming a regular contributor to *The Leader, The Daily News* and to *The Morning Chronicle*, to name but three.¹⁹ In 1852 he published *Three Years in Europe; Or, Places I Have Seen and People I Have Met*, and in 1853 the first of several versions of *Clotelle* (a version never published in America).²⁰

In 1854, his freedom purchased, Brown returned to Boston to resume his work as an anti-slavery agent, quickly becoming a prominent Garrisonian abolitionist.²¹ Over the next four years he continued to write, read and lecture to audiences in New England, New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Ohio.²² In later years he dedicated himself to the authorship of historical works, *The Black Man, His Antecedents, His Genius, and His Achievements* (1863), *The Negro in the American Rebellion, His Heroism and His Fidelity*

¹⁶ Heermance 1969: 13. Before 1844 he had become a lecturer for the Western New York Anti-Slavery Society Farrison 1954: 299.

¹⁷ Farrison 1948: 14.

¹⁸ See Lowance 2000: 325-331.

¹⁹ Farrison 1948: 17.

²⁰ Clotelle: A Tale of the Southern States. See Farrison 1969: 387-388.

²¹ William Lloyd Garrison (1805-1879. According to Lowance Garrison, 'is generally considered to be the dean of the abolitionist movement in the United States. Influenced early in his life by the Quaker rejection of chattel slavery and its inhuman practices, Garrison became one of the earliest and most outspoken advocates of the complete and total emancipation of the slaves.' Indeed, Garrisonians 'not only argued for the equality and for an end to racial prejudice, but emphatically called for "immediate, unconditional emancipation," without compensation to the slaveowners.' Lowance 2000: xvi-xvii.

²² According to Farrison, in the spring of 1856, he began to read a completed satire on the Reverend Nehemiah Adams and his *A Southside View of Slavery*, entitled, *Experience; Or, How to Give a Northern Man a Backbone* The following year he began reading another play, the five act piece, *The Escape; Or, A Leap for Freedom, A Drama in Five Acts*, later published in June 1858.

(1867), and *The Rising Sun* (1874). His personal ambition for these works he underlines in the preface of the last: 'If this work shall aid in vindicating the Negro's character, and show that he is endowed with those intellectual and amiable qualities which adorn and dignify human nature, it will meet the most sanguine hopes of the writer.'²³ Brown's final book, published four years before his death, is a series of reminiscent essay-sketches, entitled, *My Southern Home: or, The South and Its People* (1880).

Several of these works document different aspects of western steamboat culture. In *The Black Man*, for example, Brown writes of his experiences as an under steward on the steamboat *Patriot*, which 'opened to me a new life, and gave me an opportunity to see different phases of slave life, and to learn something more of the world,' and lead him to state that '[1]ife on the Mississippi River is an exciting one'. So it is that he writes of a steamboat race and the slave firemen of both boats; how the *Patriot* used 'oil, lard, butter, and even bacon, with wood' to raise steam pressure 'to its highest pitch', and how firemen sang songs 'as can only be heard on board a southern steamer'. The race, however, turns to tragedy when one of the boilers on board the *Patriot* explodes, 'carrying away the boiler deck and tearing to pieces much of the machinery', filling every part of the vessel with a 'dense fog of steam' amidst which are heard 'shrieks, groans, and cries'.²⁴ As a result 'the saloons and cabins soon looked more like hospitals than any thing else.'²⁵

Brown also writes of the practice of gambling that occurs on board, often with thousands of dollars changing hands between St. Louis and New Orleans, that leave many men 'completely ruined' and duels often the consequence. One passage even describes how a sixteen year old 'mulatto boy' is used to cover a wager and lost to an opponent: 'Such is the uncertainty of a slave's life. He goes to bed at night the pampered servant of his young master, with whom he has played in child-hood, and who would not see his slave abused under any consideration, and gets up in the morning the property of a man whom he has

²³ Quoted in Heermance 1969: 21.

²⁴ Brown gives the reason for this explosion: 'At this moment the engineer of the *Patriot* was seen to fasten down the safety-valve, so that no steam should escape. This was indeed a dangerous resort, and a few who saw what had taken place, fearing that an explosion would be the consequence, left that part of the boat for more secure quarters. The *Patriot* now stopped to take in passengers; but still no steam was permitted to escape. On the starting of the boat again, cold water was forced into the boilers by the feed-pumps, and, as might have been expected, one of the boilers exploded with terrific force.' Brown 1999 [1863]: 22.

²⁵ Brown 1999 [1863]: 21.

never before seen.' Indeed, Brown confirms how activities of this kind are not unusual on a Mississippi riverboat, with saloon tables crowded with men playing cards, each with money and pistols and bowie-knives 'spread in splendid confusion before them'. Much of this material is duplicated a year later in *Colette* where it accounts for most of the events in chapter 4. Similarly, a comparison between *Colette* and the earlier *Narrative* reveals a repetition of material as regards the portrait of the slave-speculator Dick Jennings (Mr. Walker in *Narrative*), and the 'business' of trading in slaves. As such it suggests an overt intra-textual act of self-plagiarism. And yet there are one or two differences that make comparison profitable. Thus, while it is the former that is most explicit in establishing the paradoxical association of the western steamboat and most graphic in its representation of transport, the latter offers useful elaboration.

In chapter 4 of *Narrative*, Brown records how he was 'hired' out (to Captain Otis Reynolds) as a waiter on the *Enterprize*, running on the upper Mississippi River (owned by Messrs. John and Edward Walsh, commission merchants at St. Louis). This employment, while it lasts but the remainder of the season (just three pages), nonetheless evokes the central emotional tenets of his experiences, of his desire for liberty and his reluctance to abandon his family. As regards his employment, occupation, role, and status, or indeed information of the steamboat itself, Brown merely characterizes his work as being 'to wait on gentlemen', and that 'the captain being a good man, the situation was a pleasant one to me.' (That it was 'pleasant' may plausibly be read in light of the possible alternatives, of having to work as a field-hand on a southern cotton plantation.) Brown, however, qualifies this statement in the second part of what proves an extended sentence, voicing his awareness of his unhappy condition, aroused and perpetually augmented with the steamboat's every movement: 'but in passing from place to place, and seeing new faces every day, and knowing that they could go where they pleased, I soon became unhappy, and several times thought of leaving the boat at some landing place, and trying to make my

²⁶ Brown 1999 [1863]: 20-23.

escape to Canada, which I had heard much about as a place where the slave might live, be free, and be protected.'²⁷

Such a statement clearly asserts the kernel of Brown's emotive ambivalence relating to his servitude, and reflects the paradoxical 'status' of the western steamboat: the simultaneous experience and awareness of mobility and restriction; change and endless servitude; liberty and slavery; that while the steamboat moves and faces change, Brown himself is confined, yet observing. Indeed, in *The Black Man* Brown recollects how during his time on board the *Patriot* his continued 'intercourse with educated persons' and his continued meeting of so many travellers from the free states 'caused me to feel more keenly my degraded and unnatural situation.' At the same time however it serves as a means of acquiring valuable information respecting the north and Canada, and provides the resolve 'to escape with my mother, who had been sold to a gentleman in St. Louis.' Akin to the representations of Francis Grund and Michael Chevalier the steamboat is then a symbol and practicable embodiment of personal liberty, as well as a means of observing the manners and morals of society. Unlike Grund, Chevalier, or indeed any itinerant traveler able to come and go as appetite wills, Brown learns, absorbs and accumulates, but is denied the liberty of movement and literary expression.

As a consequence of his experiences on the *Enterprize*, his thoughts turn to ideas of escape, of his leaving the boat at some place and striking out for the Canadian border. The desire, however, is quashed by the remembrance of his mother – a slave in St. Louis whom he cannot bear to abandon. Indeed, Brown's ambivalence of freedom and bondage is augmented by the fact that his employment on board the *Enterprize*, which frequently returns to St. Louis, allows him to sustain contact with his mother, brothers and sister. To emphasis this emotive state Brown records a conversation he has with his mother and sister

²⁷ Brown 2000 [1847]: 385. Crucially, this awareness was further augmented by hearing Senator Thomas H. Benton give a Fourth of July oration in which he quoted the doctrine if the inalienable rights of man as set forth in the Declaration of Independence. According to William E. Farrison, what stimulated Brown's interest was 'the gross inconsistencies between the professions and the practices of soi-distant [sic] American democrats'; that while Benton and other prominent people in St. Louis talked of liberty and professed a love for American democracy, they were nonetheless slave holders. Either the theory of individual rights of man was wrong, or the practice of slaveholding. Ultimately, there was aroused in Brown, 'a strong determination as well as a desire to be free'. Farrison 1969: 22-23.

 ²⁸ Brown 1999 [1863]: 23.
 ²⁹ See Chapter 2 of this thesis.

in which they consider his advantageous employment for the possibility it offers for escape. As such, narrative progression (here) reflects emotive struggle: ideas of liberty and servitude (only strengthened by his sight of the boat's 'human cargo'), and the sense of responsibility he feels for his family. However, despite protestations that their predicament should in no way hinder any attempt to gain his liberty, Brown pledges 'not to leave them in the land of the oppressor.' A few weeks after' these initial experiences Brown records how the *Enterprize* takes on board a drove of slaves at Hannibal bound for the New Orleans market – a place he himself would visit on a number of occasions. ³¹

THE WESTERN STEAMBAOT AND THE INTERNAL SLAVE TRADE

With its swelling cosmopolitan population, its multi-national history of ownership,³² its innumerable architectural styles, languages and 'carnival' atmosphere, New Orleans had rapidly blossomed into a nexus of social and commercial activity; a seemingly endless stream of steamboat traffic at its docks, a swarm of sea-faring vessels waiting in the gulf. Much of that commercial activity was centered and reliant on the revolutions in sugar and cotton production. Indeed, it was the labour intensive nature of such work that had turned the city into 'the great terminus of the interstate slave trade',³³ its streets alive with labour hungry plantation owners in search of slaves.³⁴ 'Nigger Hell' was how one former slave termed it.³⁵ The slaves on board of the *Enterprize*, like the slaves on board hundreds of other boats, were thus the 'instruments' of a Southern antebellum economic recovery – a part of a slave trade that according to Ira Berlin, 'became the largest enterprise in the south

³⁰ Brown 2000 [1847]: 386.

³⁵ Smith 2001 [1891]: 15.

³¹ Chapter VII records one particular experience of witnessing the murder of an African American man. Brown 2000 [1847]: 399-400. Brown writes: 'The poor man at last took refuge in the river. The whites who were in pursuit of him, run on board of one of the boats to see if they could discover him. They finally espied him under the bow of the steamboat Trenton. They got a pike-pole, and tried to drive him from his hiding place. [...] On the end of the pike-pole with which they were striking him was a hook which caught in his clothing, and they hauled him up on the bow of the boat [...] he was dead.' Brown 2000 [1847]: 399.

³² Smith 2007: 13-44.

³³ Berlin 2003: 179.

³⁴ See 'Ten Days in New Orleans, 1826' by Donald MacDonald in McDermott 1968: 278-286.

outside of the plantation itself, and probably the most advanced in its employment of modern transportation, finance, and publicity.' Berlin writes:

It developed its own language: prime hands, bucks, breeding wenches, and fancy girls. Its routes, running counter to the freedom trails that fugitive slaves followed north, were similarly dotted by safe houses – pens, jails, and yards that provided resting places for slave traders as well as temporary warehouses for slaves. In all, the slave trade, with its hubs and regional centers, its spurs and circuits, reached into every cranny of southern society. Few southerners, white or black, were untouched.³⁶

According to Berlin it commenced with the turn of the nineteenth-century and the south-west migration of 'hundreds of farmers and impoverished planters' enticed by the prospect of wealth to be had from cotton and sugar.³⁷ Geographically, it entailed 'two great thrusts of slavery's expansion – one east to west from the Chesapeake and lowcountry, the other south to north from the lower Mississippi Valley' – two thrusts that quickly united, and that ended with the secession of southern states and the start of hostilities. Berlin calls this south-west migration 'the Second Middle Passage', and records the dramatic impact it had on slave communities and African American slave culture, as more than a million men and women were forcibly 'deported' and thousands of families were 'dissolved'. The early decades of this migration naturally comprised cross country marches, but as slave territory expanded and steamboats grew to dominate river travel, their lower decks became crowded with gangs of slaves being relocated to, and within, the so-called 'black-belt'. Indeed, the rivers that were fast becoming the arteries of 'national consolidation' (to use Chevalier's phrase) were the means of consolidating the invaluable slave market (or mobile labour force) on which the economic wealth and strength of the nation was grounded.

Brown, of course, was not alone in testifying to such events. Adam Lowery, for example, gives a description of conditions on board the *Uncle Sam* (1834), of seeing 'two long chains, extending from the forward to the rear of the steerage deck. The ends were bolted to the sides of the boat about four feet above the deck floor. To these chains, at about equal distances apart, were attached twenty-five shorter chains with a handcuff

³⁶ Berlin 2003: 168.

³⁷ With the introduction of Eli Whitney's cotton gin (1793), production of cotton rose from 73,000 to 4.5 million bales in sixty years (1800-1860).

attached to the loose end. The handcuff was attached to the right arm of each slave.'³⁸ For his part, Frederick Law Olmsted records how three boys, recently separated from their parents, were left to sleep on a bed of passenger baggage with but a blanket each for cover, and forced to endure and suffer the 'driving rain and cold'. He also tells how the two elder boys constantly teased the youngest, stirring him into 'a perfect frenzy of anger and grief', so much so that he made as if to jump overboard, and was only caught at the last moment. For this attempt he receive 'a severe flogging with a rope's end'.³⁹

In his narrative Brown describes the following scene of transportation:

They numbered from fifty to sixty, consisting of men and women from eighteen to forty years of age. A drove of slaves on a southern steamboat, bound for the cotton or sugar regions, is an occurrence so common, that no one, not even the passengers, appear to notice it, though they clank their chains at every step. There was, however, one in this gang that attracted the attention of the passengers and crew. It was a beautiful girl, apparently about twenty years of age, perfectly white, with straight light hair and blue eyes. But it was not the whiteness of her skin that created such a sensation among those who gazed upon her it was her almost unparalleled beauty. She had been on the boat but a short time, before the attention of all the passengers, including the ladies, had been called to her, and the common topic of conversation was about the beautiful slave-girl. She was not in chains. The man who claimed this article of human merchandize was a Mr. Walker, -a well known slavetrader, residing in St. Louis. There was a general anxiety among the passengers and crew to learn the history of the girl. Her master kept close by her side, and it would have been considered impudent for any of the passengers to have spoken to her, and the crew were not allowed to have any conversation with them. When we reached St. Louis, the slaves were removed to a boat bound for New Orleans, and the history of the beautiful slave-girl remained a mystery.40

The passage is important and informative for several reasons, not least in its matter-of-factly recorded details of slave transportation; of numbers and age; of probable destination; that they were chained together and not to be questioned; and that 'it was not an unfrequent

³⁸ Quoted in Buchanan 2004: 86. The abolitionist Adam Lowry was on board the *Uncle Sam* at the docks in Ripley, Ohio.

³⁹ Olmsted 1861: 218. Another description of transportation can be found in Thomas Hamilton's 1833 account *Men and Manners in America*, where he writes: 'the men loaded with heavy chains, and the women with scarcely rags enough to serve the purposes of decency. I spoke occasionally to both, and the women were certainly the more intelligent. They seemed to take pride in the largeness of the prices they had formerly brought in the market; and one, with a look of dignity, told me her master had refused three hundred dollars for her. Who, after this, shall presume to say, that vanity is not an inherent attribute of woman? / The men were in a state at once wretched and disgusting. Their chains prevented their performing the ordinary functions of cleanliness, and their skin had become covered with a sort of scaly eruption. But I will not enlarge on a subject so revolting.' McDermott 1998 [1968]: 52-53. See also Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

⁴⁰ Brown 2000 [1847]: 386-387.

occurrence to have on board gangs of slaves on their way to the cotton, sugar and river plantations of the South.'41 It is also interesting for two particular linguistic choices, the words 'appear' and 'apparently about'. The first, while subjectively conditional (Brown can never know), is equivocal because, despite the noise made by the chains which bind them, such a sight and sound is so common and familiar it 'appear[s]' to draw no attention from any of the passengers: equivocal because the passengers merely pretend not to notice - a disassociation aided (perhaps) by the topographical arrangement of the steamboat (slaves being transported were typically confined to the lower deck). The second choice, 'apparently about', while plausibly remaining unspecified for the simple reason that Brown is unable to ask the girl herself, can also be read to reflect that common uncertainty a slave has regarding his / her own age.

The main point of focus is, of course, the disruption caused by the 'beautiful, unchained girl' who not only draws and holds the attention of passengers and crew, ladies included (as if to defer the possibility of its being a purely sexualised act), but who is set apart as the centre and common topic of conversation. Brown, whose own status in the scenario is arguably ambiguous (he is after all one of the observers), characterises this attention and coveting of the girl's history as 'general anxiety', an equally ambiguous phrase that might either be read as intense desire or eagerness, or as a state of uneasiness or tension caused by apprehension. Brown further consolidates this (latter) ambiguity, not only by letting this history remain (not even speculation is offered) a secret ('it would have been considered impudent for any of the passengers to have spoken to her, and the crew were not allowed to have any conversation [either]'), but by attributing this arousal to the girl's 'unparalleled beauty' and not her 'perfectly white' skin, her straight light hair, and her blue eyes.⁴²

On the one hand, it seems the girl can only ever be an object of curiosity and conversation for passengers and crew, one that is troublingly fetishistic in its presentation as 'gaze'. That she is taken to be no more than a piece of 'human merchandise', to be both

⁴¹ Brown 2000 [1847]: 387. ⁴² Brown 2000 [1847]: 387.

property and without history, only confirms this status as 'object'. On the other hand, this withholding or denial of history also serves to reflect larger contemporaneous cultural / ideological prejudices and practices apropos the status of the African American in America. For example, it reflects their 'voiceless' political and legal status, or the need for white corroboration and authorisation (the use of introductions in 'slave narratives'), as well as more personal concerns of self-identity, the simple awareness that one does not know one's own age. 43 ('History', of course, can be made to stand for all these particular examples, as both the denial *of* history and silence *in* history.)

There is however cause to suspect that the girl's disruption of passenger and crew indifference is not so clear cut, that Brown's 'insistence' is precisely just that. The reason for suspicion is an almost identical passage in the author's subsequent work Clotelle that presents the girl's 'whiteness' as having quite a different effect on the gathered passengers. In this version both ladies and gentlemen are 'startled' to see a women so white as to prove '[in]distinguishable' from the other white female passengers on board, engendering in all a sense 'that God would punish the oppressor'. Once again the description of the girl herself is romanticised: a forehead 'expressive and intellectual [...] a countenance full of dignity and heroism, her dark golden locks rolled back from her almost snow-white forehead and floating over her swelling bosom. The tears that stood in her mild blue eyes showed that she was brooding over sorrows and wrongs that filled her bleeding heart.'44 Whiteness however, is the clear source of disquiet, the narrative ironically implying that that very whiteness is threatening to the passengers because they fear it may soon prove impossible to differentiate between African American and Anglo-Saxon, that they themselves might be taken for slaves: 'Many had been taught to think that slavery was a benefit rather than an injury, and those who were not opposed to the institution before, now felt that if whites were to become its victims, it was time at least that some security should be thrown around the Anglo-Saxon to save him from this servile and degraded position.'45 Brown, of course, is playing on anxieties of miscegenation and making complicit those tolerant observers

⁴³ See the opening of *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (footnote 4).

⁴⁴ In Heermance 1969: 15.

⁴⁵ In Heermance 1969: 16.

able to displace responsibility. But he is likewise indirectly questioning the tenets of such discrimination: that fear is grounded on the knowledge that there is in fact no difference at all: that it is simply a difference of colour that facilitates differentiation.

Up until this point in his narrative Brown has merely been an observer of activities and the circumstances of slave transportation. When he is 'hired' out to Mr. Walker 'to take care of slaves', that 'relationship' changes. Initially it instils a sense of fear and uncertainty (so strong that he finds himself 'at a loss for language to express my feelings on that occasion'); for not only does it quash, if only temporarily, any hope of escape, but because he cannot even be sure that he himself has not been sold. ⁴⁶ Indeed, it is only when heading back up the Mississippi that Brown finally believes he has not.

But his experiences in this new vocation prove evermore affecting in what proves 'the longest year I ever lived'. 47 To begin with he elaborates on details of transportation, observing how the gang is kept in a large room on the lower deck, chained 'promiscuously' two and two, how a strict watch is kept over them and how 'it was almost impossible to keep that part of the boat clean.'48 (While vague, these allusions nonetheless suggest the 'cattle-like' treatment to which slaves were subjected.) The reason for such 'security', he explains, is that slaves have succeeded in removing their chains and managed to escape, in most cases, when the boat stops to take on fuel. He also writes of a woman parted from husband and children, who, not being kept in chains, jumped to her death because she had no desire to live without them. 49 Significantly, like the direct tone he uses in his description of treatment, Brown is detached in his presentation as if seeking to stress the frequency of such acts and the matter-of-fact nature of the action, that while each slave is commercially 'valuable', any value beyond that, their history, selfhood, 'soul', is nil. So agonizing are these initial experiences that Brown approaches his owner Dr. Young and expresses his wish to no longer live with Mr. Walker. When his request is denied he accompanies Mr Walker and a new 'cargo of human flesh' on board the steamboat Carlton charged with having 'to prepare the old slaves for market':

46 Brown 2000 [1847]: 389.

Brown 2000 [1847]: 389.

⁴⁸ Brown 2000 [1847]: 390.

⁴⁹ Brown 2000 [1847]: 389-390.

I was ordered to have the old men's whiskers shaved off, and the grey hairs plucked out, where they were not too numerous, in which case he had a preparation of blacking to color it, and with a blacking-brush we would put it on. This was new business to me, and was performed in a room where the passengers could not see us. These slaves were also taught how old they were by Mr. Walker, and after going through the blacking process, they looked ten or fifteen years younger; and I am sure that some of those who purchased slaves of Mr. Walker, were dreadfully cheated, especially in the ages of the slaves they bought. 50

More than perhaps any other passage in Brown's narrative this scene carries both literal and symbolic signification – a provocative blend of thematic concerns: racial, economic and psychological. Firstly, as a purely descriptive account of cultural practices to which slaves were subjected, it records several 'procedures' employed by slave drivers to ensure the saleability of their 'property' and that 'it' attained as high a price as possible; that any potential buyers were convinced of a slave's youth and vigour. As Daniel R. Hundley (1860) suggests, such activity was far from the exception since cotton and sugar planters desired a youthful and strong labour force. Indeed, Mr. Walker arguably conforms to what Hundley labels 'the Negro Trader-Speculator'.

[He] habitually separates parent from child, brother from sister, and husband from wife [...] nearly nine tenths of the slaves he buys and sells are vicious ones sold for crimes or misdemeanours, or otherwise diseased ones sold because of their worthlessness as property. These he purchases for about one half what healthy and honest slaves would cost him; but he sells them as both honest and healthy, mark you! So soon as he has completed his "gang," he dresses them up in good clothes, makes them comb their kinky heads into some appearance of neatness, rubs oil on their dusky faces to give them a sleek healthy color, gives them a dram occasionally to make them sprightly, and teaches each one the part he or she has to play.⁵¹

In order to combat such activity importing States began to implement and enforce a number of 'protective' regulations. As Kenneth M. Stampp observes, States soon required that vendors provide 'a written warrant of clear title and physical soundness of the slaves they were selling', and – as in the case of Mississippi and Louisiana – 'prove the slave's good character with affidavits from two freeholders and the clerk of the county in which

⁵⁰ Brown 2000 [1847]: 391.

⁵¹ Hundley 1979 [1860]: 139-141.

the slave had lived.'⁵² As John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger confirm, those who purchased slaves now sought guarantees 'as to the character and health of their intended purchase,' requiring every slave to be 'certified against insanity, leprosy, consumption, ill-health, and [perhaps most importantly] running away.' Indeed, as the sale and resale of runaway slaves accelerated to ever greater numbers in Louisiana, its lawmakers listed 'running away, along with ill-health and disease, as a "redhibitory" vice.'⁵³

Finally, there is a far less matter-of-fact reading of Brown's description, one that pertains to the idea of personal identity and individual autonomy. As such it is possible to read this process of physical and instructive transformation, the substitution (designation) of age and the alteration of appearance, as signifying the slave's denied self and their right of self-determination – as reflecting an overarching corruption of individual selfhood. In short, transformation as substitution, as 'blacking', signals not simply the contestation or rather negotiation of personal history but its erasure, that who they are, their history, is assigned and arbitrary. Thus, at least in terms of a commercial transaction, who they are becomes, and is, a degrading 'performance' – a masquerade extended and implemented on their arrival in New Orleans where they are dressed and driven out into the yard: 'Some were set to dancing, some to jumping, some to singing, and some to playing cards. This was done to make them appear cheerful and happy.' 54

Such acts of personal 'violence' however can be supplemented by other passages that reveal two additional kinds of violence detectable in the culture of transportation. The first, and less frequent kind, centres on the total and ever-present power of the slave-owner or driver as regards the threat of sexual violence for the female slave – something Brown observes during his employment to Mr. Walker. Violence of this kind was, of course, not uncommon on plantations where isolation afforded a degree of privacy, and stories of slave female rape and physical abuse abound in the testimonies of slaves. ⁵⁵ In Brown's narrative

⁵² Stampp 1956: 252.

54 Brown 2000 [1847]: 392.

⁵³ Halpern 2002: 277-278. The passage continues: 'Even if a purchaser could not prove that a slave had previously run away, the presumption of guilt on the part of the seller was assumed if the slave absconded within a few months after the sale.' Halpern 2002: 278.

⁵⁵ As Brenda E. Stevenson reports: 'Most slave women found no way to fight back (and win). Those women who found some manner to resist emerged in the lore and mythology of slave women as both heroic and ideal.' Halpern 2002: 251.

it is the western steamboat that serves as a convenient location for the pursuit of physical sexual desire, its many and various private spaces, like state-rooms, proving sufficiently accommodating.

On the first night that we were on board the steamboat, he directed me to put her [Cynthia] into a state-room he had provided for her, apart from the other slaves. I had seen too much of the workings of slavery, not to know what this meant. I accordingly watched him into the state-room, and listened to hear what passed between them. He told her that if she would accept his vile proposals, he would take her back with him to St. Louis, and establish her as his housekeeper at his farm. But if she persisted in rejecting them, he would sell her as a field hand on the worst plantation on the river. Neither threats nor bribes prevailed, however, and he retired, disappointed of his prey. ⁵⁶

According to Thomas C. Buchanan such and similar activity was not uncommon on western rivers as '[t]raveling slaveholders, separated from wives, mothers, and daughters, found steamboats the perfect setting for debauchery.'⁵⁷ For example, he writes, '[t]raders and passengers took advantage of the vulnerability of slave women during shipment,' and of how a trader not only ordered a 'young woman to unfasten the front of her dress [...] expos[ing] her bosom to view, but proceeds to induce [...] [a] young man to feel of her breast' as a means of encouraging her sale.⁵⁸ However, while Cynthia is initially 'able' to resist the advances and threats of Mr. Walker (Brown does not elaborate), he subsequently establishes her as mistress and house-keeper and has two children by her. But the situation does not last long and Cynthia is sold 'into hopeless bondage' and separated from her (by this time) four children.⁵⁹

The second kind of 'violence' is the physical separation and dissolution of families: husbands separated from wives, parent(s) from children, brothers from sisters. Brown's *Narrative* is inevitably filled with references to such activity, but it is his final separation from his mother that provides the dramatic tension and emotive core present throughout. The scene itself, foreshadowed by his earlier reported dialogue with his family, takes place on the deck of a steamboat, and marks the resolution of his quandary between his desire for

⁵⁶ Brown 2000 [1847]: 392-393.

⁵⁷ Buchanan 2004: 87.

⁵⁸ Buchanan 2004: 87. Buchanan is here quoting Adam Lowry.

⁵⁹ Brown 2000 [1847]: 393.

liberty and the abandonment of his mother. The scene similarly echoes his sight of slave gangs being transported on the Enterprize as he discovers his mother manacled amongst a group of fifty or sixty slaves bound for New Orleans. Having located his mother, Brown expresses feelings of culpability and asks for forgiveness. His mother however discredits and expunges that culpability, declaring that he was only doing his duty and that he should now seek his own liberty. 60 As the bell on the boat tolls for its imminent departure Brown is left to walk on shore, his heart heavy.

Brown's final recorded experience of western steamboat 'travel' is of his escape – an act aided by his being fortuitously employed by Enoch Price, a steamboat captain and commission merchant, and of his accompanying the Price family on board a boat bound for Cincinnati. The escape itself proves remarkably 'straight-forward', but requires two crucial acts of deception on his part. The first involves Brown lying to his owner when asked if he has 'ever been in a free State', to which he replies, "Oh yes," [...] "I have been in Ohio; my master carried me into that State once, but I never liked a free State.'61 The second, and more dramatic, entails, not only his consent to an 'arranged' marriage that serves to mask his guarded intentions, but also the very presence of his wife on board (he alleviates the fears of his owner by asserting that nothing but death should part them). When the boat finally arrives at Cincinnati, escape becomes a matter of opportunity and confidence: opportunity as the boat stops to discharge its cargo and passengers, who begin carrying their baggage off and on: confidence in his simply picking up a trunk and walking ashore, up the wharf, and out of the crowd into the woods.

NARRATIVE OF THE LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF HENRY BIBB

Unlike Brown's forty years of 'freedom', time spent campaigning, lecturing, writing and travelling, Henry Bibb was to experience but a dozen years of 'liberty', dying in 1854 at the age of thirty-nine. For all its relative brevity, Bibb spent his time no less profitably,

⁶⁰ Brown 2000 [1847]: 408. ⁶¹ Brown 2000 [1847]: 413.

becoming an active participant in the anti-slavery crusade. Indeed, he spent his first five years of freedom giving addresses on behalf of candidates of the Liberty Party, travelling throughout the State of Michigan, even venturing into Ohio in the company of Samuel Brooks and Amos Dresser. 62 He also found time to write an account of his experiences, not only of slavery, of his childhood and adolescence, his escapes and returns, but of his actions for the Liberty Party, publishing the Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb in 1849. However, according to Fred Landon, Bibb found his 'real' vocation in the wake of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 that saw him alter track and become a part of a 'colonization society' in Canada⁶³ - the Refugee Home Society in Sandwich Township, Ontario – assisting African Americans to migrate from the Northern States of America. Indeed, in his capacity as founding director Bibb helped settle these 'migrating' men and women on the land and 'to obtain permanent homes', while 'promot[ing] their social, moral, physical and intellectual development' by providing schools and churches.⁶⁴ As part of this process he established a bi-monthly newspaper – Canada's first black newspaper – The Voice of the Fugitive, which, amongst its articles, published numerous interviews with newly arrived escapees and recorded the number of fugitives arriving at Sandwich on the Detroit River. He was also president of the North American Convention of Colored People and committed to the Anti-Slavery Society of Canada (1851), becoming one of its vicepresidents in 1852. He died 'prematurely' after suffering a brief illness.

As regards his experiences of slavery and life in the southern slave states, Bibb's *Narrative* exposes 'in elegant style and with sundry pictorial illustrations' the violence and misery of everyday life, and charts his passage(s) from bondage to freedom.⁶⁵ Indeed, the

⁶² In amongst these experiences Bibb records an incident designed to expose the presence of racial discrimination within the northern states. The incident takes place on board an Erie canal packet bound for Cincinnati. He begins by writing how before boarding he is handed a card that states: 'no pains would be spared to render all passengers comfortable who might favor them with their patronage to Cincinnati,' and then proceeds to expose the fallacy of this statement by showing it to be a courtesy extended only to whites. The crux of his argument is as follows: while he pays the same amount as every one else, and behaves respectfully and decently, his 'status' as a man of colour bars him from the dining table while other passengers are eating. Meanwhile the indecorous behaviour of the southern white man who is drunk and uses the most vulgar language, even vomits where ladies are present, is more than tolerated, his behaviour is taken as the norm. Bibb 2000 [1849]: 547-549.

⁶³ Landon 1920.

⁶⁴ Landon 1920: 442.

⁶⁵ A quote taken from *The Liberator* and reproduced in Bibb 1969 [1850]: 205.

review in the *North Star* states: 'The description of the slave's longing for freedom – of his deception, tricks and stratagems to escape his condition, is just though, humiliating. His narration of the cruelty of individual slave-holders, is natural, and we doubt not in every essential particular is true.' Adding, 'We deem the work a most valuable acquisition to the anti-slavery cause; and we hope that it may be widely circulated through out the country.' Crucial here is that longing for freedom, those deceptions, tricks and stratagems to escape, especially in the way they unite in Bibb's experiences of the western steamboat, which serves as the means of crossing the Mason and Dixon line. In fact, Bibb makes several successful escapes to the North, returning on no less than two occasions in the hope of saving his wife and child. In these flights and returns (and captures) the steamboat is a central feature – an invaluable means of achieving liberty, of traversing the arteries of slavery, but also the method of his transportation as a slave to New Orleans.

Born in May 1815 to 'Milldred Jackson' and James Bibb, Bibb's childhood and adolescence was marked by repeated changes of ownership, separation from his mother, and by frequent flights – the first time for 'ill treatment'.⁶⁷ Over the next couple of years, working 'under the lash without wages', he emphasizes how he becomes 'much better skilled at running away', and how 'deception' is the only weapon of self-defence at his disposal. He continues: 'I learned the art of running away to perfection. I made a regular business of it and never gave it up until I had broken the bonds of slavery and landed myself in Canada where I was regarded as a man and not a thing.' The Ohio river, however, was 'an impassable gulf'⁶⁸ – but a place where watching the steamboats pass he 'receive[s] the first impulse of human rights – [...] [and] first entered my protest against the bloody institution of slavery.' In fact, the Ohio bluff marks a recurring motif in the narrative – a geographical locale that surfaces in a number of his escapes and ties together several of his steamboat experiences. Indeed, to demonstrate the tenets of Bibb's representation of the

⁶⁶ There is some confusion as to whether this comment is attributable to the *North Star*. See Bibb 1969 [1850]: 206.

⁶⁷ More specifically, Bibb writes that his mother was 'known by the name of Milldred Jackson'.

⁶⁸ Bibb 2000 [1849]: 449.

⁶⁹ Bibb 2000 [1849]: 539.

western steamboat three of these scenes may be grouped together: his first encounter of a steamboat, his experience of transportation and his final successful flight for liberty.

The structure of the first scene is dialectical, and opposes nature with the unnatural, freedom with constraint and liberty with property. On the one hand, Bibb emphasizes the nature of freedom by vividly enumerating what it is not: 'no clanking of chains, no captives, no lacerating of backs, no parting of husband and wives, and where man ceases to be the property of his fellow man.'70 On the other, he posits the natural: 'the fishes of the water, the fowls of the air, the wild beasts of the forest' – and all opposed to the unnatural 'peculiar institution' of slavery. Thus, the identification of the 'splendid' steamer which travels up and down the river in all its 'magnificence', is clearly analogous to the fishes of the water – indeed, in all probability it is the sight of the steamboat that draws the mind to the 'fishes of the water'. That the steamboat is potentially the object or method of his salvation is implicit in the word 'wafted' that serves as a substitute for the 'wings of a dove' he imagines himself having but lacks. In short, it is the western steamboat that will provide the means of his attaining his freedom.

These oppositions are revived in the second passage as Bibb is escorted 'back into the land of torment' on the deck of a steamboat bound for Louisville. He is not confined but guarded by five men – two of whom had betrayed him. From this viewpoint, travelling down the Ohio river, he records a complementary, albeit slightly realigned, signification of nature, from stirring up and instilling a longing of liberty to having the power of restoration or rejuvenation: 'Yet, while I was permitted to gaze on the beauties of nature, on free soil, [...] things looked to me uncommonly pleasant. The green trees and wild flowers of the forest; [...] the honest farmers tilling their soil and living by their own toil. These things seem to light upon my vision with a peculiar charm.⁷¹ In contradistinction to the freedom of nature, to the liberty of the men able to work and reap the rewards of what they sow, Bibb likens his own future to the treatment and servitude of an ox. Moreover, as he continues to look on he entertains (with a passion) thoughts of escape, confessing how he

⁷⁰ Bibb 2000 [1849]: 450. ⁷¹ Bibb 2000 [1849]: 472.

was tempted to jump into the water each time the boat came near the shore, and how reason successfully dissuade him, 'pointing out the dreadful consequences of one's committing suicide.'⁷²

The final scene that ties this 'sequence' together witnesses Bibb ascending the Ohio river on his way to the 'promised land'. Once again he sees the landscape of his 'nativity', and is able to look on 'the beauties of nature' and to see the slaves toiling in the fields under their task masters. The steamboat itself, a 'swift running steamer', is the means of his salvation, with 'every revolution of the mighty steam-engine' bringing him 'nearer and nearer', 'waft[ing] my body beyond the tyrannical limits of chattel slavery.' ⁷³ (It is equally significant to note these characterisations of the western steamboat – of its being swift, rapid or fast, of its being splendid and magnificent, of its wafting Bibb to his liberty. Such are the limits of his occasional representations.)

THE WESTERN STEAMBOAT AND THE RUNAWAY SLAVE

Bibb and Brown were, of course, not the only slaves to make use of the western steamboat as a means of gaining their freedom from southern oppression, with evidence suggesting the number to be in the thousands.⁷⁴ Indeed, Franklin and Schweninger, have argued that the total number of runaway slaves, from the Southern states as a whole, exceeded 50,000 per annum.⁷⁵ Those making use of steamboats however, whether river slaves 'hired' out to a particular boat, plantation slaves, or slaves living in the river cities, were predominately young men – the world of steamboating being a masculine one.⁷⁶ On the one hand, the steamboat provided opportunities for steamboatman and woman, ready like Brown, to take advantage of a momentary lapse in supervision, assisted by any knowledge of the river system gleaned during their 'employment'. On the other hand, it enticed fugitives from cities and rural areas able to blend in amongst the numerous stevedores and deckhands.

⁷² Bibb 2000 [1849]: 473.

⁷³ Bibb 2000 [1849]: 539.

⁷⁴ Buchanan 2004: 101. For a fuller discussion see Buchanan 2004: 101-121. ('Boats Against the Current: Slave Escapes on the Western Rivers.')

⁷⁵ Halpern 2002: 275.

⁷⁶ Buchanan 2004: 101-104.

Indeed, fugitives from rural areas would move from boat to boat following the paths of commerce, venturing downriver as far as New Orleans in the hope of securing space on board a boat heading back upstream, or onto the deck of an Atlantic vessel.⁷⁷

For non-steamboat workers, gaining access to the desired boat was not easy and necessitated some form of deception. The main problem was one of obtaining appropriate documentation, of 'papers' that attested to the 'status' of the bearer, and the instructions or remit of his or her activities as given ('authorised') by his or her owner. Those unable to procure such documents, when possible, brought or manufactured forged papers, or stole any that might be duplicated. Escape also commonly required the procurement of suitable attire, whether that meant a few apt articles of clothing or some elaborate 'disguise' as in the case of William and Ellen Craft who pretended to be master and servant, with Ellen Craft 'disguised' as a man with a poultice under her chin and another on her arm, and a pair of green spectacles.⁷⁸ Others not so fortuitous tried less elaborate tactics of concealment, either secreted on the lower deck in amongst hogsheads of sugar like Louis Hughes,⁷⁹ amongst deck passengers like Bibb, or hidden in the hold like John P. Parker. 80 Each tactic had its difficulties: deck passage required the purchase of a ticket; concealment in the hold introduced the problem of obtaining food and water. One incredible method of flight saw Henry Box Brown have himself sealed into a box, with only a 'bladder filled with water' to combat the heat and three tiny holes for air. In his narrative he records how on several occasions he was placed downwards on his head, once when he was 'carried to the express office', and again when he was stowed on board a steamboat. He records: 'In this dreadful position, I remained [for] the space of an hour and a half, it seemed to me, when I began to feel of my eyes and head, and found to my dismay, that my eyes were almost swollen out

⁷⁷ Buchanan 2004: 107.

⁷⁸ Craft 2000 [1860]: 700. Their route to escape took them along the river bound for Charleston, South Carolina.

The Statesman, and I sneaked aboard. It was not expected that the boat would stay more than a few hours, but, for some reason, it stayed all night. / The boat was loaded with sugar, and I hid myself behind four hogsheads. I could see both engineers, one each side of me. When night came on, I crept out from my hiding place, and went forward to search for food and water, for I was thirsty and very hungry. I found the table where the deck hands had been eating, and managed to get a little food, left from their meal, and some water. This was by no means enough, but I had to be content, and went back to my place of concealment.' Hughes 1997 [1896]: 80-81.

⁸⁰ Buchanan 2004: 110.

of their sockets, and the veins on my temple seemed ready to burst. I made no noise however, determining to obtain "victory or death", but endured the terrible pain, as well as I could, sustained under the whole by the thoughts of sweet liberty.'81

More fortunate fugitives received assistance from other passengers, both white and free black, who purchased their tickets or pretended that the fugitive was their property. Defense meanwhile connected with and used the existent and ever developing Underground Railroad network, or were smuggled into staterooms by stewards and chambermaids, or obtained food from sympathetic deckhands. However, not everyone was ready to lend assistance or simply look the other way, so that the fleeing fugitive needed to be watchful not to be recognised by some one who knew them and wary of being betrayed by those who 'aided' them. Indeed, when Hughes made his first attempt to escape by boat, and concealed himself for three days amongst its freight, he was seized by the second mate as he came out in search of food: 'In a minute he eyed me over and said: "Why, I have a reward for you." In a second he had me go up stairs to the captain. This raised a great excitement among the passengers; and, in a minute, I was besieged with numerous questions. Some spoke as if they were sorry for me and said if they had known I was a poor runaway slave they would have slipped me ashore."

To underline the scale of this culture of flight, of the number and frequency of successful escapes, appeal can be made not only to the actions of state legislators but to the flurry of newspapers advertising rewards for the successful capture and return of fugitive slaves, or that published cautionary notices or damming editorials about runaways and those that aided them. For example, on 21 April 1849 the New Orleans paper *The Daily Picayune* carried two articles that offered rewards of twenty dollars for the capture of two 'mulatto boys'. Both articles provided cursory descriptions of height and dress, one even

81 Brown 2001 [1849]: 60-61.

84 Hughes 1997 [1897]: 80-81.

⁸² Other assistance, for example, came from people who lived in the mountainous upcountry areas in close proximity to the free states (the upper south) and riverside farmers and lumberman cutting and cording wood for steamboats.

⁸³ Buchanan 2004: 111. Buchanan quotes from an article that appeared in the *New Orleans Picayune* entitled, "Caution to Ship and Steamboat Masters," where the editors charged, "Colored stewards, or cooks, or hands on the boats use their cunning and the means peculiar to their position to conceal slaves on board boats till they reach safe places for landing." Buchanan 2004: 113.

cautioning steamboat captain's 'against receiving the [...] boy on board'. Similarly, some five years earlier, the same newspaper printed an editorial entitled, 'Caution to Ship and Steamboat Masters' in which the author denounced free black steamboat workers with working 'to entice away our laboring population, and to assist in concealing and harboring them here, and then facilitating their flight to Ohio – which is our Canada.' Furthermore, it declared that, 'Colored stewards, or cooks, or hands on the boats use their cunning and the means peculiar to their position to conceal slaves on board boats till they reach safe places of landing.'

In a similar vein, the Missouri Supreme Court reported in 1846 how: 'The facility of escaping on the boats navigating our waters [...] will induce many slaves to leave the service of their masters. Their ingenuity will be exerted to invent means of eluding the vigilance of Captains, and many ways will be employed to get off unnoticed. One escape by such means, will stimulate others to make the attempt.' Such concerns likewise led to legislation in Louisiana, Missouri, Kentucky, and Tennessee which bestowed financial culpability for the loss of slaves firmly on steamboat owners and prohibited officers from allowing slaves to stow away, book passage, or to obtain work without their master's consent. However, given the cultural climate of the Mississippi River Valley, such laws proved difficult to enforce, and owners and captains opted to limit their use of slave hands when working on routes that ventured into free territory, especially at ports on the upper Ohio, such as Cincinnati. ⁸⁷ Indeed, it became routine for boats stopping at, Cincinnati, for example, to disembark slave hands lower down at either Louisville or Covington and retrieve them on their return. ⁸⁸

In 1850 these State measures were bolstered with the passing of the Fugitive Slave Act that sought to not only 'curtail the work of the Underground Railroad [...] [but] placate Southern politicians in Congress.' Amongst its ten sections, this amendment to the earlier Fugitive Slave Law of 1793 legislated for the pursuit and reclamation of slaves into free-

⁸⁵ The adverts provide descriptions: 'a dark mulatto boy [...] 5 feet 7 inches [...] black sack coat [...] pantaloons and black hat.' *The Daily Picayune*, 21 April, 1849. Saturday Evening Edition.

⁸⁶ Quoted in Buchanan 2004: 103.

⁸⁷ Buchanan 2004: 103.

⁸⁸ Hunter 1993 [1949]: 449.

⁸⁹ Lowance 2000: xxii.

state territory (Sec. 6.); imposing fines ('not exceeding One thousand dollars') and prison sentences ('not exceeding six months') on 'any person who shall knowingly and willingly obstruct, hinder, or prevent, [...] attempt to rescue, [...] or shall harbour or conceal [...] [any] fugitive' (Sec. 7.).⁹⁰ It also made the testimony of any alleged fugitive in any trial or hearing inadmissible as evidence (Sec. 6.). The reaction of Abolitionist was unsurprisingly condemnatory. For instance, the former slave, writer, orator, Frederick Douglass ('What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?') characterise this law as the nationalisation of slavery: 'By an act of the American Congress [...] slavery has been nationalized in its most horrible and revolting form. By that act, Mason and Dixon's line has been obliterated; New York has become as Virginia; and the power to hold, hurt, and sell men, women, and children, as slaves, remains no longer a mere state institution, but is now an institution of the whole United States.'⁹¹

To provide specific illustration of some of the techniques and the kind of emotions associated with the experience of escape attention may be directed to two key passages in Bibb's *Narrative*. The first escape takes place in late 1837 on board a steamboat bound for Cincinnati. As preparation for this voyage Bibb first accumulates a little money and a suit he has 'never been seen or known to wear before' to 'avoid detection'. His emotions meanwhile are dominated by ambivalence – by the voice of liberty 'thundering in my soul' that induces him to be free, by the attachments of friends and relatives, the 'love of home and birth-place', and by the love of an affectionate wife and child. Such ambivalence is further augmented by the fear of his inevitably being pursued and the likelihood of his being killed or captured and ultimately sold 'down the river', 'to linger out my days in hopeless bondage on some cotton and sugar plantation.' The desire for freedom however wins out and Bibb begins his journey by gaining permission of self-hire and traveling to the Ohio river under the pretext of looking for work. Once at the river he manages to cross over to Madison, Indiana in search of a passing steamboat. As he waits, concealed under the 'curtain of night', he writes how his anticipation was 'worked up to the highest pitch',

⁹⁰ Lowance, Jr. 2003: 27-28.

⁹¹ Lowance, Jr. 2003: 40.

⁹² Bibb refers to this as being 'one of the most self-denying acts of my whole life.' Bibb 2000 [1849]: 460.

and how he changes his suit in readiness of going aboard. Soon he hears 'the welcome sound' of the steamboat that would 'waft' him beyond the limits of slavery and with a strong desire to be off, and a trembling heart for the danger involved, he prays for aid and protection.

I then stepped boldly on the deck of this splendid swift-running Steamer, bound for the city of Cincinnati. This being the first voyage that I had ever taken on board of a Steamer, I was filled with fear and excitement, knowing that I was surrounded by the vilest enemies of God and man, liable to be seized and bound hand and foot, by any white man, and taken back into captivity. But I crowded myself back from the light among the deck passengers, where it would be difficult to distinguish me from a white man. Every time during the night that the mate came round with a light after the hands, I was afraid he would see I was a colored man, and take me up; hence I kept from the light as much as possible. Some men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil; but this was not the case with myself; it was to avoid detection in doing right. [...] Being so near the color of a slaveholder, they could not, or did not find me out that night among the white passengers. There was one of the deck hands on board called out on his watch, whose hammock was swinging up near by me. I asked him if he would let me lie in it. He said if I would pay him twenty-five cents that I might lie in it until day. [...] No one could see my face ... but I never closed my eyes for sleep that night.⁹³

Bibb's first experience of western steamboat 'travel' is conditioned and shaped by his circumstances as a fugitive slave, characterised by emotions undoubtedly heightened by the public and contained environment of the steamboat. On the one hand, his emotions are those of fear and anxiety – fear of recognition and a fear of capture. As a means of self preservation Bibb first hides in the boat's darkened corners, but then uses 25 cents to secure a hammock in which no one is able to see his face and in which he spends the night. Fear also assumes the everyday dangers common to steamboat travel, primarily of explosions: 'every time the boat landed, and blowed off steam I was afraid the boilers had bursted and we should all be killed.' On the other hand, there is the sense of excitement, and the associations of 'splendid' and 'swift-running', a means of 'waft[ing]' him to his liberty.

Interestingly, this ambivalence of emotive sensations is echoed in an image system structured on opposition, of light and dark, concealment and exposure, and corresponding moral values: light as good, positive; dark as evil, negative. That this moral value is also

⁹³ Bibb 2000 [1849]: 462.

religious in substance is clearly underlined ('Some men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil,' and of 'being surrounded by the vilest enemies of 'God'), and functions as a part of the *Narrative*'s Christian moral centre. So it is that Bibb seeks concealment in the darkness, escaping both natural light and the light of the mate. Indirectly, Bibb verifies his own position, keeping from 'the light' not because his deeds are evil, but to avoid detection in doing right.

The second and 'greatest of my adventures' of escape appears toward the very end of Bibb's narrative (chapter 16), and sees him attempt to secure passage from Jefferson City down to St. Louis and from St. Louis to Cincinnati. Once again he starts by stressing his fears and anxieties of his expectation of finding an advertisement for his person and of his being 'interrogated and required to prove whether I was actually a free man or a slave.' He similarly reminds the reader of the challenges faced in securing passage on board, how a captain could not take a coloured passenger without appropriate documentation and his having to purchase a valid ticket. Initially Bibb hits upon the idea, like Henry Brown, of getting himself boxed up as freight and having himself shipped to St. Louis, but dismisses the idea because 'I had no friend I could trust'. Instead, he adopts the stratagem of passing himself off as a body servant to a group of passengers and purposefully purchases a large trunk. He then waits at the hotel until he sees the steamboat approach, and simply follows the passengers as they move towards the boat 'as if' he were their servant and 'as if the trunk was full'. When the passengers go straight up the stairs to the cabin he follows them and waits patiently by the trunk 'as if' taking care of it – a strategy which convinces the captain he is 'their slave'. Finally, aware that some account would have to be given of himself he takes up the trunk and goes down amongst the deck passengers.⁹⁴

Having made it on board he is now confronted with the necessity of purchasing a ticket from the clerk. To accomplish this task he sets about 'insinuating' himself amongst the many Irish passengers on deck in the hope of winning over at least one of their number and convincing him to purchase his ticket for him. To ensure this comradely spirit he joins them in their drinking and general merriment, inviting them all to the bar and buying them

⁹⁴ Bibb 2000 [1849]: 538.

whisky. In this way he 'speedily' acquires 'their respect and sympathy' and creates 'a kind of a union'. He writes: 'We sat together and laughed and talked freely [...] singing songs and telling long yarns.' Ten minutes later he repeats his act of generosity and is soon regarded as 'one of the most liberal and gentlemanly men on board' – the deck passengers 'ready to do anything for me'. Indeed, when the time comes to buy his ticket he asks one of his 'Irish friends' if he would take his money and purchase his ticket for him, to which the man responds: "yes sir, I will get you a tacket [sic]".' Finally he adds: 'When they came round to gather the tickets before we got to St. Louis, my ticket was taken with the rest, and no questions were asked me.'95

In their respective representations of the western steamboat the narratives of William Wells Brown and Henry Bibb highlight the extent to which it played a part in the daily lives of southern slaves. Whether that meant the traumatic experience of transportation and familial separation or the ambivalent blend of fear and excitement, of anxiety and the irrepressible yearning for liberty, their accounts provide an important, alternative perspective of western steamboat culture. Indeed, behind the fashionable image of its white gingerbread aesthetic, its socializing cabin passengers and freight-filled deck, the western steamboat was part and parcel of America's internal slave trade, and had its own particular space in the history of African American culture. For example, the African American slave laboured as steward, waiter or chambermaid attending to the wants of cabin passengers, or as deck hands and fireman stacking freight or feeding the fires. In his capacity as waiter on the Enterprize Brown was placed in an ideal position to offer details of what that daily toil entailed, yet he significantly limits his representations on the degraded and dehumanised treatment of the slave, and the emotions that mark the (often permanent) separation of families. The reasons for such specificity are arguably attributable to the larger abolitionist agenda in which the work functioned, which sought to expose the plight of the southern slave and her or his status as merely a financial commodity. As such the steamboat becomes merely a tool in a

⁹⁵ Bibb 2000 [1849]: 538.

larger commercial industry. For his part, Bibb provides details and emotions connected with escape and transportation, with the risks that any attempted flight to the free northern states entailed, and the deceptions required for securing steamboat passage. Like Brown his narrative sheds light on a number of frequently obscured aspects of western steamboat culture and enlarges the list and significance of existing associations.

CHAPTER FIVE

MELVILLE'S WESTERN STEAMBOAT

'it is good to be shifty in a new country.'1

The impunity with which these professed gamblers carry on their trade, and the course of crime contingent upon it [...] is one of the most crying evils existing in this society. The Legs are associated in gangs, have a system perfectly organized, and possess a large capital invested in this pursuit; they are seldom alone, always armed to the teeth, bound to sustain each other, and hold life at a pin's fee [...] not a steamboat stirs from any quarter, but one or more of the gang proceed on board, in some guise or other.²

MELVILLE'S LAST NOVEL

Unlike his time served on board of the *St. Lawrence*, the *Acushnet*, and the *United States*, experiences that primed him for his later labours on *Redburn* (1849), *Moby-Dick* (1851), and *White-Jacket* (1850) respectively, Herman Melville's experience of western riverboat travel was limited to one brief journey west with his friend Eli Fly in June of 1840: the two men, like thousands of others, 'going west' to seek their fortune.³ Their destination was the riverside city of Galena, Illinois and Melville's uncle, Thomas Melvill, from whom the two men hoped to obtain both introductions and lodging. As it turned out, Thomas Melvill, while having achieved 'a fairly prominent' position in the community, was courting legal and financial disaster, and the two journeymen quickly saw little alternative but to head back east to New York.⁴ Over the past half century, this six month journey has been a source of speculation for scholars such as Leon Howard and John W. Nichol who have

¹ Johnson J. Hooper. Quoted in Meine 1930: xxii.

² William Gratten Tyrone Power, *Impressions of America, during the Years 1833, 1834, and 1835*. Published 1836, quoted in Smith 2007: 144.

³ Parker 2003: 1, 167.

⁴ Parker 2003: 1, 167. According to Hershel Parker Herman and Fly embarked upon a three day journey aboard a canal boat on the Erie Canal from Albany to Buffalo, travelling via Detroit and Chicago, arriving in Galena across the Prairie from Lake Michigan in early July. Thomas Low Nichols offers a good description of what Melville might well have experienced in *Forty Years of American Life* (1864). Equally, Charles Dickens in his *American Notes for General Circulation* (1842) gives details of life on-board a Pennsylvania canal boat.

endeavoured to retrace Melville's route through the extensive use of western imagery visible throughout his oeuvre.⁵

According to Nichol, of the three main paths open to the traveller or migrant heading west in 1840, Melville's writing would indicate he chose the northern route along the Erie Canal and Lakes to Chicago (passing Cleveland and Detroit), and from Chicago by stagecoach across the prairies to the riverside town of Galena.⁶ In its fourteen year history prior to Melville's arrival, the city had grown from wilderness to a wealthy "boom town", spawning its own fire department (1830), a First Presbyterian church (1838), a Temperance society (1838), and an alliance with St. Louis that gave it the majority control in the largest steamboat line on the Upper Mississippi. It was a city of some two thousand miners, farmers, merchants and professionals, living in some six hundred homes, most of whom had been enticed by the money to be made from its lead mines – mines that by 1845 were responsible for 83% of the nation's lead and relied on steamboats for transportation. Such activity undoubtedly provided the future author with opportunity to observe the 'animated appearance' of riverside life, an opportunity to gain some familiarity with western steamboat culture, and the sheer diversity and richness of frontier society. Equally, if not more useful, was Melville's possible route of return down the Mississippi via St. Louis to Cairo, and then from Cairo up the Ohio River, past Mammoth Cave and Marietta,⁸ to somewhere in the Alleghenies.9 However, and despite the efforts of scholars to flesh this trip out, no actual documentary evidence exists from which to elaborate Melville's later literary representation of steamboat travel.¹⁰

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⁵ Parker writes: 'From visual images scattered thinly through Melville's later writings, including poetry, Leon Howard plausibly plotted a course for his return to the East – down the Mississippi past St. Louis to Cairo, then up the Ohio on his way to New York City. ... No documentary evidence has been found either for the route or the month of Melville's return, but psychologically it would have been out of the question for the disappointed youths to retrace their way across the prairie to Chicago then their watery way along the lakes.' Parker 2003: 1, 178.

⁶ Nichol 1951: 615. See 'The Town-Ho's Story.' Howard suggests that Melville and Fly most likely traveled on horse back. Such a path would have taken Melville through Elgin, Rochford and Freeport as he travelled cross country. Howard 1951: 35.

⁷ The city was founded in 1826 on the Galena (then Fever) River near the Mississippi.

⁸ Nichol 1951: 624. Both places are mentioned in *The Confidence-Man*.

⁹ Delbanco 2005: 32-34.

¹⁰ See footnote 5.

By the time Melville came to write *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade* (1857)¹¹ his literary maturity had evolved while his reputation had suffered: the early successes of Typee (1846) and Omoo (1847) had been succeeded by the critical and public failures of Mardi (1848), Moby-Dick and Pierre (1852). 12 Such an 'evolutionary' and commercial arc had financial implications, that, despite irregular moments of equilibrium, saw Melville, by 1856, feeling the weight of familial dependency for the purchase of his Arrowhead home. 13 To make matters worse, the years up to and including 1856, witnessed bouts of sciatica and rheumatism – the former serious enough to restrict the flow of literary production. ¹⁴ That being said, with the (book form) publication of Israel Potter (1855), 15 and the personal sketch, 'I and My Chimney' in March of the same year, convalescence summoned fresh inspiration that became Melville's ninth and last novel.¹⁶ What in fact provided the creative spark, like the author's intentions, are matters of speculation; ranging from the historical figure of William Thompson, the original 'confidence-man', to a costume picnic-party that Melville attended. What is certain, is that, like his journey west, no personal material, be it diary entry or epistolary note, exists to shed light on the process of composition, though the intertextual nature of the novel points to a library of literary and broader cultural sources and 'an extensive familiarity with the literature of the West'. 17 Nor, unfortunately, is there much illumination about meaning and interpretation to be had in the surviving fragmentary manuscript pages that provide details of changes and amendments.¹⁸

Equally clear is the almost univocal character of contemporary reviews that, for the most part, proved dismissive, negative, or even sarcastically condemnatory. The Newark *Advertiser* (23 May 1857), for instance, opined: 'It seems as if Melville was afraid to write as well as he can, or else he has the dyspepsia. Nothing else can account for such vagaries.'

¹¹ All quotations from *The Confidence-Man* are taken from the Penguin edition: Melville 1990 [1857].

¹² Moby-Dick sold fewer then three thousand copies five years after publication, *Pierre* but 283 in the first eight months, and was never published in England. Cook 1996: 91. The 'Historical Note' in the Northwestern-Newberry Edition of Melville's *The Confidence-Man* contradicts this last point, stating that *Pierre* 'had scarcely circulated there.' In Melville 1984 [1857]: 323.

¹³ Melville was indebted to his father-in-law, Lemuel Shaw Sr..

¹⁴ Howard 1951: 222.

¹⁵ The book had been serialized in *Putnam's Monthly*.

¹⁶ Published in *Putnam's Monthly*.

¹⁷ Smith 2007: 170.

¹⁸ See Melville 1984 [1857].

¹⁹ For contemporaneous reviews see Branch 1974.

The *Portland Daily Advertiser* (8 April 1857), on the other hand, characterised the novel as 'fantastic, odd and obscure', while the New York *Journal*, some two months later, opted for 'eccentric'.²⁰ Indeed, confusion and bewilderment was typical. The most common criticism however, pertained to the unnatural or improbable portrait of its characters and its abuse of those 'sufficiently understood rules of probability'. The *Literary Gazette* (11 April 1857), for example, not only characterised the novel as seeking 'to inculcate philosophical truths through the medium of nonsensical people talking nonsense', but also famously maintained: 'A novel it is not, unless a novel means forty five conversations held on board a steamer, conducted by personages who might pass for the errata of creation, and so far resembling the Dialogues of Plato as to be undoubted Greek to ordinary men.' So perplexing did the novel appear that the same reviewer went so far as to declare his suspicions of its being an elaborate hoax of P. T. Barnum ilk.²¹

On the whole, English reviews proved more 'sympathetic and sophisticated' in their responses. The London *The Spectator*, for instance, focused on the setting of the steamboat and questions of genre and literary ancestry; the London *Era*, meanwhile, elaborated on the (dis)guises adopted by the confidence-man, even suggesting they were all (from 'the deaf mute' to 'the cosmopolitan'), the activities of 'one man'.²² Other reviews, like that of *The Leader* (11 April 1857) applauded the 'vivid, natural Mississippi landscape [that] is rapidly painted before the mind; [how] the narrative is almost rhythmic, the talk [...] cordial, [and

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²⁰ New York *Journal*, July 1857. The word eccentric also appears in *Mrs. Stephens' Illustrated New Monthly* (New York), June 1857.

⁽New York), June 1857.

The Literary Gazette, 11 April 1857. Of course, not all responses were of puzzlement or confusion or disparagement, The Boston Advertiser, 8 April 1857, for example, offered ideas of Melville's 'grand morale: [...] that the world is full of knaves and fools, and that a man who ventures to believe what is told to him, necessarily belongs to the latter class.' The Westminster and Foreign Quarterly Review [London], July 1857, also opines that 'Perhaps the moral is the gullibility of the great Republic, when taken on its own tack.' On 10 April 1857, the Boston Evening Transcript, while reminding the reader of the contemporaneous cultural relevancy of the novel's central figure, simultaneously confirms the attraction or celebrity he possesses for public, writing: 'One of the indigenous characters who has figured long in our journals, courts, and cities, is "the Confidence Man;" his doings form one of the staples of villainy, and an element in romance of roguery. Countless are the dodges attributed to this ubiquitous personage, and his adventures would equal those of Jonathan Wild.'

²² In Melville 1984 [1857]: 323. *The Spectator* (London) 11 April 1857; London *Era*. 17 May 1857. The New York *Dispatch*, 5 April 1857, also ambiguously hints as much when it refers to 'the disguises *he* assumes.' *Emphasis added*.

that] bright American touches are scattered over the perspective – the great steamboat deck, the river coasts, the groups belonging to various gradations of New-World life.'²³

The English reviewer was also more inclined to address Melville's portrait in light of its unfavourable portrait of American ideas and ideology. The Saturday Review (23 May 1857) for example, offers: 'Of the picture of American society which is here shown us, we cannot say much that is favourable. The money-getting spirit which appears to pervade every class of men in the States, almost like a monomania, is vividly portrayed in this satire; together with the want of trust and honour, and the innumerable "operations" or "dodges" which it is certain to engender.'24 Similarly, and citing the steamboat as the 'epitome of the American world', the Westminster and Foreign Quarterly Review (11 April 1857) credits Melville with having the vital 'knowledge [...] of the Yankee world, to write such a book and make the satire acute and telling, and the scenes not too improbable for the faith given to fiction.' The reviewer even proclaimed the novel 'a remarkable work', one that will only add to its author's reputation.²⁵ However, and despite such predictions, evidence argues that relatively few copies were sold – in England, only 386 of the 1000 printed copies - while in the United States it remained out of print until 1923. (The first scholarly edition did not appear until 1954.)²⁶ Indeed, even the famous Melvillian revival of the 1920s left the novel 'neglected and misunderstood'.²⁷

Since the pioneering work of Elizabeth S. Forster (1954), investigation has proved expansive: from the structural to the thematic, allegorical to the satirical, the biographical to the autobiographical, literary to historical, and from the cultural to political, and socioeconomic. Even Melville's use of the Mississippi steamboat has stirred diverse responses

²³ The Leader, 11 April 1857.

²⁵ Westminster and Foreign Quarterly Review (London), 11 April 1857.

²⁴ Interestingly, the *Berkshire County Eagle* (America), 19 June 1857, quotes this very passage, but concludes its brief notice with retort that as a picture of America, 'it is *slightly* distorted'.

²⁶ In Melville 1984 [1857]: 317. 'No record of sales [in America] survives, but every indication is that Dix, Edwards & Co. could not have recouped expenses in the weeks before the firm failed in late April, 1857.' Melville 1984 [1857]: 316.

²⁷ Matterson in Melville 1990 [1857]: xiv. Though the decades up to the mid-twentieth-century witnessed the publication of several articles or book entries, it was not until the work of Elizabeth S. Forster, that a genuine appreciation was inaugurated. From that time on forward the reputation of Melville's last great novel has only grown, while ideas of its meaning and import diversified and proliferated, leading to books devoted in their entirety to the work, for example those of Helen P. Trimpi and Jonathan A. Cook.

from out-right dismissal²⁸ to its cultural and literary content.²⁹ Such extensive critical and scholarly activity, not to mention the complexity and ambiguity of the novel itself (a novel where no event, act, object, person or turn of phrase has but one meaning), places a strain on readings that of necessity must remain brief – as of the case in point. As such, the focus of this chapter is limited to two particular areas of interest. The first entails an examination of Melville's Mississippi steamboat and its passengers, locating that representation in the midst of a larger cultural, historical context. The second, and drawing together the novel's formal approach and thematic content, with especial respect to the figure of the so-called 'confidence-man', engages with the novel's inimitable portrait of contemporary society. That is, reading the novel with reference to ideas of confidence and distrust, of community and self-reliance, perception and epistemology, it explores the contemporaneous nature of societal interaction as visible on Melville's steamboat.

THE STEAMBOAT AND HER PASSENGERS

In 1951 Jay Leyda identified – at least for the modern reader – a certain Samuel Willis as the most likely model for Melville's titular trickster, unearthing an article in the *Springfield*

²⁸ Wenke 1995: 195. Wenke regards the journey down the Mississippi River as mere plot device. Smith also draws attention to the criticism of John Seelye, who argues 'that the "ironic, closely-worked fabric [of the novel] is the wrong canvas upon which to depict the great, sweeping panorama of the Mississippi." Smith

²⁹ See Dolan 1993. Dolan writes of the steamboat encounter in nineteenth-century sentimental literature, of 'the trope of the passenger-boat tripe had become a semiconvention in domestic fiction.' He refers specifically to Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852) and Susan Warner's Wild, Wild, World (1850). For example, he writes: 'In Stowe's novel, for example, the title character finds temporary salvation (in the form of little Evangeline St. Clair) during his perilous voyage down the Mississippi River. In Warner's earlier work, we find a similarly set scene that serves an equally similar narrative function. Relatively early in the novel, young Ellen Montgomery wanders forlornly about the deck of a Hudson River steamer and has a serendipitous encounter with a stranger who temporarily eases her pain. Just as Tom's riverboat meeting with Eva eventually leads to his purchase away from the brutal slave trader Haley, so too does Ellen's chance encounter provide her with greater material (as well as a spiritual) comfort in subsequent chapters of the narrative.' Moreover, he argues that 'readers of popular novels like [...] Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin [...] Warner's Wild, Wild World [...] may have grown mildly accustomed to the use of the main deck of a riverboat as an occasional chronotrope for the advantageous meeting of total strangers.' 'only a riverboat could provide the necessary setting for a story in which the man who approached you could be either a swindler or a person in actual need, a criminal entrepreneur or an honest philanthropist.' Dolan 1993: 137-141.

Republican (5 May 1855) proclaiming the arrest of the 'Original Confidence Man'. The contemporary reader, as the review in the *Boston Evening Transcript* implies, required no such assistance: "The Confidence Man" was not just an 'indigenous character', someone 'who has figured long in our journals, courts, and cities,' but whose 'doings form one of the staples of villainy, and an element in the romance of roguery. But Willis, like the earlier William Thompson, was an urban phenomenon, a figure associated more with the streets of an north-eastern metropolis than the 'wilderness' and forests of the Mississippi River frontier. As such, the merging of 'confidence-man' and western steamboat appears incongruous: more apposite, surely, the steamboats plying the Hudson River. Melville, however, sought something more encompassing and pan-American for the setting of his satire, something that more accurately represented the emerging American nation. ³²

There were, of course, a range of practical and technological differences between the eastern and western steamboat, not least because of the peculiarities of each river, and the tasks with which each were charged. Yet, it is more appropriate to suppose it was the context of the frontier, western steamboat travel, and the Mississippi River in particular, that was the motive behind Melville's choice. As Nichol shows, Melville had previously made several references to the western frontier in his literary works, writing, for example, in *Israel Potter* how the 'Western Spirit is, or yet will be (for no other is or can be), the true American one.' Or even earlier, in *Mardi*, where he portrays the Mississippi River as the central artery of a vast inland network: 'And as the great Mississippi masters his watery nations: Ohio, with all his leagued streams; Missouri, bringing down in torrents the clans from the highlands; Arkansas, his Tartar rivers from the plain – so, with all the past and present pouring in me, I roll down my billows from afar.'³³

³⁰ Springfield Republican, 5 May 1855. The article had originally appeared in the Albany Evening Journal on 28 April, 1855. Leyda shared the connection with Forster, but it was the later work of Paul Smith and Johannes D. Bergmann that cemented the historical and fictional connection.

³¹ Boston Evening Transcript, 10 April 1857.

³² The London Illustrated Times pointed out the advantage of using the steamboat, stating that 'you can have all your characters present in the vessel, and several of your scenes taking place in different parts of the vessel, if necessary, at the same time; by which means you exhibit a certain variety in your otherwise tedious uniformity.' 25 April 1857. Similarly, the John Bull and Britannica London, points to the appropriateness of the steamboat, saying that it 'is not ill-chosen'. 9 May 1857.

³³ Quoted in Nichol 1951: 614 & 621.

There is in these quotes a foreshadowing of *The Confidence-Man*'s 'all-fusing spirit of the West', an ideology that is guiding America, 'helter-skelter, in one cosmopolitan and confident tide'. ³⁴ Nor should the role of the steamboat be overlooked, not only as a symbol of this 'spirit' but as its practical embodiment, utilizing the network of 'leagued streams' to create, or better yet, industrialize the lines of commercial and cultural communication, and, critically, assist in the movement and relocation of residents and settlers. Indeed, the fusion of steamboat ('machine power') and western expansion, proved instrumental in convincing many Americans of their 'Manifest Destiny' to populate the continent and as 'conclusive sanction for faith in the unceasing progress of mankind. ³⁵ Thus, in describing the *decent* of the *Fidèle* as driven by an 'all-fusing spirit', its decks crowded with '*one* cosmopolitan and confident tide, ³⁷ Melville, not least because of the events on board, is in fact mocking such unwavering confidence. Whatever Melville's own, private associations, however, *The Confidence-Man* fed into an ever expanding field of competing ideas and images (political, romantic, economic and technological), not only of the Mississippi River, but 'frontier' life in general.

In his study, *River of Dreams* (2007), Thomas Ruys Smith has explored these many representations ('imaginings'), chronicling the changing pattern of signification that placed the Mississippi River both 'physically and culturally at the heart of the nation.' Indeed, for Smith, 'The story of the imagined Mississippi River is the story of antebellum America.' As previous chapters have shown, representation assumed a variety of forms and appeared in a variety of historical, sociological and fictional publications. For example, and credited intertexts for Melville's novel, were two works by the 'itinerant missionary', the Reverend Timothy Flint, ³⁹ *Recollections of the Last Ten Years in the Mississippi Valley* (1826) and

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³⁴ Melville 1990 [1857]: 14.

³⁵ Leo Marx 2000 [1964]: 191-192. See also Chapter 1 of this thesis.

³⁶ The word 'descent' is here used not only to describe the steamboats journey south to New Orleans, but to evoke the many echoes of the idea of descent visible in the text. For example, the 'stranger's' descent in to the emigrants quarters, and the evocative phrase, 'sold down the river', associated with southern slavery.

³⁷ Melville 1990 [1857]: 14. *Emphasis added*.

³⁸ Smith 2007: 3. One central tenet, and markedly visible in Smith's discussion of the Mississippi as an 'Underworld' is the difference between 'representation' and historical 'reality', between, for example, the mythic figure of John Murrell and the real-life Murrell who, according to James Penick, was 'at best an "indifferent thief [...] probably never a highwayman or a murderer." Quoted in Smith 2007: 150.

³⁹ Smith 2007: 60.

The History and Geography of the Mississippi Valley (1828),⁴⁰ and James Hall's Sketches of History, Life, and Manners, in the West (1835).⁴¹ In a compatible sociological vein there were the innumerable 'travel narratives', both foreign and domestic, that featured accounts of life on the frontier and in such growing towns as Cincinnati, Louisville and or St. Louis. And, because most journeys were undertaken by steamboat, they also featured descriptions of society and social activity onboard as well as representations of nature ('landscape') and climate.⁴² Then there were a myriad local newspapers (Louisville Advertiser, Niles' Weekly Register, the Mississippian, Louisville Journal, and the New Orleans Picayune) that amidst the everyday advertisements, editorials and mundane occurrences, reported on such events such as the 'Vicksburg hangings', the activities ('history') of John Murrell, and steamboat accidents and explosions.⁴³ Perhaps most important, however, were the (tall-) tales of the 'Southwestern humourists' that circulated in journals like Harper's New Monthly Magazine and the Spirit of the Times, before finding permanent residence in book form.

According to Franklin Julius Meine, who, in 1930 compiled an anthology of such tales, among the most prominent collections were Augustus Baldwin Longstreet's, *Georgia Scenes*, (1835) and Joseph G. Baldwin's *Flush Times of Alabama and Mississippi* (1853). The former, writes Meine, offered a variety 'scenes, characters and incidents' of Georgian life, 'show[ing] red-necked Georgia crackers in eye-gouging, nose-biting fights, in coarse horse-trade wrangles, and in capers which even invaded funeral processions.' The latter, meanwhile, focused on 'the fast-shifting, turbulent Southwestern frontier,' entertaining the reader with a range of 'character sketches and anecdotes designed "to illustrate the periods, the characters, and the phases of society" of that [westering] movement.' Perhaps the most famous, argues Meine, was Johnson J. Hooper's 1845 *Adventures of Simon Suggs*, which brought into focus in single character all the 'virulent forces of frontier life'. Simon Suggs, he characterises, was 'a sharp, shrewd swashbuckler, whose whole philosophy "lies snugly

⁴⁰ Seelve 1969: 75-79.

⁴¹ In Melville 1971 [1857]: 249.

⁴² See for example Chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis. See also Merrick 2001 [1909]: 132-142, ('Bars and Barkeepers' and 'Gambling and Gamblers'.)

⁴³ Smith 2007: 141-175. Specifically, *History of the Detection, Conviction, Life and Designs of John A. Murel* (1835), attributed to Augustus Q. Walton, though, according to Smith, probably written by Virgil Stewart. Smith 2007: 150. Indeed, in addition to the many literary representations of the Mississippi and frontier, it is crucial not to simply overlook the weight of historical events.

in his favorite aphorism – 'it is good to be shifty in a new country' – which means that it is right and proper that one should live as merrily and as comfortably as possible at the expense of others."'⁴⁴

Within this growing catalogue of sketches and tall tales there were some in which western steamboat culture featured prominently, tales like 'The Big Bear of Arkansas' and 'The Little Steamboats of the Mississippi', by T. B. Thorpe, or 'Breaking a Bank' by Sol Smith, all of which introduced a variety of associations with the western steamboat and life on the Mississippi. For example, Smith's tale centres on the figure of Captain Summons, who demonstrates his brand of justice, guaranteeing the rights of all passengers on board the *Dr Franklin*, by not only assisting at the Sabbath services of the travelling clergyman, but equally placing himself at the disposal of those who wish to dance and gamble. Other tales meanwhile consolidated associations of drinking and fighting or the dangerous nature of travel itself, whether that meant accidents resulting from the ubiquitous snags and sawyers embedded in the river, or the dangers of fire, collision, or, most deadly, exploding boilers. (Public awareness of such dangers may, of course be accounted for by the steady stream of newspaper reports, or the fears of travel writers or travel guides, and repeated attempts at governmental legislative action.)

Smith explores all these associations, and innumerable others, detailing the role of the Mississippi in American 'culture and consciousness'. When it comes to contextualising Melville's novel, however, he focuses on the Mississippi as 'underworld', a world in which 'drinking and gambling' proved just the tip of an 'iceberg that descended through extortion and prostitution to organized crime and cold-blooded murder.' He writes, not only did the

⁴⁴ Meine 1930: xviii-xxii. The experience or 'location' of the reader might inevitably influence the reading, some one living on the East coast and unfamiliar with Mississippi steamboat travel would read differently to a resident of the Mississippi Valley.

⁴⁵ Thomas D. Clark writes: 'Thousands of gamblers, cheats and blacklegs followed river gambling for a livelihood. Formerly they had remained stationary in the river towns, and there took advantage of landing flatboatmen and travelers. Captains were supposed to watch out for those rascals and to see that none of their passengers were tricked, and if a blackleg got aboard [the captain] had instructions from the owners to "bank" him at once. Few precautions, however, were actually taken, and gambling on board the steamboats was as commonplace as stopping for wood. Sometimes the boats' officers were *en league* with the sharpers, and always put them off at the "right time" and at the "right woodyards." Next to gambling, excessive drinking and the "entertainment halls" were notorious vices of river travel. These two evils combined were the means of many innocent "gulls" losing personal fortunes within the scope of a short voyage.' Quoted in Cook 1996: 27.

⁴⁶ Brockmann 2002.

Mississippi offer 'the ingredients for much myth making [... but], at least imaginatively,' it proved the 'arena for high stakes, long shots, hope, and luck.' In short, it 'resonated in late antebellum American culture as an illicit underworld inhabited by alligator-horse boatmen, devilish gamblers, murderous robbers, and criminal conspirators who planned the overthrow of the river's newly developed urban centres.' To illustrate this catalogue of violent signification, Smith directs attention to a variety of literary creations and a number of key historical events, in some cases, discussing the gap between *fact* and *fiction* (myth). 48

On the one hand, for example, he considers such works as Justin Jones's *Marie; or the Gambler of the Mississippi*,⁴⁹ the various publications (pamphlets, newspapers and books) that dealt with the exploits of the Murrell gang,⁵⁰ as well as the work of the popular German novelist Friedrich Gerstäcker, for instance, *The Pirates of the Mississippi* (1856). He also looks at the many incarnations of the 'Mississippi [urban] mystery novel', such as Ned Buntline's *The Mysteries and Miseries of New Orleans* (1851), Heinrich Börnstein's *The Mysteries of St. Louis* (1851) and Baron Ludwig von Reizenstein's *Mysteries of New Orleans* (1854-55).⁵¹ On the other hand, Smith identifies 'the Murrell conspiracy and its connection to slavery; the Vicksburg lynchings; [and] the equivocal Mississippi gambler' as '[t]he components essential to the emergence of the Mississippi underworld in popular fiction.'⁵²

In light of such prevailing cultural associations Melville's choice of setting for *The Confidence-Man* proves apt. Indeed, all of these associations (accidents, drinking, religion, gambling), contribute to the novel's detailed image system, discernable, for example, in the

⁴⁷ That being said, a distinction needs to be made however between the lower and the upper Mississippi, which, according to Smith, was, by comparison, 'increasingly associated with the picturesque, tourism, and growing urbanization'. Smith 2007: 141.

⁴⁸ For example, The relation of the two is of especial interest to Smith, no more so perhaps than that of the

⁴⁸ For example, The relation of the two is of especial interest to Smith, no more so perhaps than that of the man and the myth of John Murrell.

⁴⁹ No date of publication is given. Smith writes that, Justin Jones was the real name of 'Jack Brace' who was 'a prolific writer of popular fiction in the antebellum years. Of the forty-four works attributed to Jones [...] thirty-three were published before 1855, five have no date, and only two were published after the Civil War, both stories of the war. As such,' he continues, 'it would also seem safe to include this important novel as an antebellum text.' Smith 2007: 216nb17.

⁵⁰ For example, William Gilmore Simms's *Richard Hurdis* (1838) and *The Border Beagles* (1840). Smith 2007: 161-162

⁵¹ For a discussion of these works see Smith 2007: 161-168.

⁵² Smith 2007: 161. For a discussion of these events and popular figures (of gambling as a part of antebellum southern culture), see Smith 2007: 141-175.

mention of the life preserver; in the encounter between Charlie Noble and Frank Goodman; the card playing passengers seated in the cabin; and, amongst the myriad allusions present throughout, the boat's pristine Bible.⁵³ They are similarly implicit in occasional narratorial musings: for instance, 'in this land, and especially in these parts of it, some stories are told about steamboats and railroads fitted to make one a little apprehensive;'⁵⁴ or the pamphlets which chronicle the lives of frontiersmen: 'the lives of Meason, the bandit of Ohio, Murrel, the pirate of the Mississippi, and the brothers Harpe, the Thugs of the Green River country, in Kentucky.'⁵⁵

In amongst these representations is one of particular interest, one sharing enough resonances with the novel's 'piebald parliament' of pilgrim passengers and their activities, as well as its thematic props and linguistic characterisations, to make it a plausible source of inspiration. Published in the 1855 December edition of *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, sixteen months prior to Melville's novel, T. B. Thorpe's 'Remembrances of the Mississippi' provides an attractive portrait of the Mississippi River, its history and society, and, in its final pages, western steamboat culture. The first and most general similarity is the volume and heterogeneous nature of the crowd 'ordinarily' encountered on board a Mississippi steamer. Not only are there 'immigrants from every nationality in Europe', but persons of every class and political persuasion: from English aristocrats to ultra-socialists; conservative bishops to graceless gamblers. ⁵⁶ On the *Fidèle* these immigrants are identified as being 'English, Irish, German, Scotch, Danes'; the crowd an assortment of 'Santa Fé traders in striped blankets, and Broadway bucks in cravats of gold cloth; fine looking Kentucky boatmen, and Japanese-looking Mississippi cotton-planters; Quakers in full drab, and United States soldiers in full regimentals.' ⁵⁷

Nor does Thorpe simply catalogue these passengers but rather presents them as passing their time in social harmony, as brought together by the 'enjoyments, novelties, and intellectual pleasures of such prolonged trips'; with each gentleman 'drop[ping] their

⁵³ Smith confirms that Pitch is an 'alligator-horse', and quotes William Lenz who describes him as "a parody of the Davy Crockett [...] backwoodsman." Smith 2007: 149.

⁵⁴ Melville 1990 [1857]: 296.

⁵⁵ Melville 1990 [1857]: 8.

⁵⁶ Thorpe 1855: 34.

⁵⁷ Melville 1990 [1857]: 14.

wranglings in the admiration of lovely women, or find[ing] a neutral ground of sympathy in the attractions of a gorgeous sunset.'58 Fittingly, 'the aristocratic English lord is intruded upon by the ultra-socialist; the conservative bishop accepts a favor from the graceless gambler; the wealthy planter is heartily amused at the simplicities of a "Northern fanatic"; the farmer from about the arctic regions of Lake Superior exchanges ideas, and discovers consanguinity, with a heretofore unknown person from the everglades of Florida; the frank, open-handed men of the West are charmed with the business-thrift of a party from "Down East". '59 In much the same way, Melville couples 'jesters and mourners, teetotallers and convivialists, deacons and blacklegs', but the connecting 'and' gives no comparable hint as to the spirit of their encounter ('intrude', 'favor' or 'amused'), or in fact whether they meet at all. The focus of the novel, however, is very much on the nature of modern societal encounters, of contemporaneous societal interaction; on what takes place, and on what lies behind, an exchange between strangers. It is particularly concerned with whether an accord or harmony is possible or if strangers meet with distrust and / or questionable motives at heart. (There is no obvious impression that the passengers on the Fidèle enjoy the implied harmony of Thorpe's steamer, but then even this harmony is perhaps only a 'temporary' respite).60

Having presented the colourful spectrum of travellers, Thorpe re-enforces this cosmopolitan heterogeneity and harmony through a catalogue of common everyday items to be found on board, underlining fusion by placing polemical, ambivalent items beside one another. Thus Thorpe writes of playing-cards and Bibles, bowie knives and life preservers, of antique sermons, pills and cholera medicines, garden seeds and powder kegs: gambling and religion; violence and preservation; creation and destruction. In this portrait the western steamboat is a space that negates or temporarily nullifies any potential animosities – animosities signified in the differing attitudes and beliefs of its cultures' multifarious ideology, by the practical purpose and symbolic value of each item. Unlike its elaborated retinue of travelling pilgrims, *The Confidence-Man* contains no such inventory

⁵⁸ There is an interesting echo here of Francis Grund's representation of on board harmony.

⁵⁹ Thorpe 1855: 34.

⁶⁰ Melville 1990 [1857]: 14. Emphasis added.

⁶¹ Thorpe 1855: 34.

of baggage or cargo, though most of the items on Thorpe's list appear throughout the course of the novel: the card players in the cabin; the steamboat's Bible; the herb-doctor's medicine; the old man's 'life preserver'.

There are also several telling characterisations in Thorpe's account, as, for example, when he writes of 'the *cosmopolitanism* of our extraordinary population', or how '[t]he volume of a strange, eventful, and *ever-changing* life is before you, on the pages of which are impressed phases of *original character* such as are nowhere exhibited, nowhere seen, but on the Mississippi.'62 Here it is Thorpe's lexicon which resonates with Melville's linguistic choices, such that the passengers together represent a 'cosmopolitan tide', and where a character referred to as the cosmopolitan dominates one half of the novel's action. Indeed, this cosmopolitan – Frank Goodman by name – is christened by the friends of the boat's barber as 'quite an original', while the text itself, in one of its three metafictive chapters, considers the phrase in regard to literary fictional characters. Meanwhile, 'everchanging' is arguably an apposite phrase to describe, not only the confidence man himself but the nature of events and persons on board the *Fidèle*.

Equally telling is a passage that reflects on the consumption of intoxicating liquors at the bar in the 'social hall':

The "social hall" of a Western steamer is the lounging-place, and "the bar" the centre of attraction. However much we may be opposed to the abuse of alcoholic beverages, the opposition is, in intellectual minds, here often neutralized by the professional manner displayed in their indulgence, and is charmed by the entire ignorance that many evince of any possible moral or physical wrong in their use. To make the consumption of intoxicating liquors a business, and its most minute phenomena, as exhibited by personal experience, a close, scientific speculation; and, above all, to devote the entire intellectual faculties and muscular energy to the one single ambition of consuming the largest amount of alcohol while displaying the least possible physical evidence of its effects, is entirely characteristic of no ordinary specimens of the human race; it is in keeping with the highest display of genius, the most brilliant success in concealing art. 63

The obvious point of intersection with Melville's novel is the conversation between Frank Goodman and Charlie Noble, and the cultural phenomenon of Temperance with its tracts

⁶² Thorpe 1855: 25-41. See Melville's characterisation and discussion of the cosmopolitan as 'quite an original' in Chapter 44.

⁶³ Thorpe 1855: 34.

and novels that branded most alcoholic drinks as poisonous to health and happiness. The scene also involves the specific perils of riverboat drinking as the trickster (Charlie Noble) strives for the inebriation of his 'mark' Goodman, with the ambiguously labelled P.W. (Port Wine). As it turns out, it is the partaking Goodman who displays the 'highest genius' in remaining unaffected by the alcohol. Significantly the two men also converse about the wine itself, discussing the contemporary belief that such drinks are liable to unscrupulous manufacture; that they are either a chemical concoction or simply expensive wine diluted with cheap whiskey or water. Noble offers: "Ill betide those gloomy sceptics who maintain that now-a-days pure wine is unpurchasable; that almost every variety on sale is less the vintage of vineyards than laboratories; that most bar-keepers are but a set of male Brinvillierses, with complaisant arts practicing against the lives of their best friends, their customers.",64

There are, then, visible in the correlation between Thorpe's representation and that offered by Melville, numerous thematic advantages for choosing the frontier and western, Mississippi steamboat in particular. Not only does the steamboat offer practical advantages that serve dramatic necessities – the constant movement and change of both characters and scene – but simultaneously allows for the achievement of formal ambition, for the choice of an absent, unspecific, equivocal authorial voice, and a narrative dominated by, and as related through, the conversations of its passengers. Thus, unlike the central characters of Redburn Wellingborough and White-Jacket, 65 The Confidence-Man is a complex mix of polyphonic voices. Not all of these voices come from definite, identified characters, some, in fact, are merely the disparate thoughts or utterances of the crowd. Nor are they treated all alike, the narrator or narrative frequently betraying an almost capricious proclivity in its selection of direct or indirect speech, or when and how information (stories) are disclosed. As such there is a purposeful deviation from the formal approaches of Melville's sea-faring novels.

⁶⁴ Melville 1990 [1857]: 192.
⁶⁵ See the novels *Redburn* and *White-Jacket*.

For example, unlike Redburn's chronicling of the various trials, operations, rituals, routines and details of daily life; of the structures and hierarchies on board the trans-Atlantic Highlander, The Confidence-Man concerns itself with the societal interaction of its passengers. As a result there is a notable absence of specific details of steamboat operations, of the work carried out by the pilot, or its officers and crew, of information regarding machinery, or the method of propulsion – no character ventures to the pilothouse or comments on the work of the deck hand or fire-men. Indeed, apart from the cursory mention of the steward and occasional allusions to the captain (the barber being the one exception), attention falls almost exclusively on the passengers, with but intermittent reference (after its initial aesthetic and thematic presentation), to the vessel itself. Thus, it is through each passenger's costume and demeanour, his words and actions, or by-way of his profession, beliefs and ideology, that contemporary concerns are raised. Like the passengers, these subjects are multiple: whether it is the alms-seeking 'soldier of fortune' who suffers from a corrupt legal and criminal justice system, 66 or the well dressed gentleman planter who suggests the contemporary Southern justification for slavery (officially known as the 'mudsill' theory), ⁶⁷ or the herb doctor peddling cures for cancer and consumption, fever and ague.⁶⁸

In this respect Melville's use of the steamboat, perhaps more than *White-Jacket* and *Redburn*, conforms to the tradition of the vessel as microcosm ('boat-as-world'):⁶⁹ the riverboat a 'sign' of America's modernising, industrial society; a space infused by social interaction, by commercial, financial and entrepreneurial transaction; a space both social and commercial. On the one hand, Melville induces a sense of scale, wealth, elaborateness, and aesthetic grandeur, detailing the many public and the more private spaces: 'fine promenades, domed saloons, long galleries, sunny balconies, [...] bridal chambers, [and] state-rooms plenty as pigeon-holes,' and each appropriately furnished with, '[s]tools,

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⁶⁶ The soldier of fortune's futile journey in search of his brother can also be read as undercutting the panacea of western migration.

⁶⁷ Cook 1996: 37.

⁶⁸ For example, such products as Brandreth's purgative 'Vegetable Universal Pills'. There are also reports of competitors who took advantage of another brand's success by stealing both recipe and packaging, other subjects include the Mexican war and the treatment of the American Indian population. Cook 1996: 43. ⁶⁹ Smith 2007: 161.

settees, sofas, divans, ottomans', curtained sleeping bunks, marble-topped tables and lamps. On the other hand, the boat is a veritable market place punctuated by 'shop-like windowed spaces', and akin to 'some Constantinople arcade or bazaar where more than one trade is plied'; a space in which '[a]uctioneer or coiner [...] might [...] drive his trade.' To further stress the amalgamation of wealth and grandeur with activity, commerce and progress, Melville compares the 'bedizened and lacquered' vessel with the imperial junks which navigate the Grand Imperial Canal in China: with what he depicts as 'The great ship-canal of Ving-King-Ching, in the Flowery Kingdom.'

Likewise, the confident cosmopolitan tide of pilgrims, are a conglomeration of hunters: 'farm-hunters and fame-hunters; heiress-hunters, gold-hunters, buffalo-hunters, [and] bee-hunters', all suggesting the primacy of the entrepreneurial, preying spirit. Along side them are the 'happiness-hunters, truth-hunters, and still keener hunters after all the hunters.' There is a similar intimation of predatoriness in the evocation of the steamboat's 'great white bulk' as a 'white-washed fort on a floating isle': the 'floating isle' arguably America; the 'fort' symbolic of its expansionist tendencies and the frontier's perpetual encroachment and seizure of Indian territory. And then there are the abundant leitmotifs and references to commercial transactions that punctuate the novel; from transfer books (Black Rapids Coal Company), and transfer agents, to peddlers of pseudo-medicines and cheap literature; of money-belts, counterfeit detectors and security devices. Indeed, the *Fidèle* is a proverbial hive of 'business' activity: like 'Merchants on 'change seem the passengers that buzz on her decks, while from quarters unseen, comes a murmur as of bees in the comb.'⁷¹

But there is another feature to Melville's representation of the steamboat, one that works as part of the novel's thematic project of equivocality. Just as the novel's polyphonic form and narrator's unreliability underline the problem of epistemological certainty, so description is variously presented as ambiguous, confusing or suggestive. For example, next to those clearly identifiable spaces like the cabin or state-room, or the open, sunlight

⁷⁰ Melville 1990 [1857]: 13.

⁷¹ The thoughts, beliefs, interpretations and evaluations of the passengers are similarly heterogeneous and diverse. See the opening of Chapter 2, 'Showing That Many Men Have Many Minds'.

balconies and promenades, are spaces and places described as being simply 'dim and dusky'; or 'out-of-the-way retreats like secret draws in an escritoire.' Then there are the ante-chambers and 'confidential passages' that contrast with the more exposed, public spaces. Ambiguity is also rendered through topographical information, either presenting it as relational, at once specific and disembodied (the barber's quarters are to be found 'under a smoking-saloon, and over against a bar-room, [...] next door but two to the captain's office'),⁷² or by conjuring a sense of confusion among the decks and ladders, balconies and alcoves, much of which is prefixed by conditional phrases: 'a sort of', 'a kind of'. The consequence of such formal tendencies are two-fold.

Firstly, there is an overwhelming impression of the steamboat as an amorphic, labyrinthine space – a space characterised by multiplicity and diversity.⁷³ Secondly, such scant topographical (aesthetic and structural), description (and as the narrative advances description all but disappears),⁷⁴ while serving to orientate action and ground exchanges in both space and time,⁷⁵ is seemingly reduced to the status of sign-posts or 'stage' directions (to queues for entrances and exits), that prove more disorientating than helpful. And yet, this is arguably the point: not only are these allusions employed to underscore the theatrical nature of events ('life is a picnic *en costume* one must take a part, assume a character, stand ready in a sensible way to play the fool'), but disorientation and confusion are key to Melville's thematic ambitions.⁷⁶

There is however one notable passage amongst these characteristics and partial descriptive elements, one rare enough to seem aberrant, almost 'practically' incongruous, although thematically relevant: 'the strangers' brief visit to the emigrants quarters in Chapter 15. The scene begins with the strangers' 'descent' down along 'a sort of corridor' that leads to 'a retreat less ornate and cheery' than the cabin he has just vacated. That it is a 'descent', and perhaps a descent into an*other* world, is announced in its being likened to a place of 'purgatory', as well as in the strangers' identification with Orpheus, who hums as

⁷² Melville 1990 [1857]: 9.

⁷⁴ The exception being the emigrants quarters in Chapter 15.

⁷⁶ Melville 1990 [1857]: 161.

⁷³ Smith traces this mazelike quality to the genre of the urban mystery novel of which, he writes, Melville was aware, and whose 'tropes resonated along the panoramic, mazy, sinister Mississippi.' Smith 2007: 164.

⁷⁵ For example, reference is made to the hour of the day, while the lamps signal night.

if seeking to open the gates of hell. The space, empty save a miser, is a dim and dusky 'pine barren dormitory', 'haggardly lit here and there by narrow, capricious skylights in the cornices.' The sleeping accommodations, meanwhile, are no more than 'knotty pine bunks, without bedding', 'three-stories high', pendulous as 'the cradle of the oriole', and arranged 'with Philadelphian regularity'. To this representation are added the details of one set of 'cradles', which hang suspended by ropes from the ceiling, and 'liable to swing at the least suggestion of motion.' In fact, so sensitive are these cradles that an occupant on the 'uppermost shelf' is quite 'liable to serious disturbance, should a raw beginner select a shelf beneath.' Finally, and to underline their inhospitability, their design is attributed to 'some sardonic foe of poor travellers' and likened to the iron bed of the robber Procrustes who mutilated or stretched his victims to make them fit.

Historically speaking, while such sleeping accommodation was occasionally to be had on board the western steamboat, no designated space for emigrants existed. Emigrants, like all other passengers, took accommodation according to their means and availability, either on the upper-deck (in the cabin) or amongst whatever freight was being transported on the deck below.⁷⁷ There was, of course, a continual stream of emigrants crowding the decks of western boats, whether newly arrived or simply relocating along the frontier.⁷⁸ Undoubtedly Melville's aim was to highlight the plight or condition of those immigrants, not just as regards there experiences of travel, but also, as 'ship of state', to stress their precarious *place* in American society, and the basic conditions under which they live.⁷⁹ On the one hand, the economical utilization of space and material, their visible poverty, and that they do nothing but work all day and then retire to their accommodation to sleep

⁷⁷ For a brief consideration of deck passage see Chapter 2 of this thesis.

⁷⁸ Peterson 1968: 210-226. Melville's own experiences in Galena would certainly have confirmed such a situation.

⁷⁹ But the passage is perhaps more profitably considered as part of a larger literary thematic agenda, the scene itself notably similar with the emigrants quarters on-board the *Highlander*. Melville writes:

besides the usual number of casks on deck, rows of immense tierces were lashed amid-ships, all along the *between-decks*, forming a sort of aisle on each side, furnishing access to four rows of bunks, - three tiers, one above another, - against the ship's sides; two tiers being placed over the tierces of water in the middle. These bunks were rapidly knocked together with coarse planks. They looked more like dog-kennels than any thing else; especially as the place was so gloomy and dark; no light coming down except through the fore and after hatchways [...] Melville 1986 [1849]: 320.

('more to pass the night in, than the day'), belies the treatment of immigrants and / or their status as a commodity – an undifferentiated mass housed like so many books on a shelf or in a library. On the other hand, the location of their quarters, hidden down 'a sort of corridor', invites the reader to consider the emigrant population as removed from the places of general population; a separated class unto themselves, and inhabiting a dark and dingy seclusion. Equally, it appears as if they are reluctantly tolerated or even ill treated, as if plagued by a certain animosity: 'Ah, did any one make such a bunk for himself, instead of having it made for him, it might be just, but how cruel, to say, You must lie on it!'

Melville's Mississippi steamboat, then, reflects a unique and successful synthesis of thematic and practical intent, providing what is arguably the most apposite microcosm for modernising America. On the one hand, and relying on the reader's personal awareness of its aesthetic qualities, its space, architecture and décor, the western steamboat functions as the perfect literary device for staging the operations of the confidence-man, pitting him amidst the shifting, swelling demographic composition of the American nation. Indeed, it is the steamboat's repeated stops for embarking and disembarking passengers that reflects America's fluidity and heterogeneity, which includes the tide of westering migration. On the other hand, the exaggerated level of topographical ambiguity, like the notable absence of the steamboat's captain (the personification of authority), is tied to the larger thematic concerns of phenomenal and metaphysical uncertainty and disorientation, and the lack of any recognisable form of cultural 'authority'. Taken together these integrated factors make the steamboat's appellation of *Fidèle*, 'faithful', nothing if not ironic.⁸⁰

THE CONFIDENCE MAN IN AMERICA

Among the possible readings of Melville's *The Confidence-Man* is one which seeks to accentuate the very act of interpretation and perception; that not only highlights the

⁸⁰ In Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*, Imogen takes the name of Fidèle, and in Wycherley's *The Plain Dealer* (1677), Fidelia is a disguised woman. In Beethoven's 1805 opera *Fidelio*, Leonora takes that name in disguise. Also, Melville knew of the ambiguous name 'Faith' in Hawthorne's 'Young Goodman Brown' (the Confidence Man appears later as Frank Goodman). Edwin Fussell notes that there was a boat called *Fidelity*, 'listed as destroyed'. Matterson in Melville 1990 [1857]: 299.

existent quandary between what is 'genuine' and what is 'false', between what is 'real' and what is 'fiction', but queries the very act of 'reading' itself. Like Ishmael's quest to learn the secrets of the white whale, his attempt to dissect the physical and metaphysical nature of things, and the realisation of that tasks' impossibility, so *The Confidence-Man* points to the variety of hermeneutical problems present in attempting to achieve certainty of the phenomenal world.

In the wake of Independence, American society and culture was experiencing a unique state of flux that accommodated a mixture of societal forces, which, according to Christopher Clark, triggered a 'fundamental shift in the way American people conducted their lives and constructed their relationship with one another':⁸¹

Community gave way before individualism and competitiveness. The rise of long-distance trade, the growth of urban areas, and the decline of older patterns of neighborhood and reciprocity all produced greater impersonality, a greater need to deal with strangers, greater anonymity, and a more abstract system of transactions. Class divisions, mobility, and anonymity all made life more atomistic.⁸²

The seat of this transforming capability was 'traditionally' seen to be the West, a space 'in which the nation's democratic ideals would find their most representative embodiment.' Indeed, in his work *Birth of Modern America*, Douglas T. Miller sees the rapid settlement of western territories as causing the erosion of institutions such as the family and church, the state, bench and bar, of the landholding and merchant elites and their ability to exercise social control. For many, he adds, such changes signalled the 'fruition of democratic individualism'; the success of an individual's self-reliance epitomized in the contemporary transcendentalist creed of Emerson. For others it stirred fears of 'anarchy and immorality': the figure of the so-called confidence man but one manifestation of that fear. ⁸⁴

In his novel Melville addresses this issue of a changing social climate by exploring the nature of societal human interaction, of its structures and ideologies. He gathers together his 'cosmopolitan' cast on board the American 'riverboat' of nation, and initiates a

⁸¹ Stokes 1996: 23.

⁸² Stokes 1996: 23.

⁸³ Cook 1996: 26.

⁸⁴ Douglas T. Miller quoted in Cook 1996: 27.

'game' of masquerade where no-one and *no*thing is as, or what, it seems: where manners and dress do not necessarily foretell either motive or character; where neither sign, document, transfer book nor 'label' are any guarantee for genuineness; were confidence is the central, defining characteristic of societal exchange. The game begins with the appearance of 'a man in cream-colours', who boards a steamboat on 'a first of April' bound from St. Louis to the southern city of New Orleans. What follows is a series of encounters and conversations between the passengers, between either one or several confidence men, and a troop of characters that personify or represent different aspects of American society; of its history, institutions, beliefs and cultural heterogeneity, its different classes and social background. For example, among the gathered individuals and aspects alluded to is the southern plantation owner, the peddler of (pseudo)medicines, the free man of colour and the slave, the beggar, the soldier, the inventor, the gambler, the emigrant, the native American, the philanthropist, and thus; slavery, war (Mexican / Indian), immigration, banks and business, and religion.

More specifically, the novel is (implicitly) divided into two parts (chapters 1-22 / chapters 22-45). The first is dominated by a series of short exchanges between the so-called confidence man and his cautious, distrusting, or unsuspecting 'mark', in which the 'performance' of the former either fails or succeeds in gaining the 'confidence' of his interlocutor. The contrast, the second is structured around the 'central' character of Frank Goodman, 'the cosmopolitan', and a series of travellers with whom his conversations are more substantial, philosophic. In addition to this formal division is a complementary shift in the thematic emphasis informing those encounters. Thus in the first series of exchanges, attention is focused on the confidence of strangers, and asks the question of whether each passenger is distrusting of his / her interlocutor and the story or product or if he / she is willing to bestow confidence, and if so, the motive behind that conferral. In the second set, though each man the cosmopolitan meets is a stranger, a notable portion of the novel's exposition (and a vital element of the novel), concerns the value / nature of friendship.

⁸⁵ Critical dissent persists as to whether the central figure of the confidence man is in fact one man in a variety of disguises or a series of confidence men, and if the former, which disguise is the first.

⁸⁶ Failure or success is here determined by the reader's interpretation of the novel, whether each encounter is the separate attempt of a new confidence man or the continuation of one man's attempt in another disguise.

Indeed, the theme of friendship is discernable throughout, from Black Guinea or the almsseeking 'soldier of fortune' to Goodman's exchange with Egbert, where it receives its fullest embodiment.⁸⁷ It is perhaps not unsurprising that every expression of confidence takes the form of a monetary transaction.

For its part, the description of the *Fidèle* is stripped of many of its commercial, technological and aesthetic characteristics (no mention is made of the cargo it carries – on the deck or in the hold – the mechanics that drive it; its physical presence quickly replaced by action and dialogue). There are occasional, at times graphic, detailed representations of a particular space, or specific references to spaces common to the western steamboat (the barber's shop, main saloon or cabin, the promenade deck), yet, for the most part, description remains subdued. Instead the steamboat becomes the physical space of the universal public arena, a space defined yet oblique, intimate yet communal. In one respect its decks and social spaces become analogous to the kaleidoscopic urban city streets that Mary P. Ryan labels as the 'bedrock of civic mingling'; streets typified by difference and diversity, and where stranger met stranger.⁸⁸ For instance, in a list that mirrors Melville's enumerated piebald-parliament, Ryan offers a 'list of social differences' visible in the cosmopolitan population of mid-century San Francisco: 'Japanese, Hindoos, Russians, Turks, Spanish, Chilians, Peruvians, Mexicans, Americans from every state in the Union, Englishmen, Yankees, Germans, Italians, Frenchman, and Jews.'89 Together, steamboat and passengers, are poured along by the mighty Mississippi amidst the 'all-fusing spirit of the West [...] helter-skelter, in one cosmopolitan and confident tide.'90

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⁸⁷ In the novel's first half, representations of friendship appear in a number of ways, from Black Guinea's need of friends to speak for him and testify to his 'status', in narratorial analogy, of a man's being rescued from one court only to be tried by another, found guiltier, and 'hanged by his friends,' and in the ironical portrait offered by the alms-seeking 'soldier of fortune' left to languish in the Tombs prison because he had no 'friends', while the culprit was acquitted and presented with a gold watch because he did. In the second half of the novel the formal approach alters to focus more intently on philosophical conversations that ultimately expose the 'charitable' / 'uncharitable' nature of the individual, of one man's relationship with another. Most significant are the cosmopolitan's exchanges with Noble and Egbert, and the transcendental philosophies of Egbert's mentor Mark Winsome. For both men 'friendship' proves a relationship greater than the possession of mere 'associates and confidents'; more than simple neighbourly convenience. Rather it is something rarefied, noble and beautiful, something removed from the associations of the everyday encounter and of everyday society.

⁸⁸ Ryan 1998 [1997].

⁸⁹ Ryan 1998 [1997]: 55.

⁹⁰ Melville 1990 [1857]: 14.

However, this 'game' is not merely conducted at the level of narrative content with the reader passively observant, and reading with the knowledge that all will securely be revealed and accounted for. Rather, it extends and plays-out at the level of the text, and forces the reader to be 'active' / 'creative' in the process of reading. Melville achieves this dual-layered form in a number of inter-connected ways. Firstly, he has the passengers, individually and collectively, engage in acts of interpretation, actively pursuing an underlying 'truth' or meaning (is Black Guinea 'black' and / or a 'cripple'), or partake in dialogues designed to expose the problematics of perception or the meaning of 'critical investment' in any act of determining (if in fact the agent's transfer book or herb-doctor's medicine is genuine or not). 91 Secondly, the narrator's representation is itself clouded by equivocality, with information given in such a way as to prove suggestive, allusive and or symbolic, dominated by conditional phrases ('as if' / 'perhaps') and negative ('not') clauses. Then, of course, there are the three connected meta-fictive chapters dealing with ideas of 'consistency', 'realism', and 'originality' in fiction, chapters that examine the relation of act and representation, and which purposefully draw the reader's attention not only to the constructed nature of the novel and (literature in general), but to the novel's formal complexity and lack of any obvious authorial or hermeneutical centre. Finally, and not least, there is the problematic figure of the confidence-man himself, of his formal role and thematic purpose; that he has both allegorical and literal status; that he is just as likely to be the devil as Christ. 92 Indeed, such is the ambiguous nature of Melville's novel, that even the simple identification of the confidence-man entails several interesting questions.

The best illustration occurs in chapter 4 ('Renewal of Old Acquaintance') where John Ringman, identified as 'the man with the weed', confronts the merchant Henry Roberts on the pretext of their being 'old acquaintances'. In their encounter, apparelled in the garb of mourning ('the weed'), Ringman first tries to stir Roberts's memory with details of their prior intimacy, and 'determine' the cause of Robert's inability to recall their

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⁹¹ Melville 1990 [1857]: Chapters 10 and 16.

⁹² In his chapter on the Mississippi underworld Smith also draws attention to connection in the popular imagination 'between the Mississippi's professional gamblers and the devil' and that '[t]he model for devilish gamblers was Satan himself.' Thus, he observes, '[t]he gambling parlor was known as a "hell"; playing cards [...] were "the devils pictur'd beuks [sic]"; they carried the smell of "sulphur and Satan." He also writes how 'Apocalyptic visions spread along the antebellum river.' Smith 2007: 168-169.

meeting.⁹³ Secondly, he attempts to consolidate his efforts by appealing to their both being brother masons, before finally imparting 'a tale of singular interest, involving calamities against which no integrity, no forethought, no energy, no genius, no piety could guard.' As a consequence of this tale, Roberts offers Ringman an undisclosed sum of money, which the latter accepts 'with an air studiously disclamatory of alms-taking.' For a number of reasons it appears that John Ringman is a / the confidence man, and has succeeded in lightening Roberts's pocket.

One reason for such an assumption lies outside the novel itself, for the scene closely emulates the method of two historical confidence men, William Thompson and the later Samuel Willis. For example, according to an article in the *New York Herald*, dated 8 July 1849, the well dressed Thompson would approach and engage 'a perfect stranger' in conversation and 'after some little' time inquire, "have you confidence in me to trust me with your watch until to-morrow." The stranger, 'supposing' the man to be an 'old acquaintance, not at the moment recollected', relinquishes his watch, thereby 'placing "confidence" in the honesty of the stranger, who walks off laughing, [...] [while] the other [,] supposing it to be a joke, allows him so to do. '95 More telling is the confidence-man's reappearance six years later as Samuel Willis, a man who enters a 'jewelry store', feigns a personal acquaintance with the proprietor, and then, under the guise of his being a fellow Mason, induces him to hand over 'six or seven dollars'. 96

But the reader has other *signs* within the text that seem to corroborate the likelihood of Ringman's being a / the confidence man: the novel's title, the business card inadvertently dropped by Roberts (in a previous chapter) and onto which Black Guinea places his leather stump (thus tying Guinea and Ringman). There is also the matter of both Roberts and reader being aware of Ringman's place on Black Guinea's list of the gentleman on board able to corroborate the truth of his 'crippled' condition (a list scholars and critics equate with the various guises of the confidence man). On the one hand, then,

⁹³ It may well be part of his performance.

⁹⁴ Melville 1990 [1857]: 29.

⁹⁵ In Melville 1971[1857]: 227.

⁹⁶ In Melville 1971[1857]: 228-229. Recorded in the *Albany Evening Journal* on 28 April 1855.

⁹⁷ Melville 1990 [1857]: 19. It also becomes a question as to whether or not Black Guinea is even black. The list reads, the 'good ge'mman wid a weed, and a ge'mman in a gray coat and white tie, what knows all about

Roberts's encounter with Ringman introduces several potent questions: the reliability of memory as a resource of knowing, and metaphysical questions of self-knowledge, (knowing one's *self*); questions that ultimately leave the merchant uncertain about the veracity of the latter's claims. On the other hand, the reader, who shares in the merchant's uncertainty, is alerted to the possibility of deception in light of Ringman's actions: the feigning of prior acquaintance and his appeal to him as a mason. However, Melville's 'game' of perception, of confidence and distrust, is equally tied to his thematic interest of authority.

The problem can be expressed in the following terms: In attempting to ascertain the 'truth' of this or any particular situation, the individual (Roberts) / reader, looks to some form of 'authority', someone or something that will attest and authorize: a badge, label, some 'waloable [sic] papers', 98 a counterfeit detector, or some form of 'documentary proof'. And yet, such an act, so the 'game' runs, is only the displacement or transference of confidence, simply the beginning of a potentially unending deferral of action – where the purchase of a counterfeit detector invites confidence in the salesman; confidence in the salesmen conferred because he carries some badge of authority, or simply 'looks' the part. Moreover, the direction of deferral runs both ways, or rather, becomes circular; trust in the badge asks trust in the one who wears it (that it is not counterfeit); or, and more interestingly, the double-edged nature of Black Guinea's list that ties him to Ringman (and vice versa), so that if the latter is a confidence-man, then by implication (most likely), so is the former. Put another way, the distrusted Black Guinea indirectly, ironically, attests to the authority of all the 'ge'mman' on his list, that Ringman is a gentleman of some creditable societal and moral standing.⁹⁹ Ringman offers: "now that it strikes me, allow me to ask, whether the circumstance of one man, however humble, referring for a character to another man, however afflicted does not argue more or less of moral worth in the latter?" What all this means, is that Roberts / the reader is ultimately left with a choice of either / or, and

me; and a ge'mman wid a big book, too; and a yarb-doctor; and a ge'mman wid a brass plate; and a ge'mman in a wiolet robe; and a ge'mman as is a sodjer; and ever so many, kind, honest ge'mman more aboard what knows me and will speak for me.' Melville 1990 [1857]: 19.

¹⁰⁰ Melville 1990 [1857]: 25-26.

⁹⁸ Black Guinea, as a professed free man of colour, complains that he has no papers to attest to his status.

⁹⁹ The use of slavery – see previous chapter – not being able to speak for himself.

a 'game' whose moral universe allows for only confidence or distrust – a Hobson's choice of either everything or nothing. 101

As it turns out, listening to Ringman's 'story' results in Robert's thrice opening his wallet and a pecuniary expression of his confidence in Ringman – an expression guided perhaps by sentiments of sympathy. Roberts's decision however should not be read solely as the result of Ringman's 'story', but rather in terms of his entire 'performance', as 'the man with the weed': 'a man in mourning clean and respectable, but none of the glossiest, a long weed on his hat.' His 'story' is necessarily crucial and convincing, but in his manner and in his dress, Ringman conforms to the merchant's own middle-class conventions of mourning. The question for both Roberts (and reader) thus becomes whether these outward signifiers signal a 'transparent' reflection of his 'inner sentiments', or if he is guilty of what sentimental, middle-class culture identified not just as scam but hypocrisy.

In her study of American middle-class culture (1830-1870), Karen Halttunen writes how concerns of hypocrisy – personified in the archetypal figure of the confidence-man and the painted woman – were met in advice literature, fashion magazines and etiquette manuals, that were themselves a product of the 'crisis of social identity' confronting socially and geographically mobile men and women. The form of this hypocrisy, Halttunen confirms, was not simply a discrepancy between word and deed, but, more alarmingly, that confidence men and women 'could manipulate facial expression, manner, and personal appearance in a calculated effort to lure the guileless into granting them

¹⁰¹ Cook 1996: 49. Interestingly, B. A. Botkin, in writing of 'Pirates, Outlaws and Sharpers', writes how; 'Perhaps the most widespread of the gambling yarns tells how a sharper is found out and makes his getaway from his vengeful pursuers by disguising himself as a Negro deckhand or cook.' Botkin 1955: 196. As a case in point, there is a tale by George H. Devol called 'The Black Deck-Hand' in which he describes disguising himself as a deck-hand to elude a group of men he has just 'beaten' at cards. He writes, 'I then blackened my face and hands, and made myself look like a deck hand.' Devol 1887: 54. Equally interesting Devol writes of another tactic used to convince potential 'marks' of his wealth. He writes, 'I had the niggers all along the coast so trained that they would call me "Massa" when I would get on or off a boat. If I was waiting at a landing I would post some old "nig" what to say when I went on board, so while the passengers were all out on the guards and I was bidding the "coons" good-bye, my "nig" would cryout: / "Good-bye, Massa George; I's goin' to take good care of the old plantation till you come back." / I would go on board, with one of the niggers carrying my saddle-bags, and those sucker passengers would think I was a planter sure enough; so if a game was propsed I had no trouble to get into it' Devol 1887: 295.

¹⁰³ Principally, such advice literature was aimed 'at those who sought their social fortunes in [...] booming cities.' Halttunen 1982: xv.

confidence.' To confront such behaviour, advice literature advocated for 'a perfect sincerity or "transparency" of character': confirming that genuine, 'true' courtesy, like matters of fashion, 'was to serve in the transparent revelation of the soul'; in 'the outpouring of right feelings from a right heart.' As a 'guide' to ensuring the success of this standard, manuals conceived of 'a "sincerity" system' that outlined rules for 'sincere' behaviour, by which means social aspirants might 'establish the legitimacy of their claims to genteel standing.¹⁰⁴ Such a system however had two fundamental flaws: not only did these guides provide an essential blue-print for the confidence man or woman according to which they could model their behaviour, adopting a guise of 'sincerity', but as such behaviour became ritualized, became but convention, hollow, and artificial, they could justifiably be condemned as forms of hypocrisy.

Of the many cultural activities that Halttunen investigates and uses as example, she refers to the possible corruption of 'the explicitly defined rules of mourning dress and etiquette.' Like similar efforts by the middle-class to establish cultural forms for the expression of private feelings, the ritual of mourning was a method by which the bereaved, and all their 'sympathetic acquaintances', publicly enacted 'a genteel performance of their deep sensibility.' But, as with other forms of behaviour, there were 'deep anxieties' that calculated self-interest was 'transforming' this 'ritual into a masquerade of affected sensibility.' Indeed, in the 'struggle for bourgeois gentility', it was feared that any confidence man or woman, could simply assume the appropriate 'mourning dress and etiquette, stage a deceptive performance of deep grief, and thus establish a false claim on genteel social status.'105 Thus, when the merchant Henry Roberts is stopped by 'the man with the weed', he is confronted with one of two choices. Either he chooses to distrust Ringman, and so keeps his money, or he takes him at his word, and possibly becomes the victim of a scam; simply putting his money into the pocket of a 'thief'. Taking all these factors together, the weight of suggestion paints Ringman as a confidence man. And yet, neither Roberts nor the reader can say with certainty that Ringman is not what his actions

Halttunen 1982: xvii.Halttunen 1982: 124-25.

and words imply. More to the point, what is essential is not the status or the 'true' identity of Ringman but the (re)action of Roberts / the reader, whether one chooses confidence or distrust, and what it says of the individual and society in general.

CONFIDENCE IN DISTRUST

Among the definitions assigned to the word 'Confidence' in the 1828 edition of Webster's Dictionary, several are essential to a reading of *The Confidence-Man*. For instance, the trust and reliance a person has in another; that in which trust is placed; notions of safety and security; and an excessive boldness or assurance that proceeds from a false sense of one's own abilities. A number of these definitions might readily apply to commercial transactions (although, neither the word commerce or business feature); where confidence in the 'integrity, stability or veracity of another, or in the truth and reality of a fact,' statement, or an official report, is essential. More significant perhaps, is the dictionary's use of scripture, be it Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Proverbs, Psalms, or indeed, Corinthians: 'I rejoice that I have confidence in you in all things.' The dictionary equally proposes that: 'Mutual confidence is the basis of social happiness.'

106 CON'FIDENCE, n. [L. See Confide.]

^{1.} A trusting, or reliance; an assurance of mind or firm belief in the integrity, stability or veracity of another, or in the truth and reality of a fact.

It is better to trust in the Lord, than to put confidence in man. Psalm 118.

I rejoice that I have confidence in you in all things. 2 Corinthians 7.

Mutual confidence is the basis of social happiness.

I place confidence in a statement, or in an official report.

^{2.} Trust; reliance; applied to one's own abilities, or fortune; belief in one's own competency.

His times being rather prosperous than calm, had raised his confidence by success.

^{3.} That in which trust is placed; ground of trust; he or that which supports.

Israel was ashamed of Beth-el their confidence. Jeremiah 48.

Jehovah shall be thy confidence. Proverbs 3.

^{4.} Safety, or assurance of safety; security.

They shall build houses and plant vineyards; yea, they shall dwell with confidence. Ezekiel 28.

^{5.} Boldness; courage.

Preaching the kingdom of God with all confidence. Acts 28.

^{6.} Excessive boldness; assurance, proceeding form vanity or a false opinion of one's own abilities, or excellencies.

Their confidence ariseth from too much credit given to their own wits.

In the floating American world of the Fidèle however, God, Mammon and confidence are far from achieving an harmonious symbiosis; though the actions and conversations of the confidence man / cosmopolitan seem to reveal a greater readiness for confidence between strangers than friends. (To what extent this confidence is 'mutual' or simply the expression of self interest, or if the result is likely to be 'social happiness', is unclear.) Indeed, the events and textual markers that fill the novel's opening and closing chapters, suggest that distrust is the overriding 'worldview', and that the actions of the confidence man would do well to alter it. 107 Chapter 1 for example presents this prevailing 'worldview' through the reactions of the passengers to three 'signs', as well as the difference between those reactions. The first 'sign' is the placard or 'play-bill' pasted on the wall by the captain's office, offering a reward for the capture of a 'recently arrived', mysterious impostor; the second, is the series of scriptural inscriptions that the mute writes and erases on his slate; the third, is the barber's sign of 'No Trust'. The scene begins with the animated crowd gathered around the 'play-bill' and the mute's Corinthian epithets, the former provoking excitement with its intimations to distrust, enticing its readers with a pecuniary reward; the latter, to 'thinketh no evil'. 108 However, while the former creates interest and enthusiasm, the crowd's reaction to the latter heralds society's repudiation of such importations, and any 'authority' they might effectively possess. 109 Or rather, the text stresses their equivocality by having the crowds' reaction directed more toward the mute himself than to his epigraphical words; that he wears no visible 'badge of authority', and

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¹⁰⁷ The impetus is, of course, arguably on the reader.

¹⁰⁸ Noah Webster's 1833 limited revision of the King James Bible. 1 Corinthians, Chapter 13.

^{4:} Charity suffereth long, [and] is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,

^{5.} Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;

^{7:} Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

^{8:} Charity never faileth: but whether [there are] prophecies, they shall fail; whether [there are] languages, they shall cease; whether [there is] knowledge, it shall vanish away.

^{13:} And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these [is] charity.

¹⁰⁹ The full dialectic runs point / counterpoint: suspicion of impostor / 'thinketh no evil': jostled, hat flattened / 'suffereth long, and is kind': thrust aside, epithets / 'endureth all things'. (The remaining epigraphs, 'Charity believeth all things,' and 'Charity never faileth,' relate more generally to the novel as a whole – variously evoked in the confidence-man's encounters, from Roberts to Mark Winsome and his disciple Egbert.)

appears, 'so singularly innocent [...] [as] to be somehow inappropriate to the time and place.'

In counterpoint to the mute's Biblical epigraphs, and to the crowds' distrustful and unfriendly responses to their Christ-like proponent, the Barber's (William Cream's) 'sign' of 'No-Trust' is met with general acceptance. Indeed, unlike the incongruity of 'Charity', the 'sign' 'seems' to provoke no 'corresponding derision or suspicion, much less indignation; [...] [nor] to all appearances did it gain for the inscriber the repute of being a simpleton.' Quite the contrary, as a sign 'not infrequently seen ashore gracing other shops', Cream's (advertised) worldview is granted the status of 'authority'; of an acknowledged prudential imperative in the contemporary world. His reasons for entertaining it, as his exchange with Frank Goodman (the cosmopolitan) shows, are founded on his years of experience in a profession that deals with physical, facial, transformation, 'in macassar oil, hair dyes, cosmetics, false moustaches, wigs, and toupees.'112 (Alongside this declaration of 'No-Trust', the opening chapter provides further examples of societal distrust: in the assembled chevaliers plying their trade, able to make a profit by peddling popular safe guards like money-belts and security locks, or satiating public interest in violence and treachery through the pamphlets that chronicle the lives of bandits. It is even witnessed in occasional narratorial representation: how many believe that, 'in new countries, where the wolves are killed off, the foxes increase.')¹¹³

But if the opening chapter announces the basic framework, and society's underlying malaise, chapter 45 is the ambiguous, open-ended question. In contrast to the earlier crowd-filled, sun-drenched decks, the scene takes place at midnight in the gentleman's cabin, where an old man sits at a table reading beneath the last lit lamp, surrounded by a crowd of sleeping passengers. Once again there is the underlying dialectic of confidence and distrust. On this occasion that dialectic is foremost personified in the character of the old man – the naïve, innocent countryman ('untainted by the world, because ignorant of

113 Melville 1990 [1857]: 8.

¹¹⁰ Melville 1990 [1857]: 8.

¹¹¹ Melville 1990 [1857]: 10.

¹¹² Melville 1990 [1857]: 273. The question of Cream's own character are also put into doubt as he seeks to 'shave' Goodman for a fifty dollar deposit against potential losses. Melville 1990 [1857]: 277-280.

it'), and his ambivalent worldview. Other contextual markers are the steamboat's Bible – the book the old man is reading – the security devices of the boy peddler, and the last unextinguished lamp (kept burning 'not solely [because] of the sad consequences which might, upon occasion, ensue from the cabin being left in darkness, but, also of the circumstances that, in a place full of strangers, to show one's self anxious to produce darkness [...] was, to say the least, not becoming'). 114

On the one hand, the old man recognises the authority of the Bible (a book he has been reading for seventy years), and is able to alleviate Goodman's 'anxiety' over a passage that seemingly advocates distrust: "With much communication he will tempt: he will smile upon thee, and speak thee fair, and say What wantest thou? If thou be for his profit he will use thee; he will make thee bare, and will not be sorry for it. Observe and take good heed. When thou hearest these things, awake in thy sleep." Having located the passage, the old man is similarly relieved ('brightening up') when he identifies it as Apocrypha. 115 On the other hand, and having just read this passage, he demonstrates his own distrust in man, and so his fellow travellers, by not only purchasing a padlock (the 'traveller's patent lock') for his stateroom door but a money belt to protect against the many pick-pockets that frequent the Mississippi. In addition to his purchases the peddler makes him a present of the ironically named 'counterfeit detector', 116 (i.e., the detector itself is counterfeit), with the aid of which he commences to scrutinize 'a three dollar bill on the Vicksburg Trust and Insurance Banking Company.'117

But there is a greater equivocality to this scene than the simple ambivalence of the old man, one that encompasses the entire boat and all her passengers. Firstly, the prevailing culture of mistrust is again underlined by the signs that read "Beware of Pickpockets" that are everywhere to be seen on board the Fidèle. Secondly, the cosmopolitan's allusion to

¹¹⁴ Melville 1990 [1857]: 284.

¹¹⁵ There, of course, remains the answered question of whether Goodman is merely feigning ignorance as to the apocryphal nature of the passage.

During this period there were many such books that assisted shop-keepers, etc., to differentiate between notes that were genuine and those that were fake. That the old man's note is (most likely) fake, is discernable (within the text) in light of his searching for a 'goose'. Jonathan Cook has identified that the bill is 'patently worthless; for as the site of some of the worst "wildcat" banking during the late 1830s, the state of Mississippi had actually prohibited all its banks from issuing notes from the mid-1840s up to the Civil War.' Cook 1996: 51.

117 Melville 1990 [1857]: 285-294.

'some stories are told about steamboats [...] fitted to make one a little apprehensive', hints not only at the culture of theft and violence but to the general dangers of collision, fire and explosions. Thirdly, in his perusal of the steamboat's Bible the cosmopolitan notes how it looks 'old without, and new within'; a circumstance that 'speaks not so well as could be wished for the good books' esteem in the minds of the travelling public.' Fourthly, when the old man is reminded of his perhaps wanting a life preserver in case of accident, the cosmopolitan convinces him to take the brown stool (chamber pot)¹¹⁸ that has been his seat throughout their entire conversation. Finally, when the cosmopolitan escorts the old man out of the cabin to his stateroom, the former extinguishes the last remaining lamp, and thus leaves the slumbering passengers to 'the sad consequences which might, upon occasion, ensue.'

Throughout the novel this dialectic or choice of confidence or distrust has been faced by each individual the confidence-man (in whichever incarnation) has encountered and engaged with in conversation. In some cases, from whatever motive or incentive, his interlocutor has confirmed their 'confidence' in him through an act of financial patronage. In other cases, his exchanges have only served to reveal an individual's want of confidence or their confidence in a policy of distrust. (Indeed, it is reasonable to query: if an act of confidence is informed (or entirely based upon) motive or incentive, what precisely does it mean to have confidence.) And then there are actions and motives of the confidence man himself;¹²⁰ as the one-legged man early on suggests: 'Money, you think, is the sole motive to pains and hazard, deception and devilry, in this world. How much money did the devil make by gulling Eve?' 121 But the novel itself provides no unequivocal answers to these or similar questions; nor any obvious, unified moral or ethical stance into which the events of the novel neatly fall. Rather, Melville invites (or in fact demands) that the reader be creative in their reading, discerning in their thought, and self reflexive in their action.

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¹¹⁸ See Duban 1990.

¹¹⁹ Melville 1990 [1857]: 284.

¹²⁰ It is unclear from the content of the novel exactly how much the confidence man gains for his work.

¹²¹ Melville 1990 [1857]: 42.

When Melville came to write *The Confidence-Man*, the existence of certain cultural associations with both the American frontier and western steamboat travel in particular, offered the perfect setting for a novel about deception and masquerade. Among those associations were the activities of gamblers and river pirates, of 'town-site' frauds and counterfeit banknotes. ¹²² Indeed, even before the commencement of steamboat traffic, the wide-open rivers and river country of the west ('with their easy hiding places and means of escape, [and] their abundant flow of goods and money'), attracted a culture of violence and piracy. ¹²³ With the increase of traffic such activity became more and more pervasive, giving life to such men as John A. Murrel and Samuel Mason, and places such as Cave-in-Rock and Natchez that quickly became synonymous with murder and robbery. With the rise of steamboats, the nature of this activity altered, and it was not long before boats became the province of gamblers and card sharps like George Devol and Canada Bill, ¹²⁴ and men who worked in gangs traveling up and down the Mississippi Valley. Thus, while the American 'confidence man' had roots in the Urban East, his activities would be equally at home on the western steamboat.

In his narrative, Melville utilizes such cultural associations, alluding, amongst others, to the celebrated histories of (in)famous outlaws; to the 'Jeremy Diddler;' even has a quartet of seated card-players, any one of whom, if not all are sharpers. And, as a central thread that ties it all together, there is the eponymous confidence man who seemingly spends his entire day attempting to accrue money from strangers. As such, while Melville's literary ambitions veer to the philosophical, theological, political or metaphysical, the passengers, like the events and substance of (many) conversations themselves, are firmly grounded in the concrete (if not necessarily) everyday nature of the societal encounter, and the underlying sentiments and 'spirit of the times'. Indeed, whether it is the immigrant, the merchant, the relocating family, slavery, war, hypocrisy, or financial insecurity, 125 Melville's western steamboat is a cosmopolitan mix of 'hunters' united in a hive of

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¹²² See Merrick 2001 [1909]: 174-183, 'Wild-cat Money and Town-sites.'

¹²³ Botkin 1955: 196.

¹²⁴ See Devol 1887.

¹²⁵ For example, the so-called 'panic' of 1837. There would similarly be another 'panic' the same year as the novel's publication (1857).

activity, driven on by a pervading commercial spirit – even matters of friendship are frequently discussed in terms of financial loans and the possible loss of both friend and money. But it is also a place of personal and societal reinvention, of change and movement; America as a nation pushed on 'helter-skelter' by the 'all-fusing spirit of the West.' It is a place where former, seemingly entrenched ideas, values and structures were being exposed as liminal and relative, and subject to reinterpretation; and where mutual confidence was the cement that tied it all together.

CHAPTER SIX

THE PROFESSION OF PILOTING

Now I had often seen pilots gazing at the water and pretending to read it as if it were a book; but it was a book that told me nothing. A time came at last, however, when Mr. Bixby seemed to think me far enough advanced to bear a lesson on water-reading. So he began:—¹

If I have seemed to love my subject ['the science of piloting'], it is no surprising thing, for I loved the profession far better than any I have followed since, and I took a measureless pride in it.²

These windows overlook the Ohio – once alive with steamboats & crowded with all manner of traffic; but now a deserted stream, victim of the railroads. Where lie the pilots? They were starchy boys, in my time, & greatly envied by the youth of the West. The same with the Mississippi pilots – though the Mobile & Ohio Railroad had already walked suddenly off with passenger business in my day, & so it was the beginning of the end.³

THE PILOT AND THE AUTHOR

Writing in the *New Orleans Times-Democrat* on 20 May 1883, Lafcadio Hearn proffers the opinion that *Life on the Mississippi* is 'the only realistic history of piloting on the Mississippi in existence, and written by perhaps the only author of the century whose genius is thoroughly adapted to the subject treated.' He continues:

Certainly the first two hundred and fifty pages possess a large historical value; and will be referred to in future years as trustworthy paintings of manners, customs, and social phases which have already been much changed, and will doubtless, before another generation, belong altogether to the past [...] the author has taken pains to collect and set forth almost every important fact connected with the Mississippi River – historical or geographical. These positive data rather gain than lose in weight by their humorous presentation; and it may safely be said that many persons who may read the opening chapters will obtain from them a better knowledge of what the Mississippi is, than they could gain by laborious study of physical geographies [...] it is more novel in its character [...] more thoroughly American in its fun, and withal, more historically valuable.⁴

¹ Twain 1984 [1883]: 91. (Originally published in 'Old Times on the Mississippi'.)

² Twain 1984 [1883]: 122. (Originally published in 'Old Times on the Mississippi'.)

³ Salamo 1997: 15. Quoted from a letter by Twain to Olivia Clemens, dated 10 January 1872, from Steubenville, Ohio.

⁴ Budd 1999: 237-238.

There are several points of interest in Hearn's evaluations, a mutually constitutive arrangement of form and content, of argument and selected vocabulary. On the one hand, Hearn praises the 'historical value' of Twain's representation, of its worth to casual reader, or future sociological endeavour, crediting his narrative as a 'trustworthy' portrait 'of manners, customs, and social phases', that include 'almost every important *fact* connected with the Mississippi River'. On the other, Twain is applauded for a type or form of presentation that grants 'a better knowledge [...] than [...] could be gain[ed] by laborious study of physical geographies'. Read together these evaluations signal a 'novel' work that is historically valuable for the details it contains and for the American form ('tone' is perhaps a better word) of its presentation; not only for what is stated but also the spirit with which it is imbued.

Twain himself seems to have convinced Hearn that he was the right man for the job, asserting his belief in his own authority on several occasions. For example, in 'Old Times on the Mississippi', and so in *Life*, he writes: 'I feel justified in enlarging upon the great science [of piloting] for the reason that I feel sure no one has ever yet written a paragraph about it who had piloted a steamboat himself, and so had a practical knowledge of the subject.' Equally, in an interview published in 1895 in the Winnipeg *Tribune* he is reported as having said:

By a series of events – accidents – I was the only one who wrote about old times on the Mississippi. Wherever else I have been some better have been there before and will come after, but the Mississippi was a virgin field. No one could write that life but a pilot, because no one else but a pilot entered into the spirit of it. But the pilots were the last men in the world to write its history. [...] Here then was my chance, and I used it.⁶

But the relationship of author and pilot is more complex and personal than such a declaration reveals; a relationship traceable with reference to Twain's epistolary communiqués.

In January of 1866 Twain began a letter to his mother and sister confessing: 'I don't know what to write – my life is so uneventful. I wish I was back there piloting up & down the

⁵ Twain 1986 [1883]: 97.

⁶ Quoted in Kruse 1981: 10.

river again. Verily, all is vanity and little worth – save piloting.' In August that same year he elaborated to his friend William Bowen precisely what it was that made piloting so desirable: '- that all men - kings & serfs alike - are slaves to other men & to circumstances - save, alone, the pilot - who comes at no man's beck or call, obeys no man's orders & scorns all men's suggestions.'8 Where Twain saw himself in this tussle between his former and current profession is alluded to in an earlier letter to his brother Orion and sister Mary, suggesting a dissatisfaction with the one, and an ambivalence towards his accomplishments in the other. He writes: 'I have had a "call" to literature, of a low order - i.e. humorous. It is nothing to be proud of, but it is my strongest suit.' A paragraph later he adds: 'it is human nature to yearn to be what we were never intended for. It is singular, but it is so. I wanted to be a pilot or a preacher, & I was about as well calculated for either as is poor Emperor Morton for Chief Justice of the United States.'9 Using such letters, Edgar J. Burde has diagnosed Twain's psychology as subject to a 'gulf he [must have] felt between himself and figures of genuine authority and power,' and that in searching for both he not only experienced 'complex and contradictory feelings about piloting' but that such feelings had 'hindered his discovery of his special relation to that material.'10 All that changed, when, during a conversation with Joseph H. Twichell, Twain hits upon the notion of writing 'of steamboating glory & grandeur as I saw them (during 5 years) from the pilot house.'11

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⁷ Branch et al 1988: 1, 327.

⁸ Branch *et al* 1988: 1, 358. Twain also adds, 'You "write me of boats, thinking I may yet feel an interest in the old business." You bet your life I do. It is about the only thing I *do* feel any interest in & yet I can hear least about it. If I were two years younger, I would come back & learn the river over again. But it is too late now. I am too lazy for 14-day trips – too fond of running all night & sleeping all day – too fond of sloshing around, talking with people.' Branch et al 1988: 1, 358.

Branch et al 1988: 1, 323.

¹⁰ Burde 1978: 879. Burde equally makes reference to a recurrent steamboating nightmare that Twain later confesses to Albert Paine: 'There is never a month passes ... that I do not dream of being in reduced circumstances, and obliged to go back to the river to earn a living. It is never a pleasant dream, either. I love to think about those days; but there's always something sickening about the thought that I have been obliged to go back to them.' Burde 1978: 879.

¹¹ Conveyed in a missive to William Dean Howells 24 October 1874. Twain writes: 'For Twichell & I have had a long walk in the woods & I got to telling him about old Mississippi days of steamboating glory & grandeur as I saw them (during 5 years) *from the pilot house*. He said 'What a virgin subject to hurl into a magazine!' I hadn't thought of that before.' Frank *et al* 2002: 6, 262.

However, far from achieving an organic reconciliation, the tension of professions is visible not only in the serialised accounts of 'Old Times', or their subsequent expansion and inclusion as chapters (4-20) of Life, but something underpinning the entire 'standard work'. As Lawrence Howe observes, the formal texture of Life is characterised by a conflict of / for authority between the pilot and the writer, in which the appropriation of the earlier work into the latter 'effectively subordinates the pilot's authority to that of the writer.' For Howe, this conflict is marked out by the respective demands of each profession, an opposition between the 'rigid control' / 'directed purpose' of the pilot and the 'less practical and less rigid verbal form of authority' of the author. In terms of professional accomplishment, of productivity, it is the difference between the 'teleological motivation' of expeditiousness that sees the pilot attempt to steer the shortest and quickest route in delivering his cargo, and 'an expansive and associated form of authority', which, by 'allowing the narrative to drift' results in a work of subscription length'. 12

But this difference has a corresponding impact on the 'type' of history being written, not only in terms of its formal composition but with respect to, and scope of, subject matter. For Howe, the difference means seeing 'Old Times' as a work which 'nostalgically recall[s] an antebellum romanticism that evokes a unity of self'; a unity for the most part retained with the addition of chapters 18, 19, and 20, and a 'diffuseness' in the post-war narrative that reflects both the superiority of the author (as well as the construction of a new authorial persona, 'the writer Mark Twain'), and a 'formal appropriateness in representing the bustling, competitive, heterogeneous national culture.' Thus, by building *Life* around the representation of 'Old Times', Twain introduces an expansiveness that is at once cultural and historical, refocusing a brief and region specific story (the period of his apprenticeship) to one that describes a longer temporal scope and stretches beyond the confines of the river. History and authority over its

¹² The form of the text is also discussed in Chapter 7 of this thesis.

¹³ Howe 1998: 15-37.

authorship, then, reflects a move from the univocal biography of direct experience, to 'a heteroglot text that represents the democratic pluralism of the nation.'14

In writing 'of steamboating glory & grandeur', of 'Old Times on the Mississippi', it is as much Twain's personal sentiments as it is his lived experiences, then, that forges history into shape. In these antebellum pages history is the quasi-biographical history of the author's progress to the pilot-house, whose narrative arc culminates in the acquisition of the authority and power (personified in) the pilot's licence. Until this point (and chapter 21 in *Life*), the challenge to the pilot's authority comes largely from, in-and-of-itself, the creative act of *authoring* – though the motif of linguistic metaphor is visible throughout. To put it another way: the pilot-house provides the view-point; personal initiation provides the exposition; and experience inspires a sense of authority and energy over his own material: 'I am the only man alive that can scribble about the piloting of that day.' Thus, as Burde observes, writing for Twain became a substitute for piloting; literary fiction a space where 'he could imaginatively become a master pilot': and that, while 'overtly [he] adopted the pose of inferiority in the guise of the cub, he covertly assumed a role of superiority.'

To look closely at 'Old Times', then, is to discern a subtle pattern of textual strategies (structure, language) that codify and flavour this recreated passage of initiation. They are, for example, visible in the orchestration of the narrative around the pilot-house, an arrangement

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¹⁴ Howe 1998: 61. Howe explores the many ways in which this difference is discernable. For example, he argues that 'the authority of the pilot, which lived in "sober truth and not by fiction of words," is supplanted 'by an authority that manifests itself precisely in the fiction of words repudiated in "Old Times." Or how the second part of *Life* 'narrative authority shifts its emphasis from actual experience to textual experience.' Howe 1998: 37-41.

¹⁵ Interestingly, power and authority are related to the idea of 'spectacle', whether it is the cub's experience of envy when a local boy becomes 'apprentice engineer or "striker",' or his own public initiation when Bixby perpetrates his 'friendly swindle'. In both cases, visibility is central. In the first, the young cub is plunged into 'obscurity and misery' amongst his peers as the apprentice seizes every opportunity to laud his notoriety and stimulate envy; donning 'his blackest and greasiest clothes;' peppering his speech with 'steamboat technicalities;' always ensuring his visibility on the guards whenever the boat passed by. In the second (and discussed below), Bixby causes his novice to appreciate the link between confidence (or self-confidence), and authority through public embarrassment. Twain 1986 [1883]: 66.

¹⁶ In a letter to William Dean Howells 3 December 1874. Frank et al 2002: 6, 303.

¹⁷ Burde 1978: 880. In a letter to Howells Twain writes, 'but there are some things more, which I am powerfully moved to write. Which is natural enough, since I am a person who would quit authorizing in a minute to go to piloting, if the madam would stand it.' Burde 1978: 880. For James M. Cox, 'Old Times' can be understood as 'Mark Twain's return to the river on which Samuel Clemens had once been a pilot.' Cox 1976 [1966]: 118.

suggesting literal, symbolic and textual readings. Hence the pilot-house is not just the focus and apex of the cub's tutelage, as well as the centre of the pilot's authority and practical control, but equally the dominant literary frame from which history is written. As such, it is both a practical field of vision (a circumferential panorama for the surveillance of river and landscape, enabling the pilot or cub to negotiate the many sawyers, sand-bars and snags), and the literary field of vision that sutures narrative content. But the dialectic between professions is similarly manifest when the pilot-house becomes a space where other narratives are formed, told and exchanged (acts of creation and preoccupation that Twain's account embodies and reprises). For instance, in chapter 7, 'A Daring Deed', there is the dramatised exposure of the cub's marginality (his lack of power and authority), and the simultaneous performance of the cub's future (current) authority as author Twain. 18 That is, while it is Horace Bixby who pilots the Paul Jones over the sand-bar at Hat Island, providing the rough material for a novel tale of extraordinary piloting, it is Twain who confers narrative (or at least published) status to the deed, and in-so-doing, gains authority through authorship. Read in this way, chapter 7 also exemplifies the performance of narrative exchange: of the construction and embellishment of a pilot's reputation through the recounting of his accomplished 'Daring Deed'.

Further evidence of this dynamic is visible in the process of 'learning' the river, which entails a creative use of linguistic deployment. It occurs, for example, when Twain employs a string of letters to demonstrate how it is that the pilot acquires information 'unconsciously'; ¹⁹ when Bixby affirms how he (the cub) is to know the river 'like A B C'; ²⁰ and most famously, when he likens the face of the water to that of a 'wonderful book'. ²¹ This dynamic, while more complex, is similarly evident in terms of speech and language; in their synonymity with authority and the cub's 'rite of passage' from naiveté (silence, unknowing) to maturity

¹⁸ What is meant by 'future / present' is the 'future' profession of the cub both within and without the fabric of the text *Life on the Mississippi* – Twain's historical biography – and the 'present' historical document, the text *Life on the Mississippi*.

¹⁹Twain 1986 [1883]: 116.

²⁰ Twain 1986 [1883]: 76.

²¹ Twain 1986 [1883]: 94.

(speech, knowing). Thus, in chapter 7, the cub occupies a position of 'cipher', of someone torpid and subdued, and left standing in a corner; 'the talk I listened to took the hope all out of me.'22 Here authority can be understood in terms of a lack: a lack of knowledge that not only denies the cub access to the speaking community, but also the ability to participate in the ritual of exchange. At the same time, it is a factor in the exchange of information between pilots and determined hierarchically by reputation and standing, notably personified in the quality and style (i.e., wealth) of attire. That speech is synonymous with authority is likewise confirmed when Twain declares his wish to communicate 'in the crisp language of an order' or when the cub expresses his envy or admiration for the language of steamboatmen – for those men able to pepper their speech with 'steamboat technicalities'.²³

The representation of the pilot, however, is recontextualized with the addition of three antebellum chapters that round out Twain's piloting experiences. Central to this change is the figure of Brown, whose character undergoes a significant transformation, starting out as an image of 'mild burlesque' and becoming the 'maliciously oppressive authority'. For example, it not only forces a reconsideration of such specific events as Bixby's 'friendly swindle', setting it beside Brown's 'invent[ed] trap', but also initiates a larger pattern of contestation over authority, signalled in the 'patricidal desire' on the part of the cub. Indeed, as Howe argues, the reconfiguration of Brown 'as villain' is carried out 'in order to slay, symbolically, an old model of authority [i.e., pilot's] before he embarks on a narrative whose intention requires the purposeful freedom of a more expansive vision' (the author's).²⁴ Moreover, this ('oedipal') act is signified, not so much by the violent pilot-house confrontation that occurs, as it is by the cub's correction of Brown's grammar: 'I reformed his ferocious speeches for him,

²² Twain 1986 [1883]: 80. The text is also punctuated by specific steamboating terminology that is not necessarily always explained. ²³ Twain 1986 [1883]: 123.

²⁴ Specifically, Howe observes, 'the cub's concern with the authority of language and his patricidal desire in his stormy relationship with Brown announce an oedipal element in Twain's reconfiguration of the pilot-cub relationship.' Howe 1998: 38. Howe also moves on to examine the represented relationship of cub and Brown as allegory, arguing that, 'Twain recasts his personal experience as an allegorical prefiguration of the Civil War, reshaping the actual to compensate for his failure to participate in the great watershed in American history.' Howe 1998: 42.

and put them into good English, calling his attention to the advantage of pure English over the bastard dialect of the Pennsylvanian collieries whence he was extracted.'25

If Twain was the first pilot to offer details of western steamboat piloting culture he was not the last. Whether in the form of biography or autobiography, subsequent years saw the publication of works that both celebrated the lives of captains and pilots, and the work of individual boats, their officers and crew, books like Joseph Mills Hanson's The Conquest of the Missouri – The Story of the Life and Exploits of Captain Grant Marsh (1909). Other accounts, like Emerson W. Gould's Fifty Years on the Mississippi; or Gould's History of River Navigation (1889) provided more all-inclusive histories of western steamboat culture. One such work is George Byron Merrick's Old Times on the Upper Mississippi (1909), which, to one reviewer, offered 'no better account, from the inside, of steamboating'. 26 Superficially, Merrick's work appears formally and structurally dissimilar to Twain's, providing a fuller, more systematic account by devoting specific chapters to particular professions and aspects of steamboating culture ('Wooding Up', 'Mississippi Menus', 'Music and Art'), as well as specific historical cultural phenomena ('Wild-Cat Money and Town-sites). Indeed, as the work progresses, the central figure of the author as subject becomes more a thread that binds everything together than the principal point of focus; not until 'Living it Over Again' does Merrick reassume the centrality of the first dozen or so chapters. That being said, it is possible (for the purposes of this chapter), to frame these two accounts with respect to three areas of interest, in which the work of the latter serves as an apposite complement to the former.

The first area concerns the ambitions and path of the cub up to the pilot house: 'a rite of passage' to the realization of maturity; a realization baptized by a unique personal initiation and accredited by the attainment of a pilot's licence. The second, focuses on each account's presentation of the role, skills and authority of the pilot as represented in direct demonstration;

²⁵ Twain 1986 [1883]: 158.

²⁶ Hosmer 1909: 596.

in his instruction of the cub-pilot, and his relationship with other steamboatmen; as well as the captain, officers and crew. Finally, that of the literal and symbolic return to the river, which not only serves to underscore the changes that have taken place but contextually refocuses those earlier representations. Some qualification however is necessary. On the one hand, not only is Merrick's path to the pilot house too circuitous to be considered here in full, but in his use and general endorsement of Twain's representation of piloting, there is much duplication.²⁷ Where Merrick does differ, and is especially valuable, is his portrait of the captain, and the captain's relationship with the pilot. On the other hand, each narrative's formal use of the thematic 'a return to the river' (outside the literal return of *Life* (chapters 22-60) and of 'Living it Over Again'), is not without textual ambiguity, for neither work is strictly chronological, but, and to different degrees, incorporates an impression (and tone) of temporal awareness. For example, while Twain's narrative (chapters 4-20) slides all but seamlessly between present and past (dominated by a sense of immediacy), Merrick repeatedly makes this temporal shift explicit, as in his piloting chapters, where he compares present with past practice, or in announcing the underlying tone of his work: 'The majesty and glory of the Great River have departed.'²⁸

PERPLEXING LESSONS

Whatever Twain's sentiments toward piloting and writing, one inescapable reading of the 'Old Times' sketches is the apparent deification of the antebellum steamboat pilot. From the outset the adolescent boy 'day-dreams of a future when [...] [he] should be a great and honored pilot, with plenty of money, and could kill some of these mates and clerks and pay for them.' At a time when every boy sought freedom, romance, popularity and wealth, 'Pilot was the grandest

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²⁷ Merrick credits *Life on the Mississippi* with having 'fully described' the work that was accomplished by the old-time Mississippi pilot. More to the point, he writes: 'it would be temerity in any one to attempt to add to what he has so humorously, and yet so graphically delineated. It rarely occurs that a man combines a perfect knowledge of a profession so far removed from the world of letters as is of piloting a steamboat with the literary skill to describe its details. It will probably never again happen that a great master in literature and humor will graduate from a pilot house.' Merrick 2001[1909]: 83.

²⁸ Merrick 2001[1909]: 13.

position of all.'²⁹ It was a romantic dream that experience would frustrate: 'had I really known what I was about to require of my faculties, I should not have had the courage to begin.'³⁰

The cub's 'learning' begins with the experiential, empirical process of observation, of acquiring the 'name and position of every visible feature', and subsequently, the level of the river itself.³¹ All this data must be committed to memory, with the cub learning the river, up and down, by heart; "to know it just like A B C." When he humorously demonstrates his ineptitude, Bixby advises he procure himself 'a little memorandum-book' to note every detail down.³² This however proves an intermediary stage, and the cub quickly learns that memory can (and needs to) be trained 'patiently and laboriously', to work mechanically, constantly, and 'unconsciously', swelling its store of information; detail by detail, 'hour by hour, day by day'.33 A similar emphasis on memory is made by Merrick, where its prodigiousness is several times rendered as analogous to a machine: as 'mental machinery' and 'memory machine'; and akin to a 'photographic negative'. 34 As illustration, each author demonstrates this facility of acquisition and retention, through the circumstance of the leadsman's monotonous cries, that sees the pilot able to differentiate and retain a single chosen detail amid a series of identical calls. So attuned and trained is the pilot that this differentiation occurs 'unconsciously', is retrievable two or three weeks later, and allows him with precision to render not only 'the boat's position' at that instant, but 'give you such a lot of head-marks, stern-marks, and sidemarks to guide you, that you ought to be able to take the boat there and put her in that same spot again yourself!' In 'A Pilot's Needs' Twain writes,

First of all, there is one faculty which a pilot must incessantly cultivate until he has brought it to absolute perfection. Nothing short of perfection will do. That faculty is memory. He cannot stop with merely thinking a thing is so and so; he must know it; for this is eminently

²⁹ Twain 1986 [1883]: 67.

³⁰ Twain 1986 [1883]: 72-73.

³¹ Twain 1986 [1883]: 97.

³² Twain 1986 [1883]: 76. This marks the first variation of the river as text.

³³ Twain 1986 [1883]: 116.

³⁴ Merrick 2001[1909]: 93-94.

one of the "exact" sciences. With what scorn a pilot was looked upon, in the old times, if he ever ventured to deal in that feeble phrase "I think," instead of the vigorous one "I know!"³⁵

Memory then is a matter of certainty, knowledge and unequivocalness: authority displayed / marked out / declared in the concreteness of speech. (Merrick, who likewise uses the words 'knew' and 'know' is more opaque as to the authority or force attached to their use.) However, what this knowledge amounts to is more than simply knowing 'points', rather of knowing the river's shape in its entirety: of knowing its shape at night and the different shape it has during the day; its shape going upstream and the shape it has going down. As Bixby confirms, 'you learn it with such absolute certainty that you can always steer by the shape that 's in your head, and never mind the one that 's before your eyes." The necessity for such conviction is the river's proclivity for metamorphosis, for the shifting meteorological and or environmental conditions capable of duping an unwary, innocent or gullible pilot. So it is the cub learns how,

[a] clear starlight night throws such heavy shadows that if you did n't know the shape of a shore perfectly you would claw away from every bunch of timber, because you would take the black shadow of it for a solid cape; and you see you would be getting scared to death every fifteen minutes by the watch. You would be fifty yards from shore all the time when you ought to be within fifty feet of it. You can't see a snag in one of those shadows, but you know exactly where it is, and the shape of the river tells you when you are coming to it. Then there 's your pitch-dark night; the river is a very different shape on a pitch-dark night from what it is on a starlight night. All shores seem to be straight lines, then, and mighty dim ones, too; and you 'd run them for straight lines only you know better. You boldly drive your boat right into what seems to be a solid, straight wall (you knowing very well that in reality there is a curve there), and that wall falls back and makes way for you.³⁶

Merrick, who quotes this passage directly, though he declares it the extreme case, nevertheless confirms the authority of Twain's depiction – that such was 'approximately the case'. Where the two authors differ is with respect to terminology, so that when Merrick seeks to illustrate the possible consequences should the cub / pilot steer by sight and not by what he 'knows', he

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³⁵ Twain 1986 [1883]: 115-116.

³⁶ Twain 1986 [1883]: 86. Consequently Twain writes: 'It was plain that I had got to learn the shape of the river in all the different ways that could be thought of,—upside down, wrong end first, inside out, fore-and-aft, and "thort-ships,"—and then know what to do on gray nights when it had n't any shape at all.' Twain 1986 [1883]: 89.

substitutes the word 'knows' with 'faith'.³⁷ As such, 'faith' serves as a variant or replacement for conviction or confidence, but certainly lacks the authority of Twain's '*I know*'.

Learning the shape of the river however is no easier for Twain than memorising the catalogue of 'points'; the cub complains: 'I would fasten my eyes upon a sharp, wooded point that projected far into the river [...] and go to laboriously *photographing* its shape upon my brain; and just as I was beginning to succeed to my satisfaction, we would begin to melt away and fold back into the bank!' But, responds Bixby, 'If the shapes did n't change every three seconds, they would n't be of any use.' Indeed, it is precisely because the river does constantly change shape, that navigation is possible; for it is the way in which objects appear in relation to one another that enables the pilot to steer aright; to know when to make the appropriate course corrections.³⁸

Observation however, is not the only means utilized in the gathering of information; both Merrick and Twain provide details regarding the value and importance of 'sounding' the river. (Twain, for example, besides devoting chapter 12 to the operation, makes references throughout his account, as in Bixby's accomplishment of a 'Daring Deed' or his perpetration of 'a friendly swindle'.)³⁹ When such work entails sending out the yawl boat to locate where the water is 'shoalest', dropping a buoy for the steamboat to follow, the task, writes Twain, is characterized by 'an air of adventure about it'. 'Often there is danger; it is so gaudy and man-of-war-like to sit up in the stern-sheets and steer a swift yawl'.⁴⁰ On the lower river, where the water was deeper the act of measuring itself was accomplished with the use of a lead line, on the upper river steamboatman would use a twelve-foot pole to gauge river depth. According to Merrick, though such measurements were useful in navigating over a particular

³⁷ Merrick 2001 [1909]: 88-89.

³⁸ Twain 1986 [1883]: 89. Emphasis added.

³⁹ The idea of spectacle is here evinced as Twain is courting, and competing with another cub, for the attentions of a young female passenger, and where venturing out on the yawl boat would attract her attention and admiration.

⁴⁰ Twain 1986 [1883]: 110. Merrick characterizes the task of gauging depth with a pole as 'picturesque', adding 'one more "feature" to the novelties of the trip.' Merrick 2001[1909]: 92.

reef or bar, especially when the river was at an especially low stage, they were not necessary taken for immediate use but also for the purpose of comparisons.⁴¹

The cub / pilot must equally know the height of the bank, and how high it was on the previous or other trips. Knowing the height, Bixby calmly informs him, reveals the stage of the river, whether it is rising or falling; that should the leads 'lie' about the river's depth the bank would alert him to that fact. At the same time, knowing the height at one point informs the cub / pilot of its height at another, keeping him apprised of the river's movements as well as the accessibility and condition of its chutes. (The incident also introduces the subject of floating drift-wood as signifier: 'A rise starts the drift-wood, but then it keeps on floating a while after the river is done rising.') In short, the cub is told he must learn all these marks and banks 'to a dead moral certainty'. But observation has its problems as is illustrated in the bluff reef incident in 'Continued Perplexities', where the senses are shown to be fallible and prone to deception;

"Now don't you see the difference? It was n't anything but a wind reef. The wind does that."

"So I see. But it is exactly like a bluff reef. How am I ever going to tell them apart?"

"I can't tell you. It is an instinct. By and by you will just naturally know one from the other, but you never will be able to explain why or how you know them apart." 43

This, and the above quoted passage (starless night), evince two paradoxes. One concerns the 'training' of sensorial perception and interpretation, the other, the conflation of instinct, knowledge and absolute certainty. In the former, the pilot effectually trains his senses that he might know when to distrust them, while simultaneously having confidence in what he perceives, and that what he perceives is what he 'knows' to be the case consequent of his experience. In turn, this confidence enables him to interpret and act aright, at the same time

⁴¹ See Merrick 2001 [1909]: 91-99.

⁴² The use of the word moral underlines the responsibility under which the pilot operates, that he is responsible for the lives of everybody, both crew and passengers.

⁴³ Twain 1986 [1883]: 94-100. These sentiments are echoed in Hiram Martin Chittenden's biography of Joseph La Barge. See Chittenden 1962 [1903]. 85-87.

knowing that what he perceives is in fact a misapprehension or ultimately not the case. The latter paradox raises questions about what (here) constitutes knowledge and absolute certainty, conflating a type of knowledge so ephemeral as to be incommunicable (and that refuses external corroboration), with another predicated on the unquestioned, unchanging conjunction between signifier and signified: that 'this' will always signify 'this'. One plausible literary interpretation of these paradoxes is that they assist in Twain's 'myth-making' agenda of piloting designed to celebrate, to the point of deification, the old-time Mississippi pilot; where the cub's / pilot's knowledge transcends practical erudition to become anti-empirical, almost mysterious. Alternatively, and the two are commensurable, the source of this intuitive capability resides with another of the pilot's essential qualities, that of confidence.⁴⁴

In contradistinction to Twain's instinctual 'science of piloting', Merrick employs the term 'art'; where piloting is the soul of the artist incarnate. Indeed, one clear departure from Twain's representation is the explicit attention he gives to 'The Art of Steering': the 'artistic quality' indispensable in handling a steamboat. In this chapter (12) he begins by distinguishing between the work of the artist and the athlete, observing how the work of the latter simply amounts to unnecessary labour and results merely in 'materially retarding' a steamer's speed, while the former, combining his art and knowledge, handles his boat with delicacy. He writes, 'The skilled steersman [...] will give his boat only enough wheel to lay her into her "marks", closely shaving the points of the reefs and bars, and will "meet her" so gradually and so soon as to check the swing of the jack staff at the exact moment when the "marks" are reached.'45 In this way the pilot performs no more work than he needs to and progress is all the more rapid for its being smooth. (Twain's representation is often more implicit; as when the 'cub'

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⁴⁴ As Howard Horwitz has conceptualized it, another way of reading this representation is in terms of contemporary cultural concerns over the compatibility of nature and labour. Horwitz argues that Bixby's (or Twain's) portrait of piloting knowledge as natural, untransmissible, even unlearned, although admittedly a product of laborious training conceals 'labor' 'in natural instinct; [that] piloting is so natural that it is not labor.' In short, 'piloting interpretation' is shown to be 'work that is not work, mastery that is ease, power that is effortless.' Horwitz 1990: 243-271.

⁴⁵ Merrick also writes of being alert to the feel or handling of the boat as a source of information, that he recognized shoal water because then the floor under his feet 'seemed to hang back and drag; the motion of the paddle wheel was perceptibly retarded; the escape was hoarser from the pipes.' Merrick 2001[1909]: 88.

'speaks' of 'admir[ing] the easy confidence with which my chief loafed from side to side of his wheel, and trimmed the ships so closely that disaster seemed ceaselessly imminent.')⁴⁶ Merrick closes this chapter with a nostalgic embellishment that quantifies the nature of the work itself: for 'the man who puts his spirit into the task, it is work ennobled by painstaking devotion, and glorified by the realization of work artistically and lovingly done.' He equally declares the hold piloting possesses over the one time pilot, even after leaving the river; of how any opportunity he gets he 'instinctively reach[es] out for the wheel': and confesses to personally having time and again dreamt of holding the wheel once more in his fingers (a longing that he and Twain not only entertain, but accomplish as part of their return to the river).⁴⁷

In chapter 9 ('Continued Perplexities') Twain famously renders the river analogous to reading 'a wonderful book': a book which opened itself up and 'told its mind to me without reserve, delivering its most cherished secrets as clearly as if it uttered them with a voice.' It was a book that told many stories; was never void of interest; with never a page you would want to skip. To the uneducated passenger the 'faint dimple' on the river's surface was but a charming occurrence, if noted at all; to the pilot it was 'an *italicized* passage; [...] a legend of the largest capitals, with a string of shouting exclamation points at the end of it.' And yet as the surface of the river becomes a written text, a text with its own language, the ability to read this language drains the river of its former glory and romance. All the grace,' writes Twain, 'the beauty, the poetry had gone out of the majestic river! [...] [All] the romance and the beauty were all gone.' What remains, it seems, are but sober signifiers; the 'value' of any feature is its usefulness in ensuring safe navigation.

For example, 'those tumbling "boils" show a dissolving bar and a changing channel there; the lines and circles in the slick water over yonder are a warning that that troublesome place is shoaling up dangerously.' Nor is this process a sudden, or a fully conscious one: the

46 Twain 1986 [1883]: 73.

⁴⁷ Merrick 2001[1909]: 100-105.

⁴⁸ This is the second variation of river as text, though it is a text that 'speaks'.

cub simply starts out 'bewitched' by the glories and charm of sun and moon; then comes a day when he begins 'to cease from noting' these glories, and another when he 'ceased' noting them 'altogether'. Finally, he only reads a scene as: 'This sun means that we are going to have wind to-morrow'. 'Romance' (the 'romantic'), is usurped by 'realism'; like the humiliations and embarrassments he experiences, the price of becoming a pilot is the loss of his romantic expectations. ⁴⁹ The paradox, of course, is that in order for Twain to adequately demonstrate the weight of this transmutation he recreates 'a certain wonderful sunset' in all its charm and glory. There is then a tension, not only between pilot and author, between piloting and writing, past and present, but between the two texts / languages (or semiotics) of the river. Indeed, in a manner of speaking, Twain's authorship, his final choice of the writing profession, can be interpreted as a battle for *author*ity over the river's own narrative. ⁵⁰

For the most part, the accumulation of the cub's knowledge is a process of empirical observation; where the apprentice is the practical observer; and the act of teaching signals the transmission of knowledge. Crucial to this process is the officiating function of the teacher as authority, of Bixby as conduit and guarantor of knowledge; the apprentice in turn implicitly relying that his teacher's knowledge is complete and correct. Thus the relation of information, of how the cub should commence to read the language of the river, marks the communication of a 'cipher' that assists in that reading and his making the appropriate, corresponding piloting decisions. As such, it is Bixby's accumulated knowledge and authority that authenticates the experiences and gathered, collated, data, as well as its status as knowledge. Conversely, the cub's only recourse for authentication is to appeal to Bixby: a relationship dependent upon, and discernable in, his expression of confidence. At the same time, such confidence is a vital pre-requisite in the teaching process, without which the teacher could not teach.

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⁴⁹ See Cox 1976 [1966]: 107.

Twain 1986 [1883]: 94-96. For a more detailed discussion of this transformation, indeed the significance of this change in perspective, see Leo Marx's essay, 'The Pilot and the Passenger' in Smith 1963: 47-63.

⁵¹ Merrick also makes reference to the cub's gaining confidence from the presence of the instructing pilot. Merrick 2001 [1909]: 89.

A PILOT'S NEEDS

Besides the prodigious faculty of memory, both authors stress the cub's having certain higher qualities. In Merrick's portrait, "nerve" is central and fundamental: if the cub could acquire all the other necessary skills, yet proved timid, cowardly, or was, in effect, a 'doubting person', he 'had no business in the pilot-house'. Given 'average mental ability and common sense', he confirms, as well as the physical strength to handle the wheel, any boy could be taught. If, however, it turned out 'he lacked the nerve to steady him in time of danger, he was promptly dropped.'52 For Twain the cub requires judgement, decision and courage: 'good and quick judgement and decision, and a cool, calm courage that no peril can shake.' But while decision and judgement are crucial prerequisites, the cub need only have the 'merest trifle' of courage to begin with.⁵³ That courage however is crucial, is announced on the first occasion Bixby instructs his cub to back the boat from the New Orleans wharf, an act that causes the cub to hold his breadth and his heart-beat to flutter. The experience last less than half a minute as Bixby retakes control; 'flaying me alive with abuse of my cowardice'. 'I was stung,' writes Twain, 'but I was obliged to admire the easy confidence with which my chief loafed from side to side of his wheel and trimmed the ships so closely that disaster seemed ceaselessly imminent.'54 Nor is the source or 'location' of the cub's courage, and the degree to which he possesses it, initially clear to him, though he believes it to have grown and strengthened.⁵⁵ In chapter 13 ('A Pilot's Needs') Twain confirms:

The growth of courage in the pilot-house is steady all the time, but it does not reach a high and satisfactory condition until some time after the young pilot has been "standing his own watch," alone and under the staggering weight of all the responsibilities connected with the position. When an apprentice has become pretty thoroughly acquainted with the river, he goes clattering along so fearlessly with his steamboat, night or day, that he presently begins to imagine that it is his courage that animates him; but the first time the pilot steps out and leaves him to his own devices he finds out it was the other man's [...] The whole river is

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⁵² Merrick 2001[1909]: 96

⁵³ Twain 1986 [1883]: 118-119.

⁵⁴ Twain 1986 [1883]: 73-75.

⁵⁵ Merrick provides the anecdotal tale of a rapids pilot to demonstrate the necessity of courage.

bristling with exigencies [...] [and] he does not know how to meet them; all his knowledge is forsaken.⁵⁶

In this passage, where courage and confidence coalesce, the measure of the cub's confidence is shown to be the presence of his teacher, in whose absence confidence and courage desert him. In this moment the cub's 'confidence in that knowledge' vanishes, exposing a gap which sees the usefulness of the one as contingent on the possession of the latter; that knowledge alone does not entail courage.⁵⁷ Indeed, such is the completeness of the relationship between pilot and apprentice that the presence of the former masks the latter's awareness of his own responsibility and conceit. Bixby's role, his final task, then, is to ensure his charge appreciates the proverbial weight of responsibility that rests on his shoulders.

To guarantee that the pilot-to-be has sufficient courage, each pilot has in his teaching repertoire a variety of 'strategic tricks'. ⁵⁸ For Twain, Bixby's 'trick' assumes the form of 'a friendly swindle' that sees the cub embarrassed and ridiculed by his fellow steamboatmen and passengers: forced to experience the vexatious sense of his own foolishness and to have that experience solidified in its being made a public spectacle. ⁵⁹ It begins with Bixby exiting the pilot-house and leaving the cub alone to negotiate the next crossing: "I suppose you know the next crossing?".'

This was almost an affront. It was about the plainest and simplest crossing in the whole river. One could n't come to any harm, whether he ran it right or not; and as for depth, there never had been any bottom there. I knew all this, perfectly well.

"Know how to run it? Why, I can run it with my eyes shut."

"How much water is there in it?"

"Well, that is an odd question. I could n't get bottom there with a church steeple."

"You think so, do you?"

The very tone of the question shook my confidence.

⁵⁶ Twain 1986 [1883]: 119.

⁵⁷ Twain 1986 [1883]: 93.

⁵⁸ Twain 1986 [1883]: 119.

⁵⁹ A factor in the success of this swindle has interestingly been foreshadowed in 'Competing My Education' where Bixby comments that 'the leads might lie'. Howe draws attention to the 'invented trap' of Brown as an interesting point of comparison. Howe 1998: 32.

The successful intended effect of Bixby's words inspires self-doubt in the cub's mind and results in a run of associated, possible dangers that the imagination moulds from nothing until his 'confidence in that crossing' is shattered. The cub's immediate recourse is to sounding the river; but his anxieties are only exacerbated when the fallacious cries come back 'M-a-r-k three . . . Quarter less there!' until the cub finally calls out to the engineer, "Oh, Ben, if you love me, back her! Quick, Ben! Oh, back the immortal soul out of her!".' At that precise moment the cub hears the door close gently next him,

"It was a fine trick to play on an orphan, was n't it? I suppose I 'll never hear the last of how I was ass enough to heave lead at the head of 66."

"Well, no, you wouldn't maybe. In fact I hope you won't; for I want you to learn something by that experience. Did n't you know there was no bottom in that crossing?"

"Yes, sir, I did."

"Very well, then. You should n't have allowed me or anybody else to shake your confidence in that knowledge. Try to remember that. And another thing: when you get into a dangerous place, don't turn coward. That is n't going to help matters any." 60

In this scene Bixby has coordinated a 'performance' that places cub and pilot-house at the centre of attention; for all eyes to see; and revisits Twain's earlier realization of his want of mettle. As a result the cub learns the value and importance of confidence and responsibility. On the one hand, Bixby's 'trick' imparts an awareness that without confidence in what he has learned and in what he knows, all that knowledge is effectively negated. On the other, it reenforces the role of the pilot and the responsibility entrusted to him. (It also distinguishes between confidence and courage, the former being a belief in one's abilities, the latter as a shrinking from danger. There is no evident hierarchy between the two, both are crucial.)

Merrick makes similar reference to 'An Initiation'; a test of his confidence (or self-reliance), and likewise emphasizes that without it, 'all else will go for nothing'. In contrast to Twain's embarrassment, Merrick's 'initiation' is an event not necessarily orchestrated by the

⁶⁰ Twain 1986 [1883]: 119-121.

⁶¹ Twain writes: 'a steersman who had made an amount of progress that was satisfactory to any two pilots in the trade, they could get a pilot's license for him by signing an application directed to the United States Inspector.' Twain 1986 [1883]: 129.

pilot-teacher, but assumes a form of its own choosing; coming to all sooner or later. This "baptism", as he calls it, sees him running during a storm whose ferocity makes vision nigh-on impossible, and the captain stands wondering if they should not wait it out 'tied up'. Merrick's decision to proceed, while influenced by pride, inherited courage, and 'perhaps a dash of pigheadedness', is largely contingent upon his concern for his (as yet un-made) reputation. For, like Twain, he knows that his performance as 'story' will reverberate by word of mouth through the piloting and larger river community: that in a profession where the reputation of every pilot is 'common property' for the length of his run, any 'daring deed', mistake or mishap determines the novitiate's standing in that community. Therefore, fearing the 'popular version of events' would be unfavourable should he tie up his first time alone at the wheel, he simply communicates to the captain for a glass of brandy to take the chill off. (The mate later confidentially informs him of the captain's praise and commendation; confirming his having, 'nerve enough to last you through'. He adds, 'I was certainly proud of that night's work [...] [which had] given me standing with the "old man"; and I felt reasonably certain that his report would carry weight among the river men who might chance to discuss the merits of the young "cub", and his equipment for serious work.")⁶² For his part, Twain endures the embarrassment and the ribaldry directed at him, though, as Bixby may have expressed it, if it saves one more steamboat from disaster, the lesson will be well learned.⁶³

THE PILOT'S MONOPOLY

Commensurate with this picture of the cub's / pilot's skills and abilities is the representation of his power and authority. In a letter to William Bowen (August 1866) in which he laments the fall of the Pilot's Benevolent Association, Twain represents the antebellum pilot as having

⁶² Merrick writes that while the incident is of 'such common occurrence on the river as to attract little or no attention when the man at the wheel was an old and experienced pilot. But this was my "trying-out" time, which made a difference. Even if no one else ever gave the incident a second thought, I should have felt the shame of it to this day, had I "craw-fished" on that first trial. Merrick 2001 [1909]: 109-110.

⁶³ Merrick 2001 [1909]: 106-109.

been 'the only real, independent & genuine *gentlemen* in the world go quietly up & down the Mississippi River, asking no homage of any one, seeking no popularity, no notoriety, & caring not a damn whether school keeps or not.'64 A similar portrait spills from the pages of 'Old Times' where his autonomy and freedom, like the integrity and dignity of his profession, is granted regal authority and status; he describes the pilot as 'an absolute monarch who was absolute in sober truth and not by fiction of words.' More than simply being gifted with the glory of travel, the luxuries and privileges conferred of wealth that wholly marshal 'the boy's ambition', the pilot was possessed of a 'boundless authority'. He was a man without master, treated with courtesy by the captain, and with deference, by crew, officers and passengers alike. The fullest illustration of this power and authority, is, however, discernable in those scenes and passages that contrast, more than they compare, the pilot's role with that of the captain: either in the everyday job of piloting or later in the collective strength of the pilot's monopoly.

The captain could stand upon the hurricane deck, in the pomp of a very brief authority, and give him [the pilot] five or six orders while the vessel backed into the stream, and then that skipper's reign was over. The moment that the boat was under way in the river, she was under the sole and unquestioned control of the pilot. He could do with her exactly as he pleased, run her when and whither he chose, and tie her up to the bank whenever his judgement said that that course was best. [...] Indeed, the law of the United States forbade him to listen to commands or suggestions, rightly considering that the pilot necessarily knew better how to handle the boat than anybody could tell him.⁶⁵

For the most part, Twain's work demonstrates this accepted etiquette between captain and pilot, one that realizes the reciprocated acceptance of procedure, and acts out the relation of authority. For example, Twain reveals the mechanics of this etiquette in 'A Daring Deed'; in recounting his own piloting days under Captain Montgomery ('Episodes in Pilot Life'); or

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⁶⁴ Branch et al 1988: 1, 358.

⁶⁵ Twain 1986 [1883]: 122-123. Thus Twain records the moment of authority exchange between the captain and pilot; form this point on, when the steamboat is 'underway in the river,' the pilot assumes sole responsibility. See also John Mills Hanson's biography of Captain Grant Marsh, Hanson 2003: 18-19. However, as Howard Horwitz observes, Twain 'greatly exaggerates' this independence and power. Using Emerson Gould's seminal work he not only refutes the existence of any such 'law', but highlights how 'the pilot harkened to the captain who determined the steamboats destination and oversaw its course.' Horwitz 1990: 255.

his anecdote of Stephen W- and Captain Y- that witnesses the frustrated, deceiving captain forced to hold back his protestations. 66 Indeed, almost every case which enacts this etiquette endorses the pilot's authority and the deferral to that authority by the captain. 67 However, as Howe demonstrates, the nature of this relationship is far from clear-cut. On the one hand, the pilot's authority is shown to be, not only enforced by 'the higher authority of the law', but 'also forced by it'; it was, after all, 'the law of the United States [that] forbade him to listen to commands or suggestions'. On the other hand, Howe highlights a suggestive linguistic choice that in fact hints at the potential limits of a pilot's liberty: Twain writes of knowing how some captains 'took pains to keep' great pilots; 'to keep such a pilot in idleness, under full pay, three months at a time, while the river was frozen up. '68 In light of such ambiguity it is necessary to qualify the formal centrality of the pilot in Twain's portrayal, that far from merely diminishing or denying the captain's authority, he pushes him into the background. Thus it is not so much that the captain's office is without status as it is that, in perpetrating the literary deification of the pilot, Twain gives little direct attention to it. Instead he forces the reader to piece together a portrait from scattered references, anecdotes and fictionalised events.

In contrast Merrick's reminiscences provide a valuable portrait of the captain's status, a portrayal thorough in its concreteness and details, and its emphasis of character and abilities. In his account the 'Old Man', as the captain was 'affectionately' spoken of in his absence, not only possesses more authority and responsibility, but whose profession demands greater public presence: a position all the more compelling for the complex, competing, twinned paradoxical aspects of his persona.⁶⁹ The first paradox relates to the character of the captain, to his role,

⁶⁶ Twain 1986 [1883]: 344.

⁶⁷ Twain's personal account is interesting in that it demonstrates the force which this etiquette commands as he allows the steamboat to collide with another boat while coming to berth rather than disobey the strict orders laid down by the captain. He confirms, 'The captain never said a word to me about the matter afterwards, except to remark that I had done right, and that he hoped I would not hesitate to act the same way again in like circumstances.' Twain 1986 [1883]: 345.

⁶⁸ Howe 1998: 36. The emphasis is Howe's. Thus, writes Howe, the pilot is kept from plying his trade 'having been bough and paid for', that it 'implies a contract of indenture, a paradoxical kind of slavery that prohibits work.' Howe 1998:36.

⁶⁹ According to Merrick, the ascension to captaincy commonly ran from the mate up or from the pilot down, that while promotion was possible from either the clerks office or engine-room, mate or pilot represented 'the normal lines of education.' Nor was it uncommon, prior to 1860 when most captains began as pilots, for the two offices

status and position on board, requiring him to be sociable and amiable, very much a feature and function of the boat, and yet, at the same time, sees him as a man 'set apart' by hierarchy and responsibility. The second is conveyed topographically in the 'seat of authority' that is his office and that denotes an impression of inclusion and exclusion.

According to Merrick, for a captain to be successful and effective, he needed to have a well rounded manner and demeanour: needed to be polite and sociable, and of 'sufficient polish' to guarantee his boat's popularity and to secure vital first class patronage. Equally, he must be proficient in all the technical, practical and financial aspects (business acumen was indispensable). In short, his knowledge of the boat and everything connected with it had to be absolute:⁷⁰

[n]early every old-time captain on the river could, in case of necessity, pilot his boat from St. Paul to Galena. Every captain could, and of necessity did, handle the deck crew, with the second mate as go-between, during the captain's watch on deck. Some few might have gone into the engine-room and taken charge of the machinery, but these were exceptional cases. All were supposed to know enough about the business of the office to enable them to determine between profit and loss in the running of the steamer.⁷¹

Mirroring this high degree of responsibility is the captain's autocratic status, especially if the boat was under his sole ownership. In such circumstances he was amenable only to those unwritten laws of custom and etiquette, or 'the civil authorities in case of legal technicalities'. For example, custom dictated that remonstrations or reprimands (of either officer or crewman) were conducted in the privacy of his office; public interference was permissible only when

to be combined in one person. On steamboats of the smaller classes it was not uncommon for the captain to double in the role of pilot or mate, but on the larger vessels he customarily intervened in the handling of the boat only to the extent of deciding questions of policy or of taking direct charge at landings and in accidents or other emergencies. Merrick 2001 [1909]: 71-77. Significantly, as Hunter (seemingly) contradicts, despite this latter path of education, in terms of handling the boat and machinery, the captain (and unlike his 'salt-water' compeer), often proved 'less skilled...than the other officers'. Hunter 1993 [1949]: 237.

⁷⁰ As Merrick reflects, it became customary, or befitted, for a captain to be endowed with a variety of social graces 'that commended him to the ladies and gentlemen who took passage with him. [He was p]olite in his address, a fine dancer, a good story-teller and conversationalist, [whose] [...] personality went far toward attracting the public who traveled for pleasure—and that was the best-paying traffic, for which every first-class packet was bidding.' Merrick 2001 [1909]: 55.

⁷¹ Merrick 2001 [1909]: 71-72.

necessary for the boat's safety. Outside of these customs he was able to discharge or to order ashore any man he chose; able to 'interpose his veto on any command or any action, by any of his officers or men.' The only constraint to this power came if under the employ of the boat's owners, who had (subsequent) approval of any decisions of dismissal or employment. As a result of such 'supreme power', authority, and the burden of responsibility, Merrick identifies the captain as a man set apart 'by himself'.⁷²

Merrick's representation also reorients, as well as recentralises, power and authority away from the pilot-house to the captain's quarters in the forward part of the Texas:

The seat of power was in the forward part of the "Texas", where a commodious and hand-somely-furnished cabin served as office, audience-room, and whenever he so willed, as dining-room. Connected with it was a sleeping apartment, larger and better furnished than the ordinary staterooms in the passenger cabin. From the windows on the front and on two sides of his sitting-room he could look out ahead, or on either side, and see everything that was going on. It was here that he entertained favored guests when in relaxation, or hetcheled contumacious officers when in tenser moods.

From his berth, directly under the pilot house, he could read the sounds of shuffling feet as the man on watch danced from side to side of his wheel; he could note the sounds of the bell-pulls, as signals were rung in the engine-room; and he could tell very nearly where the boat was at such times, and judge very cleverly as to the luck the pilot was having in running an ugly piece of river, or working out a crooked crossing.⁷³

In this way, the centralisation of the captain's supremacy is bestowed as well as embodied in the accommodations accorded; a description confirmed by the symbolic value of the captain's 'space', in-and-of-itself, and the luxuries and comforts it affords. It is a space that intimidates and impresses: a space that intimates a degree of privacy and a degree of sociability: a place to entertain and a place to castigate. Yet it is also a space that facilitates observation, and through observation, control: centrality here reflects the captain's facility for extensive visual and aural surveillance – able to see all that goes on; able to discern activity from the distinct 'sounds' around him. Expressed in these terms, the captain's power and authority become tied to the

⁷³ Merrick 2001 [1909]: 71-73.

⁷² Merrick 2001 [1909]: 72-74. Merrick also confirms: 'He must be a man possessed of nerve and courage, quick to see what was required, and as quick to give the necessary commands to his crew ... the captain must be the last to leave his sinking or burning boat.' Merrick 2001 [1909]: 74.

idea of that space. Here then, is the second paradox, echoed in, or symbolised by, these key spatial values / qualities. That is, the topographic positioning of the captain's quarters reflects a sense of inclusion and exclusion, of being, at one and the same time, separated from and immersed in the workings of the steamboat; separated by the walls of his private state-room, socially by the power of authority, and the authority of that office.⁷⁴

In contradistinction to this image, the pilot of Twain's narrative is shown to be part of a larger community; in the pilot-house where other pilots gathered; the community in general; and finally, in the concrete, institutionalised form of the pilots' monopoly. Nor is the pilothouse itself without its own unique complementary characteristics. For example, Twain offers a contrast between two diverse pilot-houses, one cramped, battered and dingy, the other 'a sumptuous glass temple' made comfortable by its 'hospitable big stove', its 'showy [...] window curtains', and its 'bright, fanciful "cuspadores". 75 Crucially, moving from the former to the latter has the effect of restoring a sense of 'romance' for the cub struggling to learn the river: romance conspicuously synonymous with physical luxury. Like the captain's quarters, the positioning of the pilot-house has practical purpose and symbolic value, signifying not only the apex of steamboating culture, that place and position to which the younger Twain and countless like him aspire, but also the centrality of control and observation. However, in contrast to the closed-in office of the captain, the view from the pilot-house is necessarily panoramic, where control is exercised by means of a bell on the roof and the speaking tube connected to the engine-room; the former signalling the leadsman to verify the depth of a particular crossing; the latter (used in conjunction with the bell), to communicate instructions to the engineer. It is equally a space to which tourist and traveller are commonly drawn, eager

⁷⁴ However, the position of captain did not necessitate the skills, knowledge or character traits to which Merrick makes reference. Captaincy could be attained, or rather obtained, through wealth alone. Any man could become captain of his own steamboat by simply purchasing directly or by having a vessel personally constructed from one of the various boatyards. In this respect the source of authority is potentially anything but meritorious – purchased, not necessarily earned. His status and everything incumbent on that status (authority and power) is conferred by wealth, both granted consequent of appellation – the historical, cultural value with which the word is impressed. It is undoubtedly for this reason that it was the pilot who retained control – authority – when the boat had entered the river.

⁷⁵ Twain 1986 [1883]: 77.

to learn of the pilot's many personal experiences; the pilot ready to reciprocate in a manner according to disposition.⁷⁶

Twain also gives details of the relationship that exists between the two pilots engaged in piloting any one boat, dramatizing the 'etiquette' that organizes their working protocol and conduct. For example, in chapter 8 the cub serves as a witness to 'the unpardonable sin' of tardiness between Bixby and Mr. W— who arrives late for his night shift at the wheel. More dramatically, chapter 7 elaborates on the social activities as well as professional comradely affinities existent among the piloting community. He starts out by enumerating the reasons for the assembled crowd gathered in the pilot-house; that some pilots were waiting for their own boats to depart; some because temporarily unemployed; others to gather information on the current stage of the river; some simply to make use of the boat's fare. Whatever their reasons, their presence was always 'useful' and pleasurable: 'useful' because all pilots were 'always ready and willing [...] to go out in the yawl and help buoy the channel or assist the boat's pilots in any way they could'; pleasurable because 'all pilots are tireless talkers'. Twain's account exemplifies such comradely behaviour when it becomes clear the boat is behind schedule and each pilot takes his turn at the wheel to run that portion of the river with which he is most freshly acquainted.

Attention is similarly granted to the pilot's personal attire, not merely as an expression of his wealth but equally as an indicator of hierarchy. Thus, a differentiation is made between those who 'wore polished silk hats, breast pins, kid gloves, and patent-leather boots', and the 'more of less loosely clad' men with 'tall felt cones' upon their heads 'that were suggestive of

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⁷⁶ As Twain confirms in *Life on the Mississippi* it was often the case that a pilot would offer, to those he sensed were sufficiently gullible, fabulous tall-tales. Indeed, it is such tales that Twain is in search of when he returns to the river to gather material for his 'standard work'. See Chapter 24 of *Life*.

⁷⁷ A contrast exists between the implementation of exclusionary, closed systems, what Twain terms, 'monopolies', and harmonious, reciprocatory dialogues. For example, Hunter writes: 'The pilots followed with their local associations, and in 1859 the representatives of associations in many important trades met in convention at Louisville where they adopted wage schedules and arranged for uniform practices and mutual assistance in matters relating to navigation. [...] In 1870, for example, the following pilot groups were in operation: the Cincinnati and St. Louis, the Cincinnati and New Orleans, and the St. Louis and New Orleans associations; and an association of the pilots operating between Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, and Louisville. These four associations were described as working in harmony, exchanging information about river conditions, and coöperating in other matters of interest.' Hunter 1993 [1949]: 469-470.

the days of the Commonwealth'. The disparity is further accentuated however, not only by the difference in the manner of their speech but in the deference, or indeed the authority, accorded their opinions or assessments. So it is that the well-dressed, 'gorgeous ones', prove to be not only 'choice in their English', conducting themselves with a dignity apropos their wealth and reputation, as if to behave otherwise would prove disrespectful to their noble profession; but, and despite the seemingly free, open and reciprocal nature of communication, the information they impart is accredited a higher degree of veracity.⁷⁸

Such courteous exchange was likewise found on the wharf-side where in-coming boats provided out-going pilots with up-to-date information. Indeed, before the age of the telegraph, these exchanges (in addition to newspaper reports offering details of distant tributaries) served as the chief source for news on navigation conditions. A pilot could of course supplement this information with that gleaned from any of several river 'guides' or so-called 'navigators' that 'contain[ed] charts and directions for navigating the rivers'; but the ever-shifting channel, the ever-changing shape of the river particular to Twain's portrayal, would perhaps have limited their usefulness.⁷⁹ As the telegraph network expanded however, information naturally became more up-to-date, offering more accurate details of weather conditions, stages of the river, as well as occasional references to obstructions and channel conditions.⁸⁰

An illustration of how such factors and relationships functioned is provided by what Twain calls the Pilot's Monopoly: 'The Pilot's Benevolent Association'. In this context it is possible to see how authority, consequent on community and information exchange, becomes a source of power and a guarantor of wealth; as what begins as a competition between pilots results in 'perhaps the compactest, the completest, and the strongest commercial organization

⁷⁸ Twain 1986 [1883]: 79-80.

⁷⁹ Hunter confirms: 'The best known of the early river guides was Zadok Cramer's *The Navigator*, published at Pittsburgh in twelve different editions from 1801 to 1824. This work was issued in the first instance to meet the needs of emigrants, farmers, and others who ventured down the rivers in clumsy arks and flatboats. It was followed by other guides of which the most important were J. C. Gilleland's The Ohio and Mississippi Pilot (Pittsburgh, 1820); Samuel Cumings' Western Navigator (Philadelphia, 1822), reissued from time to time over a period of thirty years under the title, The Western Pilot; and George Conclin's New River Guide (Cincinnati, 1848), which in turn was reissued, with changes in title, a number of times during the next twenty-five years.' Hunter 1993 [1949]: 245.

⁸⁰ See Hunter 1993 [1949]: 245-247.

ever formed among men.'⁸¹ A measure of the Association's status, as it existed for Twain, is visible in his letter to William Bowen, who had written apprising him of its having 'fallen from its high estate'. Twain writes:

I don't know when anything has made me feel so badly as the paragraph that told me the Association had fallen from its high estate—had lost its more than regal power. I say *more* than royal power, Bill, & I speak advisedly—for no king ever wielded so absolute a sway over subject & domain as did that association. I have compared its machinery with that of other governments—royal, republican & ecclesiastic—& did not find its match. These had their rotten places, their weak spots—but *it* was perfect. It was a beautiful system—beautiful—& I am sorry enough that its greatness hath departed from it.⁸²

Ostensibly, the monopoly was formed for the protection of the pilots' guild; to ensure that wages, then being undermined by the growing swarm of new pilots, were appropriate and standardized, as well as providing security for retired pilots. It began after much talk and pontification with the boldest pilots gambling on a 'close organisation'; they 'elected their officers, completed their organization, contributed capital, put "association" wages up to two hundred and fifty dollars at once-and [...] were promptly dis-charged from employment.' Within these rules however lay the seeds of success, for as business improved and pilots became scarce the 'bylaw' that prohibited associated pilots to work with non-associated pilots forced owners and captains to discharge the latter and to hire (two of) the former. This demonstration of power, far from being temporary, was consolidated by the authority consequent of an exclusive network of information exchange - non-association pilots were denied access – that greatly increased reliability and safety. The information itself, comprising details of water depth, the presence of snags, and steering directions, were carefully noted down on specially designed sheets given to each pilot as he journeyed up or down the river. Completed sheets where then deposited in 'strong boxes' – secured through the use of unique 'peculiar locks' - placed on the many wharf-boats that lined the river. 83

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⁸¹ Twain 1986 [1883]: 128.

⁸² Branch et al 1988: 1, 357-358.

⁸³ Twain 1986 [1883]: 129.

The benefits of such a system, as Twain makes clear, are not hard to conceive: assisting the weaker pilots and consolidating confidence in general: 'The pilot who had formerly been obliged to put up with seeing a shoal place once or twice a month, [now] had a hundred sharp eyes to watch it for him, [...] and bushels of intelligent brains to tell him how to run it. His information about it was seldom twenty-four hours old.' Moreover, if any misgivings remained the pilot would attract the attention of an approaching associated pilot and information was exchanged by word of mouth. Associated pilots also had their own dwellings where they socialized and submitted their final reports; where information was exchanged and pilots indulged in river talk, discussing news and settling uncertainties. Ultimately, the pilot travelled 'so armed against accident that he could not possibly get his boat into trouble without bringing the most ingenious carelessness to his aid.'84

There is however, an ambiguity as regards the effect that such an association had on the characteristics and distinctness of the individual pilot. For example, in his study, Burde suggests that the association signals the death of the pilot's unique, innate talent, while similarly exposing the limitations of his authority and power. He argues: 'the power of the association is collective and economic rather than personal and moral. [...] Not only do the association members gain their strength from their reliance upon each other, they in fact depend upon a power greater than theirs to defeat the boat owners - that of the insurance under-writers, the "power behind the throne".' Moreover, the 'facts' contained in these written reports ironically resemble those the cub commits to his 'memorandum book', suggesting that the association is effectively dependent on precisely the procedure from which the cub is 'struggling to free himself'. For Burde, it is seen as 'the victory of direct observation and the death of intuition':85 the subordination of innate and individual talent to institutional authority. Nevertheless, the Association also seems to consolidate the independence and power of the

⁸⁴ Twain 1896 [1883]: 133.⁸⁵ Burde 1978: 884-885.

pilot. As Howard Horwitz⁸⁶ observes, such an Association enables Twain's monarchical, 'super-regal authority'; marks 'the climax of the pilot's power and independence': and, not only secures high wages and grants licensing authority to the pilots, but 'improves water-reading, reduces accidents, safeguards property and life, and thereby obviates calls for government regulation.'⁸⁷

I RETURN TO MY MUTTONS

In the post-war period the many changes taking place in the Mississippi Valley, both on and along the river, entailed a dramatic transformation in the profession of piloting. Just as the continued expansion of railways and towing-fleets were reducing the circulation of passenger and through-freight traffic, so the 'mechanization' of western steamboat culture heralded an upheaval in the role, status and dignity of the pilot's profession and his relationship with the rivers themselves. For the most part, Merrick's presentation reflects an acceptance of these many changes, portraying them with a sense of sober pragmatism. For Twain however, despite the praise he has for some innovations, these transformations have quite simply 'knocked the romance out of piloting'. Practically, these developments entailed the introduction of, amongst others, reflective diamond-shaped signs that marked out the channel and electric search-lights mounted on the bow of each boat, as well as the charting work of government engineers, laying out the river's course by compass. The consequence of such endeavours and innovation was the reduced degree of anxiety and peril for the modern pilot: the steamboat able to run not only on the thickest of nights and the densest fog, but run 'with considerable security, and with a confidence unknown in the old days.'

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⁸⁶ Horwitz chooses to read the association in terms of insuring individual 'control and property'; piloting as 'a form of economic mastery.' Horowitz 1990: 246.

⁸⁷ Horwitz 1990: 259-262. Horwitz writes how Twain 'transmutes institutional power into a freedom from all economic constraint, a strategy that both idealizes the freedom offered by a market economy and reprises the idealization of freedom risked in the liberal vision.' Horwitz 1990: 259.

⁸⁸ Twain 1986 [1883]: 204. In his narrative Merrick will make a similar observation with regards the operations of the government engineers whose having laid out the crossings allowed the pilot to steer 'serene in [the knowledge] that it [the 'diamond board'] is placed in line with the best water.' Merrick, 2001 [1909]: 79.

However, in their representations each author does more than simply provide a record of either the favourable or unfavourable effects of time's passing. Of particular interest are the narrative strategies that shape each encounter, and give each experience its particular form. Even in Merrick's account of 'Living It Over Again', where he is tempered in the expression of his sentiments, there is a notable sense of nostalgia and happiness in once again entering the pilot-house, and in identifying the familiar on board sights and sounds. Superficially, these narratives betray a number of similarities, not least because each involves an underlying oppositional dynamic of ante- and post-bellum conditions. 89 For example, both returns take place after a twenty year absence, and although travelling for different reasons, both authors make a return to the pilot-house the focus of their experiences. (Even Twain, though a passenger for much of his narrative, initially sets his ambitions on the pilot-house and the pilot's penchant for tall-tales; he even succeeds in securing his hands on the wheel). Both accounts also coincide in the substance of their representations, particularly in the dramatic absence of the steamboats that once lined the levees of major towns and cities, and the significant drop in pilot's wages. 90 One simple reason for these and similar correlations, is that Merrick has read Life on the Mississippi and, more than simply quoting it directly, allowed it to influence the presentation of his personal recollections. That being said, there are a number of obvious differences, the most plain being the total textual space granted to the depiction of return and changes, a difference that tempers the forceful effect on the reading experience.

Such obviousness however, should in no way devalue the significance of form and positioning, for while return signals the departure for Twain's new narrative, his river journey a convenient frame for the polyphonic canvas of experience, reminiscence, social criticism and anecdote, Merrick's return 'performs' a textual strategy of closure: it is both literal final chapter and the proverbial journey's end. For example, not only does Merrick confess to becoming a boy once more when he takes hold of the pilot's wheel; a desire couched in terms

⁸⁹ Merrick begins with: 'The majesty and the glory of the Great River have departed [...] fresh and undying, in the memories of those who [...] still can see it as it was a half-century ago.' Merrick 2001 [1909]: 13.

⁹⁰ See Merrick 2001 [1909]: 241.

of never truly having been fully weaned from it, but, as the boat goes by his childhood home in Prescott he conjures up the image of the attic windows from where he and his brother conducted their nighttime vigils. Indeed, more like the work's opening chapters, Merrick's experience of return, of modern steamboat travel, and his reflections on his own maturity, are offered as dramatic narrative. The two temporal moments even become inextricably entwined, as when engaged in steering the boat 'by the aid of diamond boards and ancient landmarks' he listens to Mr. Link soliloquize the river 'as only a lover could talk'. In fact, his experience has the effect of reconstituting the past, transforming months of intensive labour into what 'now seemed to have been nothing but holiday excursions'. (The experience of being a passenger, however, finally proves preferable when it comes to not being raised by the watchman at twelve o'clock at night.)⁹¹

There is also a contrast between the narration of innovations and the obvious joy he experiences from witnessing and describing the steamboatmen performing their work 'as of old': a distinction between the convenience of the fixed board lever that gives the signal for landing ('a very little thing, but it went with [...] a score of other improvements'), and the sheer 'pleasure' of piloting. Equally, there is the mix of nature and power as he experiences the beautiful June morning, the songbirds and the scenery, all combined with 'the sense of power' derived from handling a steamboat 'with [but] a touch of the wheel'; in being able to steer with the deftest of touches. Hence there is the sense of pride in the knowledge and artistry that he has not only learned but retained. Finally, a similar sense of pride and pleasure is exhibited in the 'lullaby' of familiar sounds which he recognizes, translates and ultimately lists as he lies in his berth (only one in the two dozen bells is outside his knowing).⁹²

Twain's return is likewise inscribed with a sense of the familiar, and the pleasure that comes from experiencing it; a familiarity perceived in the larger polemic context of change / unchanged. Unlike Merrick however, that familiarity remains largely unfulfilled: his return

⁹¹ Merrick 2001[1909]: 241-247. 92 Merrick 2001[1909]: 242-248.

punctuated by a succession of repeated losses; from the absence of the 'river man' in the billiard room to the dramatic absence of steamboats from river and levee; from the vanished armies of drays, stevedores, and former mountains of freight to the vanished lumber rafts, coal barges and trading-scows. When, for example, Twain enters the St. Louis Billiard room he observes: 'I saw there none of the swell airs and graces, and ostentatious displays of money, and pompous squanderings of it, which used to distinguish the steamboat crowd from the dryland crowd in bygone days [...] I suspected that the ranks were thin now, and the steamboatmen no longer an aristocracy.' Moreover, while the changes in the city of St. Louis are characterized as 'uniformly evidencing progress, energy, prosperity', those that have occurred on the levee itself are, 'melancholy' and 'woeful'. Change here means absence or finally non-existence. ⁹³

In an especially frank, suggestive sentence, Twain articulates the plight of the all but non-existent steamboatman: 'His occupation is gone, his power has passed away, he is absorbed into the common herd, he grinds at the mill, a shorn Samson and inconspicuous.' Here the choice of language belies not only loss and invisibility but also homogenization and emasculation; of not simply having lost the power and authority of one's profession but of one's own identity and self. Another telling passage appears when Twain searches for a boat to take him down river and comes across the nature encrusted *Grand Tower* packet (a fraud of a boat): 'she was playing herself for personal property, whereas the good honest dirt was so thickly caked all over her that she was righteously taxable as real estate [...] worth a hundred dollars an acre [...] The soil on her forecastle was quite good – the new crop of wheat was already springing from the cracks in protected places.' In this instance the condition of western steamboat culture is buried beneath inertia and overgrown by nature; its industrial purpose stagnated to a pace that nature has successfully reclaimed her authority. Indeed, so inactive is the western steamboat that boats like the *Grand Tower* are more profitable (per acre) as arable land than an asset in America's internal commerce. This return of nature is extended to

⁹³ Twain 1986 [1883]: 169-173.

incorporate the connection of the river's modernization and its natural shape, where Twain and Uncle Mumford express an ambivalence as to whether the renowned West Point engineers will be successful in taming it.⁹⁴

With respect to the pilot himself, Twain not only offers 'a longing glance to the pilothouse', declaring an 'itching to get my hands on the wheel', but succeeds in achieving that desire. But this sense of joy is in sharp contrast with the details of the piloting profession that has witnessed a loss of its former 'state and dignity'. On the one hand, the pilot's former status has been curtailed by having the captain earn the bigger wage, reducing his aristocratic rank so that he is treated 'like a parcel of mates and engineers'; forcing him to 'remain at his post, and stand his watch clear through, whether the boat be under way or tied up to the shore.' On the other hand, all the consequences of mechanisation, the snag-boats pulling the river's teeth, the charts and beacons marking the channels, the lamps that disperse the formless blackness of night, while improving safety and saving money, have ultimately robbed the profession of its romance: 'knocked all the romance out of it'. 95

Two years before his return to the river Twain was asked in a letter from a student if he would like to live his life over again. His response was that he would, but only on the condition that he 'emerge from boyhood as a 'cub pilot' on a Mississippi boat & that I should by and by become a pilot, & remain one.' Moreover, he would want to be famous for his piloting and 'notorious' among English speakers: that 'when they were informed that I was the celebrated 'Master Pilot of the Mississippi,' & immediately took me by the hand & wrung it with effusion ... I should feel a pleasurable emotion trickling down my spine & know I had not lived in vain.' To read such sentiments uncritically is to acknowledge the hold that the profession of piloting retained on the author of such celebrated works as *The Innocents Abroad* (1869),

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⁹⁴ Twain 1986 [1883]: 172-175 & 205-207.

⁹⁵ Twain 1986 [1883]: 204-205.

⁹⁶ Quoted in Kaplan 2005 [2003]: 381-382. It was a student of Laura Wright, Twain's 'sweetheart of 1858.'

Roughing It (1872) and The Adventures of Tom Sawyer (1875). Indeed, despite attempts to engage with those experiences in 'Old Times on the Mississippi' Twain seemingly received less gratification in authorship than in the prospect of reliving those years of his life. Thus, perhaps unsurprisingly, the portrait of the pilot is close to literary deification; where both pilot and pilot-house are unequivocally the apex of western steamboat culture; where the pilot's abilities are prodigious; his rank and dignity more than regal. Yet the picture is vivid, vibrant and 'authentic', and more than any single text concerning that profession uncontestedly dominates the landscape of literary representation.

CHAPTER SEVEN

LIFE ON THE MISSISSIPPI

The Mississippi is well worth reading about.1

The Mississippi is remarkable in still another way – its disposition to make prodigious jumps by cutting through narrow necks of land, and thus straightening and shortening itself. More than once it has shortened itself thirty miles at a single jump! These cut-offs have had curious effects: they have thrown several river towns out into the rural districts, and built up sand bars and forests in front of them. The town of Delta used to be three miles below Vicksburg: a recent cut-off has radically changed the position, and Delta in now *two miles above* Vicksburg.²

TWAIN'S STANDARD WORK

Some seven years after the publication of 'Old Times on the Mississippi' Mark Twain returned to those old and affectionately remembered river scenes of his maturity in search of material for his long planned 'Mississippi book'. Twain had been planning a return for some years, and while the exact circumstance of that return is debateable, his own words offer a hint as to the book's intended form. The first mention of the work appears as far back as 1866 when Twain writes to his mother of having begun a new work, a 'pet notion of mine', and envisages a return to St. Louis because the last hundred pages 'can only be got there'. Five years later, in a letter to his wife, Twain makes a second reference to this 'notion' and uses an ambiguous, allusive phrase in hinting of his likely ambition: 'When I come to write the Mississippi book then look out! I will spend 2 months on the river & take notes, & I bet you I will make a standard work.' Notably, each letter makes no reference to the idea he would make a trip either up or down the river, nor that he would emphasize his own experiences, only of his intention of staying in either St. Louis or New Orleans (perhaps another hint of its likely form).³

¹ Twain 1986 [1883]: 39.

² Twain 1986 [1883]: 40.

³ The intended form of Twain's 'standard work' could perhaps be inferred from the type of material he would be able to locate in either city.

Whatever Twain's ambitions he required no such return for the composition of his 'Old Times' *Atlantic Monthly* sketches in 1874, which he wrote from 'personal' reminiscence, and at the prompting of Joseph H. Twichell – thus making them the unlikely expression of any initial conception of the 'standard work'. What is more likely is that the desire to return to the river was revived during this writing process – though it would prove another seven years before he set foot on the banks of the Mississippi. Finally, and in the company of James R. Osgood and Roswell Phelps, Twain arrived in St. Louis on April 19 1882, and there boarded the steamer *Gold Dust* for New Orleans. Having completed his journey south and back north to St. Paul, Twain spent the rest of the year reading and writing, at times struggling to meet deadlines, until the work's submission late December. It would be another five months (12 May 1883) before Twain's 'standard work' finally saw publication, bearing the title *Life on the Mississippi*.

From the outset *Life* has generated considerable curiosity and criticism with respect to the peculiarity of its heterogeneous form, on exactly what kind of book Twain has written. Indeed, the text's composition has prompted much speculation over the meaning of 'a standard work', and whether the published product signals the fulfilment of ambition or the improvised result of deadlines and a lack of material. Here the most profitable solution is to read the work on its own terms – in Twain's own words – as the 'physical history' and 'historical history' of the Mississippi Valley.⁷ On the one hand, 'historical history' means the underlying chronology

⁴ Twain's desire to return to the Mississippi may also have been revived during the composition of the early chapters of his collaborative novel *The Gilded Age* in which the western steamboat takes centre stage.

⁵ Kruse writes that Twain may have had another plan to return to the river in 1877 and makes mention of Twain having told Mrs. Fairbanks on April 14 that he was unable to attend her son's wedding, because he should "either be in the neighborhood of New Orleans, then, or hard at work on a book." The trip was referred to once again in 1881 when on July 17 Twain informed 'George Washington Cable that "Howells is still in mind to go to New Orleans with me in November for the Mississippi trip, & we shall hope to see you then." Kruse 1981: 15.

⁶ For a comprehensive account of *Life on the Mississippi*'s path to publication see Kruse 1981. One meaning which Kruse ascribes to the phrase 'standard work' is the necessity of its being seen 'in terms of its potential popularity and universal appeal ... [that] yarns and humor are as important as the statistics.' Kruse 1981: 11. For Leland Krauth the phrase 'standard work' 'reveals Twain's aspiration to make his mark in high culture by creating a serious, definitive study. [That t]o write a standard work is to describe, define, and evaluate with consummate authority; again, it is to write with the command of an expert issuing papers.' Krauth 1999: 118.

⁷ Twain makes this distinction in chapter 1. Twain 1986 [1883]: 41. All quotations for *Life on the Mississippi* taken from the Penguin edition: Twain 1986 [1883]. All quotations for *The Gilded Age* from the Library of America edition: Twain 2002 [1873].

that begins with De Soto's encounter of the river in 1542 and concludes with Twain's return in 1882 (or even the process of authorship). It means everything from places and people to cultural traits, practices and particular idioms (turns of phrase). On the other hand, the geographical ('physical') frame entails not just the river as subject, but as textual strategy, where the text's formal approach of digression mirrors the river's proclivity for deviation and metamorphosis.

In addition to such temporal and geographical lines of suture, 'historical history' means the inclusion of different sources and voices: from newspaper articles, tall tales, diary entries and travel narratives to public statistics, historical accounts, and the testimony of residents and passengers. Thus, while Twain remains the uniting figure of authority, his remembrances and observations constituting the body of the work, the 'intertextual' use of contesting voices (or directly recorded speech) and metafictive reflections, stands opposed to the idea of a univocal or homogenised narrative. Not only does the text demonstrate (and itself enact) the notion that different voices will more than likely tell different stories, and that 'stories' can assume many different forms, but that the more authoritative account will record that cacophony in all its local and idiomatic colour (Southwestern vernacular).8 Indeed, the formal construction of Life intimates that if the subject is composed of different voices – for example, the heterogeneous culture and population of the American nation, and specifically that of the 'frontier' – then any work attempting to represent its history must be similarly plural; must be polyphonic and (perhaps) even polygeneric. As a result, Twain's 'Mississippi Book' is both theoretical and descriptive, focused as much on writing a narrative of life on the Mississippi, as it is about how that narrative should be written.

⁸ Twain is often praised for his use of local / particular idioms and dialects – whether it is recording the specific linguistic qualities of a particular region or the language (or lexicon) of steamboatmen. In his study Lawrence Howe observes: 'Twain suggests in *Life on the Mississippi* that a true document of the river cannot be written from the unifocal bias that recognizes only the elite white power structure. Rather, it must be multifocal and, moreover, multivocal, representing the robust, if sometimes cacophonous, sound of speech in its fullest array. A text true to its object must include the apocryphal, the loud-mouthed, the off-colour: in short, it must be vernacular. Language, especially vernacular, is the *Life on the Mississippi*.' Howe 1998: 66.

At the heart of the narrative, inevitably, is the river itself; its defining 'eccentricities' – its shape and size, its behaviour; the river traffic moving upstream and down; the homes and communities that populate its banks. Physically it is about length and breadth, depth and speed, about the very 'language' of the river and how that language changes according to who reads it. Historically, it is about the events and activities that have and continue to define it, activity that has transformed the river from an 'unexplored', 'uninhabited' 'wilderness' to a densely populated, industrialised artery of commercial and cultural communication. It is about places and cultural events, about dates and piloting deeds. Indivisible from this narrative is the role of the western steamboat and the dramatic transformation it effected. Indeed, Twain positions the steamboat at the very heart of *Life*, and allows it to all but dominate the overall narrative.

But while unique, *Life* is not the author's only work breathing life into antebellum western steamboat culture. Scattered throughout Twain's literary oeuvre, be it *The Gilded Age* (1873) or *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), the reader encounters a plethora of references and representations. Individually, these portraits offer the steamboat in a myriad guises and from a variety of viewpoints; from the postmaster in his office to the everyday traveller or steamboat veteran, from the apprehensive child to the god-fearing slave, from the fireman feeding the boilers to the ambitious village boy standing on the bank. Read together, such personalized / individuated sentiments and qualities combine to form a more complex, cultural picture, expressed not only in its range of competing tropes but as representative of differing contemporary attitudes. An attempt to catalogue these literary tropes in the hope of elaborating a specific pattern of representation or read them in light of larger ideological narratives, is not within the remit of this thesis, though something more modest is possible.

Firstly, and using contemporary reviews for context, this chapter will consider Twain's authority as chronicler / 'historian' of antebellum life on the Mississippi; the form that his narrative takes, and the presentation of the steamboat within it. In turn, section two considers

⁹ See Chapter 6 of this thesis.

the aesthetic representation of the western steamboat, focusing specifically on the images provided by Charles Dickens and Twain himself. Finally, and by way of enlarging upon his portrait in *Life*, section three provides a close reading of Twain's representation of the steamboat and steamboat culture in the opening chapters of (his co-authored work) *The Gilded Age*.

HISTORY AND AUTHORITY

When Lafcadio Hearn opined that *Life on the Mississippi* offered 'the only realistic history of piloting on the Mississippi', whose 'first two hundred and fifty pages possess a large historical value', he not only assigned a value to Twain's work that the author himself had undoubtedly sought, but firmly located the height of steamboat culture in the past. As noted earlier, Hearn regards Twain's portrait as 'trustworthy', 'historically valuable', and infused with an American spirit: not only a testament to Twain's authority; but simultaneously opening up the possibility of a deviation from the traditional historical format. In fact, it invites the notion that authority in historical representation resides with a form that mimics, or embodies, the spirit of the times it tries to chronicle; that something might read as fiction yet be all the more 'trustworthy' for its fictiveness. To put it another way, what the reader is presented with in *Life* is a humorous, novelistic narrative masquerading as history – 'a kernel of curious fact in every rich-flavored incident of humor' – whose status as 'novelistic' does not deny its status as 'history'.¹⁰

Hearn was not alone in making such remarks, questions of fidelity (authenticity) and literary improvisation are visible in a number of contemporary reviews, that, for the most part, divide into three subject groups. Firstly, there is the physical description of the Mississippi River; secondly, the picture of riverboat life, chiefly the 'science of piloting'; thirdly, the population of the Mississippi Valley and the South – its people, beliefs, culture and language. Reviewers commonly touched upon either one, two, or all three of these points, and, more

¹⁰ Budd 1999: 237.

often than not, Twain's characteristic humour is implicated. For example, three reviews, all published on 23 May 1883, raise the issue of form and either allude to or draw direct attention to the relationship of humour or fiction and the accuracy of representation. Firstly, the *Chicago* Tribune, while it endorses Twain's ability to write of the people of the Mississippi Valley, offers the following assessment: 'Of course, a good deal of exaggeration and of fiction is mingled with the author's narrative; but that only gives additional spice to the reading, and Mark Twain's volumes are not exactly intended to serve as guide-books.' In much the same way, the Hartford Times opines that Life contains 'much true and good description', and some 'interesting facts about the Mississippi River'. It adds: 'It is full of life and fun, but not all of it is humorous; there are as good pictures of actual life on the Mississippi and in the west and northwest as will be found anywhere.' In contrast, the sentiments of the New York Tribune are more equivocal: 'Sometimes this fine Ariel strays into the humor of representative Western character, and this is the sort of language he has invented as falling from the lips of a braggart raftsman or keelboatman on the Mississippi: [...] What wealth of humor and what fidelity to nature! If one phrase more than another is typical of the vocabulary of a drunken rowdy on a Mississippi raft, that phrase is "isolated communities"; and Mr. Clemens captures it like a bird.'11

Alternatively, The British Quarterly Review of July 1883 proves more damning in its criticism of Twain's chosen style, and attributes the narrative's unreliability to that voice. It writes that, while Twain offers 'a great deal of instruction about the Mississippi and the life on it, [...] it is so entangled in his own peculiar vein of fun that it is not too much to say that the book is unreliable.' Indeed; 'Reliability is not Mr. Mark Twain's "fort," [sic] and he does not seem to wish that it should be so.' Instead, it charges the author with 'extravagances' and 'perversions', with 'contortions' and 'caprice', all of which have 'enable[d] him to convert his adventures into one continuous joke.'12 Underlying all these remarks is the dualistic nature of

Budd 1999: 236-245. Emphasis added.
 Budd 1999: 245.

the work as something informative and entertaining, and that 'history' can (and perhaps on occasion must) be both at the same time. And yet it is more than simply a case of the book being humorous, of Twain employing his own 'peculiar vein of fun' for entertainment's end.

In his anthology of Southern and Southwestern humour, Franklin Julius Meine argues the need to not only recognize Twain's indebtedness to the tradition of frontier humourists but to see his work as very much the climax of that tradition. Similarly, Bernard DeVoto writes how Twain, from his boyhood, 'heard it [humour] from the mouths of rivermen and wherever villagers talked together in the leisurely waterside town of Hannibal.' Adding: 'When Sam Clemens took to writing he had to look for a model no farther than the nearest newspapers and for material no farther than the boiler deck.' As literature, it pictured the life that had been his – its characters counterparts to the men and women he saw and met everyday 'on the river'. Thus, to read Twain as part of this fertile tradition is to recognize that in his own work he is detailing events and characteristics, while utilizing a form or narrative style that for several decades had given printed expression to a uniquely American way of life. Moreover, he is not simply recording or recreating people and their experiences, but doing so through a cultural medium and 'voice' which had articulated, informed and re-enforced their experiences and their identity. To abandon that form, that humour, would be to deny that history one of its most quintessential, constituting features – the very language of its expression.

A further dimension may be added to this contested portrait of Twain as 'historian', one that reads *Life* not merely as a static product of Mississippi culture or as cultural artefact, but as the originator of countless iconic images. To put it another way, while *Life* sets out to represent a past, and immediate present (and a personal one at that), Twain's achievement has received the accolade of 'authorship' (authoring) from generations of readers, both in America

¹³ Meine in fact goes on to write that Twain was very much the climax of that tradition.

¹⁴ Meine 1930: xv-xxxii.

¹⁵ Twain writes in *Life* how: 'I got personally and familiarly acquainted with about all the different types of human nature that are to be found [...] When I find a well-drawn character in fiction or biography, I generally take a warm personal interest in him, for the reason that I have known him before – met him on the river.' Twain 1986 [1883]: 152. Smith writes: 'Mark Twain's representations of the Mississippi proved definitive; but only one so steeped in the antebellum river, culturally as well as physically, could have produced the iconic Mississippi that still flows powerfully through a wide and fertile floodplain in American literature.' Smith 2007: 7.

and abroad. Early evidence of this authority – of Twain's association with the Mississippi – can be found not only in contemporary reviews and 'literary' works, in travel narratives and personal reminiscences (Ernst von Hesse-Wartegg's *Travels on the Lower Mississippi 1879-1880* or George Bryon Merrick's *Old Times on the Upper Mississippi*), but even appears in *Life* itself as Twain encounters a boat on his voyage down stream bearing his own name. ¹⁶

More recently, scholars, historians and critics have been keen to testify to Twain's role as 'author'. One example is John Francis McDermott's anthology of antebellum work on the Mississippi. Not only does he credit Twain with 'copyright' on the Mississippi River, but uses the currency of his association by entitling his collection, Before Mark Twain – A Sampler of Old, Old Times on the Mississippi. That such accolade is more the rule than the exception is confirmed by Thomas Ruys Smith (the title of whose study makes a similar appropriation), as he sets out to redress 'the relative [academic] neglect of the Mississippi'. 17 In his estimation, Twain's representations have had a dual-edged effect: on the one hand, they have 'ensured that the antebellum Mississippi is an environment that persists in the collective sense of America as its physical and imaginative identity'; on the other, because such readings 'have been taken as authoritative' they have 'eclips[ed] truly contemporary interpretations'. 18 Such testimony is a clear demonstration of the status accorded to Twain and his work, acknowledging him as the quintessential contributor in defining an 'idea' of the South, the Mississippi Valley and the western river steamboat in particular. Nor perhaps should *Life* be regarded as an exception, but appreciated in connection with his other works about the Mississippi – The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn etc., - that together (re)present an intra-textual narrative of antebellum life (linked by geography) and conspire in a portrait endorsed by many contemporary reviews.

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¹⁶ Twain 1986 [1883]: 203.

¹⁷ The full title of Smith's work is River of Dreams – Imagining the Mississippi before Mark Twain.

¹⁸ Smith 2007: 7. Indeed, Smith attributes the lack of investigation of the antebellum river to this cultural dominance.

For instance, in its review of *Huckleberry Finn* on 9 March 1885, the *Hartford Times* praises not only Twain's description, that the book serves 'as good as a trip through all the regions of which it treats', describing things in Missouri 'as they really were', but that amongst 'its merits is the fidelity with which it paints the characters and the scenes with which the story deals.' Similarly, six days later, the *San Francisco Chronicle* offers: 'It is a more minute and faithful picture of South-western manners and customs fifty years ago than was *Life on the Mississippi*, while in regard to the dialect it surpasses any of the author's previous stories in the command of the half-dozen species of patois which passed for the English language in old Missouri.' Moreover, it adds how, 'Any one who has ever lived in the Southwest, or who has visited that section, will recognize the truth of all these sketches and the art with which they are brought into this story.' Lastly, and published in the *Atlanta Constitution* (26 May 1885) Joel Chandler Harris announces that: 'It presents an almost artistically perfect picture of life and character in the southwest, and it will be equally valuable to the historian and to the student of sociology': that; 'Whatever is coarse and crude is in the life that it pictures, and the picture is perfect.' 19

But whatever Twain's credentials for authoring a 'history' of the Mississippi Valley, his authority with respect to antebellum western steamboat culture is one of personal conviction.²⁰ As the preceding chapter has shown, Twain argued for the authority granted by his privileged

¹⁹ Budd 1999: 267-280. The San Francisco Morning Call (17 March 1885), for example, writes: 'The shadings have not been done in a haphazard fashion, or by guesswork, but painstakingly, and with the trustworthy guidance and support of personal familiarity with these several forms of speech.' Similar praise appears in the San Francisco Chronicle (29 March 1885), which contends that Huckleberry Finn provides 'a remarkably careful sketch of life along the Mississippi river forty years ago. If one has lived in the South he can appreciate the art with which the dialect is managed [...] They are peculiarly Southern, but only those who have lived south of Mason and Dixon's line can thoroughly appreciate the fidelity to nature with which they have been drawn.' Finally, the Century Magazine has the following under the heading "Open Letters": 'the book is a most valuable record of an important part of our motley American civilisation. / What makes it valuable it the evident truthfulness of the narrative, and where this is lacking and its place is taken by ingenious invention, the book suffers.' 'If Mark Twain would follow his hero through manhood, he would condense a side of American life that, in a few years, will have to be delved out of newspapers, government reports, country histories, and misleading traditions by unsympathetic sociologists.' Budd 1999: 273-279. There are one or two of dissenting or questioning voices that suggest a tendency for exaggeration for the sake of ridicule, San Francisco Alta (24 March 1885), but such voices few by comparison.

²⁰ The *Hartford Times* (9 March 1885) also characterises *Huckleberry Finn* as 'a tale of the Mississippi River, as that mighty stream and its commerce and travel presented themselves to the observer away back in Clay and Polk times, or thereabout.' Budd 1999: 267.

position as pilot: 'I feel justified in enlarging upon the great science [of piloting] for the reason that I feel sure no one has ever yet written a paragraph about it who had piloted a steamboat himself, and so had a practical knowledge of the subject.'²¹ He reaffirmed this conviction in his interview for the Winnipeg *Tribune* in 1895, where he speaks of the Mississippi as 'a virgin field', and of it requiring a pilot to write its 'history' (only a pilot had 'entered into the spirit of it'), and of his recognising this as his chance.²² Taken together these passages not only confirm Twain's literary ambition of writing the 'history' of this culture, of his belief in the necessity of that historian having the requisite personal empirical experience, but also that the form of that history would (and in fact does) represent a departure from more traditional modes.

In *Life on the Mississippi* the centrality of the western steamboat to the broader history of the Mississippi River Valley is emphasised in the intersection of two passages used to establish an overarching chronology. Not only do these passages unite that chronology to the ordering of the work, but also expose the correlation of river and steamboat; 'its flushes and widest-awake epoch' being the same epoch that witnessed steamboating in its prime. Firstly, Twain mixes historical order with narrative structure:

Let us drop the Mississippi's physical history, and say a word about its historical history —so to speak. We can glance briefly at its slumbrous first epoch in a couple of short chapters; at its second and wider-awake epoch in a couple more; at its flushest and widest-awake epoch in a good many succeeding chapters; and then talk about its comparatively tranquil present epoch in what shall be left of the book.²³

Secondly, in chapter 22, he offers the chronology of western steamboat culture:

Mississippi steamboating was born about 1812; at the end of thirty years, it had grown to mighty proportions; and in less than thirty more, it was dead! ... not absolutely dead ... but as contrasted with what it was in its prime vigor, Mississippi steamboating may be called dead. 24

²¹ Twain 1986 [1883]: 97.

²² Quoted in Kruse 1981: 10. See Chapter 6 of this thesis.

²³ Twain 1986 [1883]: 41.

²⁴ Twain 1986 [1883]: 173.

On the one hand, the first passage prioritizes nineteenth century history as proving the most significant to the 'historical history' of the Mississippi (all but the opening two chapters of the book focus on the years post 1800). When the passage is overlaid with the second, the differentiation between 'widest-awake', 'slumberous' and 'comparatively tranquil', not only highlights the existence of the river steamboat, but makes a connection between a culture in its prime, and at its most vigorous, with a period in Mississippi history that Twain identifies as its 'flushest and widest-awake'. The period equally coincides with Twain's youth and his personal steamboat experiences. On the other hand, and reciprocally, the language and phrasing of the opening two chapters shows that this period of activity is associated with concerns of utility; that the 'widest-awake' stage of its history is synonymous with its commercial productivity.

For example, Twain writes how the river slumbered 'unvisited by whites' for about a hundred and thirty years after De Soto's visit, because '[a]pparently nobody happened to want such a river, nobody needed it, nobody was curious about it.' When someone (La Salle) did become curious about it, he was lured by the belief of having discovered a way of making it useful: 'for it had come to be believed that the Mississippi emptied into the Gulf of California and therefore afforded a short cut from Canada to China.' The belief, as it turned out, proved misjudged, but La Salle took 'possession' of the land and announced 'the river was ready for *business*'. ²⁵ Twain concludes his march into the nineteenth century, observing how it required a further seventy years 'before the river's borders had a white population worth considering; and fifty more before the river had a *commerce*.' Finally, and devoting just a single fictional chapter to the era of the keelboats and broadhorns, and the men who gained their livelihood by such work, the narrative arrives at the age of the western steamboat: 'By and by the steamboat intruded, [...] [and] after a while [...] so increased in number and in speed that they were able to absorb the entire *commerce*.'²⁶

²⁵ Twain 1986 [1883]: 50. Emphasis added.

²⁶ Twain 1986 [1883]: 43-51. Emphasis added.

To emphasize this revolutionising effect of the western steamboat, chapter 4 ('A Boy's Ambition') dramatises the arrival of a small, cheap gaudy packet at a small town. Before its arrival the river town is asleep, drowsy, the streets all but empty, yet the day is 'glorious with expectancy'. With the cry, "S-t-e-a-m-boat a-comin'!" the town shakes into action amidst the clatter of drays and carts as men and boys all hurry from every quarter to the 'common *centre*' of the wharf: 'Assembled there, the people fasten their eyes upon the coming boat as upon a wonder they are seeing for the first time.' Once the boat is at rest there is a scramble to get aboard and ashore, to take on freight and discharge it, 'all at one and the same time; and [all amidst] such a yelling and cursing as the mates facilitate it all with!' After the boat is gone the day is 'dead and empty'.

In many ways this scene echoes the myriad nineteenth-century narratives promoting the transformative effects of machine technology on western settlement, what David E. Nye labels 'technological foundation stories'. According to Nye, these 'stories' were 'central to the new nation's perception of history and geography, [...] its perception of time and space', and describe 'a new form of society based on the successful exploitation of a new technology.' With respect to the western steamboat they elaborate its importance to the commercial and cultural fecundity of the 'frontier' and the nation as a whole. Examined more closely Twain's vignette exhibits most, if not all, of these tenets. First, there is the contrast between the eagerly awaited steamboat and the energy it engenders, as well as the several flatboats that lie unattended and unnoticed. Second, the primacy of the steamboat, and an indication of the transformation it has brought, is manifest (personified) in the 'stone-paved' wharf. Third, there is the explicit way in which the steamboat ties, through freight and passengers, the otherwise isolated town locally and nationally to the wider frontier and distant cities. Indeed, without this connection the town would most likely not exist. Finally, it is the steamboat that regulates the lives of the town's inhabitants, its very arrival serving as a measure of time.

But what precisely is the relation of these 'foundation stories' and Twain's narrative.

On the one hand, Nye not only argues that such stories about steamboating 'place [...] Twain's

writing within the larger discourse about the settlement of the Mississippi Valley', but position *Life* specifically, as 'the final stage in the development of a set of second-creation narratives focused on steamboats.'²⁷ On the other hand, however, this 'final stage' borders on what Nye elsewhere labels 'technological nostalgia'; narratives that focus on 'an irrecoverable and static yesterday, not a dynamic present'. Not only, do such narratives rewrite 'the second-creation story after its tools or machines have become obsolete or outmoded, [...] reconceiv[ing] the steamboat as an idyllic representation of the past after the railroad superseded it', but equally 'emphasize the automatic unfolding of inevitable events'.²⁸

Having thus prefaced the birth of western steamboat culture Twain now refocuses his narrative 'within' the steamboating community, using his experiences not only as frame and structure for the antebellum period of that culture, but effectively as substitute for its broader general 'history'.²⁹ In this way, the 'flushest, wide-awake times' are dominated by the task of 'learning' the river, by a fictionalized representation of his experiences of piloting and of the piloting community – of the effectual deification of the pilot and his profession. But idyllic is not quite accurate in characterising Twain's narrative, though the work's division into present and past does underscore an obvious longing for 'irrecoverable' youth – not least because his own historical chronology regards steamboating (in 1882) as 'dead'. Better is the conception of its being fuelled by a notable nostalgic reverence, a reverence all the more pronounced for being personal. Even the daily arrival of 'a cheap, gaudy packet' is a personal one: 'After all these years I can picture that old time to myself now, just as it was then.'³⁰

With his return, the work *Life* grows more expansive, engaging with the larger history of the Mississippi and the South, frequently digressing into social and cultural critique: 'The Art of Inhumation'; 'Southern Sports'; 'Hygiene and Sentiment'; and most (in)famously, on the pervasive nature of Southern sham culture. And yet, the steamboat and western steamboat

²⁷ Nye 2003: 9-12.

30 Twain 1986 [1883]: 64.

²⁸ Nye 2003: 18-19.

²⁹ That is, Twain substitutes the personal for the national.

Orleans and up to St. Paul. The difference now is that, while free to record what he presently encounters, for instance, the changes that have taken place on the river, or on board, his twenty year absence makes him reliant on the stories and histories of others. Similarly, because Twain is striving for an all-inclusive form for his 'standard work' he incorporates conversations, newspaper reports, historical records and travel narratives (either quoted, paraphrased or plagiarized, and all frequently re-contextualized to fit his historical vision). As a consequence, the central narrative line of western steamboat culture is not only integrated into the larger 'narrative' of nineteenth-century Mississippi life, but is likewise reconsidered and reframed through contemporary events and the eyes of others, as well as in terms of events past and present – 'befo' the waw' and 'aftah the waw'.³¹

THE AESTHETIC AND CULTURAL RELATIVITY OF THE WESTERN STEAMBOAT

In writing his 'standard work' Twain recognised the necessity of painting his portrait in the colours of many voices. As such the finished product *Life on the Mississippi* has often been charged with 'padding' – Twain guilty not only of including his own un-used material, but of inserting material gathered from other sources.³² The principal targets here are foreign travel narratives, volumes of which Twain had directed Osgood to send him: 'I wish you would set a cheap expert to work to collect local histories of Mississippi towns & a lot of other books relating to the river for me. Meantime all those people who promised to send such things to us ain't doing it, dern them.' In response, Twain received 'a lot of books relating to travels in the

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³¹ Twain 1986 [1883]: 319.

³² In marshalling proof to support their charges critics unfailingly draw attention to Twain's letter to William Dean Howells dated 30 October, where he writes: 'Went to work at nine o'clock yesterday morning and went to bed an hour after midnight. Result of the day, (mainly stolen from books, tho' credit given) 9,500 words. So I reduced my burden by one third in one day.' Smith *et al* 1960: 1, 417. In his study, while ready to make some concessions, Kruse stresses that the final text largely reflects Twain's intentions, that, not only did Twain follow 'a specific plan,' – 'that the necessary deviations did not greatly affect the original idea for the standard work.' Kruse 1981: 126. He also challenges such 'hasty' evaluations but identifying 'patterns in the patchwork ... [that] also function aesthetically as organizing principles for the materials presented.' Kruse 1981: 129.

U.S. by English people in the first half of this century; twentyfive volumes in all. They included Mrs. Trollope, Basil Hall and Marryat, &c. &c. Their average price is about a Dollar per *volume*.³³ But if Twain hoped to make extensive use of this library, his expectations were sorely disappointed: 'I drudged through all those old books, mainly to find out what the procession of foreign tourists thought of the river towns of the Mississippi. But as a general thing, they forgot to say.³⁴

Taking Twain at his word, such reading was arguably intended to provide a context for his own account and a framework for a discussion of American cultural ideas and institutions. It was not, seemingly, an avenue to service material as regards evidence of western steamboat culture, of activity and society – his own experiences were purposeful enough for that.³⁵ Indeed, with the exception of Dickens, whose representation of the steamboat he queries, though never quotes, Twain's use of travel accounts pertains largely to the river or riverside cities and to the form of 'civilisation' to be found there. For example, in 'Some Imported Articles' there are quotations that describe the traveller's first sight (and his or her emotions) of the Mississippi River, or his or her experiences of ascending its 'mighty current'. Chapter 29, 'A Few Specimen Bricks', on the other hand, apportions space for the 'truthful' words of Mrs. Trollope, who 'spoke of this civilisation in plain terms'. Twain's use, of course, is not only a matter of convenience, a straight-forward attempt at multi-vocalism, but plays a vital role in the work's formal and aesthetic ambitions, and a prominent part in its reflexive questioning of narrative status and construction.

For example, the introduction of such material establishes a narratorial line on which to plot the evolution of a nation, an effectual dialectic of past and present, one that merges the

³³ Quoted in Kruse 1981: 48-49.

Twain 1986 [1883]: 300. Kruse, who makes use of the same passage, goes on to comment that 'As early as the middle of August, therefore, an important project for the preparation of the additional chapters of *Life on the Mississippi* – the collecting and reading of the travel literature – had proved essentially, futile.' Kruse 1981: 52. Significantly, what material he does convert into narrative, Kruse argues, is not only sent to his publishers in three portions prior to the Oct 30 letter, but for which the acknowledged receipts were dispatched on Sept 16, 29, and 30, respectively.

³⁵ As Chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis show there is considerable attention paid across the many early nineteenth-century travel narratives to the western steamboat.

past of others with Twain's own remembered personalised past. It also supplies a geographical line of formal suture, with past observations of people and places introduced into the narrative as Twain himself encounters them on his way down and up the Mississippi. Furthermore, that the majority of these sources are travellers from overseas, establishes the dialectic of foreign and domestic, allowing Twain to step beyond the potentially restrictive perspective of cultural parochialism, and raise questions of cultural relativity. Nor, of course, is such an appropriation alien to the genre of travel writing, which commonly makes use of prior accounts as either a way of securing a degree of authority, to contradict those evaluations or simply to fill in the gaps of experience. Finally, and in addition to these formal ambitions, the consultation of such accounts opens the proverbial door to theoretical and critical thought and exposition; issues of genre, cultural and inter-cultural study (observation, understanding and appreciation), and questions pertaining to the production (and status) of history; of 'truth' and 'truthful' representation – in short, the representation of experience.

In 'Some Imported Articles' Twain writes:

Each tourist took notes, and went home and published a book – a book which was usually calm, truthful, reasonable, kind; but which seemed just the reverse to our tender-footed progenitors. A glance at these tourist-books shows us that in certain aspects the Mississippi has undergone no change since those strangers visited it, but remains to-day about as it was then. The emotions produced in those foreign breasts by these aspects were not all formed on one pattern, of course; they *had* to be various, along at first, because the earlier tourists were obliged to originate their emotions, whereas in older countries one can always borrow emotions from one's predecessors. And, mind you, emotions are among the toughest things in the world to manufacture out of whole cloth; it is easier to manufacture seven facts than one emotion.³⁶

As a context to Twain's use of travel narratives, this passage is key. Firstly it introduces the idea of something being 'truthful', of the origination, 'manufacture', and 'borrowing' of emotion; and so by inference, evaluations. Secondly it pits foreign observations and domestic, of foreigners and 'our tender-footed progenitors', while also foreshadowing later discussions of cultural and aesthetic relativity. The two, of course, are connected. For example, 'truth' or

³⁶ Twain 1986 [1883]: 198-199.

reliability, indeed authority, is a central tenet of travel writing in general, and Twain repeatedly broaches the issue, never more so than when simultaneously engaging with the attitude and response of Americans to some early nineteenth century travel accounts. He writes: 'all those tourists aimed at the truth; did their honest best to tell it, and always succeeded, except when deceived by smarty natives of the practical-joker type of vermin.'37 Sixty pages later, he adds: 'Unfortunate tourists! People humbugged them with stupid and silly lies, and then laughed at them for believing and printing the same.'38 One source of this humbuggery was the growing suspicion harboured by many Americans towards the European (and especially the British) traveller, consequent upon their unflattering presentation of American society and manners. Perhaps the most vilified works were those of Basil Hall and Frances Trollope, accounts with which Twain engages explicitly in 'A Few Specimen Bricks'. For his part, Twain defends Trollope as being alone in not 'gilding' what she saw, rather offering her opinions and observations in plain, 'unsugared' terms: that she wrote 'without malice, and without hate'. True, 'Her voice rises to indignation, sometimes, but the object', declares Twain, 'justifies the attitude – being slavery, rowdyism, "chivalrous" assassinations, sham godliness.'39 Ultimately, Twain bestows on her narrative a level of integrity unseen in all the anxious gloss that proved a feature of most tourist accounts.

Nearly all the tourists were honest and fair; nearly all felt a sincere kindness for us; nearly all of them glossed us over a little too anxiously, and apexed each particularly harsh truth concerning us with a lugged-in soft one which often bore the marks of artificial mellowing by manipulation; but Mrs. Trollope, alone of them all, dealt what the gamblers call a strictly "square game." She did not gild us; and neither did she whitewash us. 40

Another facet in Twain's exposition on travel accounts pertains to what he calls the 'pattern' of expressed emotions, to the common practice of travel writers making use of anterior accounts.

Twain, of course, is mimicking that practice in his own formal approach, but in substance he

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³⁷ Twain 1986 [1883]: 219.

³⁸ Twain 1986 [1883]: 288.

³⁹ Twain 1986 [1883]: 219.

⁴⁰ Twain 1986 [1883]: 220.

nonetheless questions the very use and authority, or indeed, the very status of those proffered emotions, and by extension, information. An example of this activity is visible in the ironic, playful, back-handed qualification on the origination (manufacture) of emotions and facts (to manufacture, i.e., to make or create): 'it is easier to manufacture seven facts than one emotion.'⁴¹

When Twain adds his own critique of Southern culture to this hostile reaction of Americans, he focuses on the notion of cultural and aesthetic relativity. That such is the case is underlined by the purposeful use of travel accounts in chapters that concern southern 'sham' culture: in 'The House Beautiful' and 'Castles and Culture'. To best illustrate these concerns attention might be focused on the first of these two chapters, and the aesthetic representation of the western steamboat inspired by the Cincinnati boat *Gold Dust* Twain boards for New Orleans. Firstly, Twain orients the issue of aesthetic relativity within the frame of cultural relativity, engaging with Dickens's representation of the western steamboat and the opinion held by local Mississippians. Secondly, he compares the aesthetics of the Mississippi steamboat with those of the finest dwellings visible in 'every town and village along th[e] vast stretch of double river-frontage' (in-so-doing exposing the sham nature of the latter).

To begin with, Twain draws attention to the representation offered by Dickens's, how he 'declined to agree that the Mississippi steamboats were "magnificent," or that they were "floating palaces" [...] terms which did not over-express the admiration with which the people viewed them.' Twain chooses not to quote Dickens directly, merely to present the reason behind his comments and evaluations. He suggests that if Dickens's assessment was based on a comparison of the steamboat with the 'crown jewels', 'the Taj' or 'Matterhorn', with 'some other priceless or wonderful thing he had seen', then he was right and the western steamboat was not 'magnificent'. On the other hand, because the inhabitants of the Mississippi Valley had likewise compared the steamboat with what they themselves had witnessed first-hand and

⁴¹ Twain 1984 [1883]: 198-199.

⁴² Twain 1984 [1883]: 275.

judged them accordingly, the term 'magnificent' 'was the correct one'. But the difference is not merely experiential, rather one that is similarly enforced by aesthetic criteria. It is worth comparing Dickens's representations with that of Twain. Dickens first:

In the first place, they have no mast, cordage, tackle, rigging, or other such boat-like gear; nor have they anything in their shape at all calculated to remind one of a boat's head, stern, sides, or keel. Except that they are in the water, and display a couple of paddle-boxes, they might be intended, for anything that appears to the contrary, to perform some unknown service, high and dry, upon a mountain top. There is no visible deck, even: nothing but a long, black, ugly roof, covered with burnt-out feathery sparks; above which tower two iron chimneys, and a hoarse escape-valve, and a glass steerage-house. Then, in order as the eye descends towards the water, are the sides, and doors, and windows of the state-rooms, jumbled as oddly together as though they formed a small street, built by the varying tastes of a dozen men: the whole is supported on beams and pillars resting on a dirty barge, but a few inches above the water's edge: and in the narrow space between this upper structure and this barge's deck, are the furnace fires and machinery, open at the sides to every wind that blows, and every storm of rain it drives along its path [...] the machinery, not warded off or guarded in any way, but doing its work in the midst of the crowd of idlers and emigrants and children, who throng the lower deck; under the management, too, of reckless men whose acquaintance with its mysteries may have been of six months' standing⁴³

Perhaps the best comparison can be made with respect to Twain's evocation in chapter 4:

[...] And the boat *is* rather a handsome sight, too. She is long and sharp and trim and pretty; she has two tall, fancy-topped chimneys, with a gilded device of some kind swung between them; a fanciful pilot-house, all glass and "gingerbread," perched on top of the "texas" deck behind them; the paddle-boxes are gorgeous with a picture or with gilded rays above the boat's name; the boiler deck, the hurricane deck, and the texas deck are fenced and ornamented with clean white railings; there is a flag gallantly flying from the jack-staff; the furnace doors are open and the fires glaring bravely; the upper decks are black with passengers; the captain stands by the big bell, calm, imposing, the envy of all; great volumes of the blackest smoke are rolling and tumbling out of the chimneys—a husbanded grandeur created with a bit of pitch pine just before arriving at a town.⁴⁴

Separated by thirty years each representation is very much a part of the context in which it appears, whether that means a critique of manners and social democratic conditions pervading the American frontier, or a reminiscence that endeavours to conjure the effect of the steamboat

⁴³ Dickens [1842]: 174-175. See also the description of J. S. Buckingham ESQ. in Chapter 1 of this thesis.

on a sleepy river-side town, on the lives of its citizens and the imagination of a southern boy. For Dickens, western steamboat travel is typified by societal mundanity, where every one behaves in the same way and talks of identical things; where all behaviour is bad and all conversation is dull. In amongst such criticism the style and colour of the western steamboat is rendered in less flattering, less awe-inspiring terms: as a technology recklessly mismanaged — an aesthetic no more than an haphazard conglomeration of pillars and beams and jumbled mismatched features on 'a dirty barge'. For Twain the western steamboat proves a handsome sight, and the life blood of small, riverside communities; carrying goods that feed the body and ideas that fuel the imagination.

Within these contexts, the represented three-tiered boat (the surveying eye descending deck by deck), suggests that Twain and Dickens are describing a steamboat at the same stage of its evolutionary development, being generically similar in design. But while Twain writes of grandeur and spectacle the foreign eyes of Dickens see only negatives, incongruity and absence – in terms of what the boat is not and the recognisable details it lacks. Indeed, for Dickens, the general impression is one of formal disharmony, of parts that fail to create a well-balanced or well-proportioned whole: a composition and construction that is an haphazard conglomeration of uncomplimentary styles. On closer inspection, however, Twain's selected vocabulary reveals an implicit ambiguity. There is, for example, something false about the impression the steamboat makes on the local residents; about the 'husbanded grandeur created with a pit of pitch pine' just before the steamboat arrives in town, and that is used to generate the billowing black plums. It is an act designed and carried out with the express intention of stirring a particular reaction in the towns-folk. More contentiously, while Twain refers to the steamboat as a 'handsome sight', he notably begins the paragraph that heralds its arrival with: 'Once a day a cheap, gaudy packet arrived.'

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⁴⁵ See Chapter 1 of this thesis.

⁴⁶ Twain 1986 [1883]: 64. Emphasis added.

To emphasize this ambiguity of representation, attention can be directed at another portrait that appears some two-hundred pages further on in Life, in 'The House Beautiful'. In this chapter the image of the steamboat is set next to the artificial, mock mansions of the wealthy; a relation rendered all the more complex for its deployment of irony and sarcasm. On the one hand, Twain comically elaborates the ludicrously complex and empty construction of the house's sham aesthetic, ironically prefaced with: 'It is easy to describe'. The humour and criticism derives from the precision with which he reconstructs the house, identifying every detail of furniture, design and decoration down to the 'out-rage in water-color, done by the young niece that came on a visit long ago and died.' On the other hand, he offers the less detailed enumeration of steamboat art, design and décor, from the Windsor arm-chairs to the picture painted paddle-box. However, the comparatively sedate 'objective' enumeration of detail is repeatedly interrupted by jest and questioning that suggests something phony. For example, everything is garnished with white wooden filigree, the picture on the paddle-box is 'gaudy', the 'spraying crown of plumes' cut into the chimney-tops are 'counterfeit', the chandeliers are 'each an April shower of glittering glass-drops', the pink and white carpet in the ladies' cabin 'as soft as mush', and the inventor of the Bridal Chamber 'still alive and unhanged'. As if this were not enough, each state-room might be graced with a looking-glass, a wash-bowl and pitcher, and perhaps 'part of a towel which could be told from mosquito netting by an expert.' There is in all this 'gilded' elaborateness more than a hint of what Twain diagnoses as the 'Sir Walter disease'. And yet, in this instance, Twain's portrait of the steamboat signals its 'highest and finest, and most pleasing, and comfortable, and satisfactory estate', not least in comparison to the dirt-caked Cincinnati boat of 1882. But there is yet another way to explore this seeming ambiguity.⁴⁷

In 'Castles and Cultures', and more famously, 'Enchantments and Enchanters', Twain riles against the Scottish novelist Sir Walter Scott for the pernicious effects of his mediaeval romantic novels on Southern American culture; turning back progress with 'sham grandeurs,

⁴⁷ Twain 1986 [1883]: 278-279.

sham gauds, and sham chivalries of a brainless and worthless long-vanished society.' Adding: 'The South has not yet recovered from the debilitating influence of his books. Admiration of his fantastic heroes and their grotesque "chivalry" doings and romantic juvenilities still survives here.' Indeed, the ideas promulgated by such works are conceivably the source of the aesthetic criteria that sees local residents identify the western steamboat as 'magnificent'. But is this type of 'gaudiness' synonymous with the 'gaudy' paddle-box pictures that grace the side of many steamboats, or is there a difference between the practical and commercial value of the steamboat – with what it accomplishes and symbolizes technologically – and its architectural, aesthetic presentation? To demonstrate more fully the level of ambiguity of these questions, there is the steamboat wreck in *Huckleberry Finn*. ⁴⁸

In Chapter 12 Huck and Jim encounter the wreck of a steamboat on their journey down the Mississippi River, a boat Huck boards only to discover 'a gang of murderers in yonder'. Commonly read as the personification of culture, the steamboat is assigned the name of *The Walter Scott*. But there are a number of possible interpretations of this scene. First, and least problematic, is to read the boat's destruction as an everyday fact of steamboat culture; that there is nothing extraordinary about the incident or the name of the steamboat, the two are merely coincidental.⁴⁹ Alternatively, and given Twain's voluble attack on Scott in *Life*, and the scene's association with the 'romantic' predilections of Tom Sawyer (acting according to the 'book'), the application is purposefully selected, and inextricably unites steamboat culture with that of sham and chivalry (of the South's predilection for chivalric romance). As such the narrative implies that the boat was wrecked as a criticism of the detrimental influence of that predilection. Finally, Twain's criticism is possibly this: that while the western steamboat reflects, and is the practical personification of progress (of economical prosperity, industrial

⁴⁸ Twain 1986 [1883]: 285. In Chapter 46 Twain adds, 'Most of the world has now outlived good part of these harms, though by no means all of them; but in our South they flourish pretty forcefully still. Not so forcefully as half a generation ago, perhaps, but still forcefully. There, the genuine and wholesome civilization of the nineteenth century is curiously confused and commingled with the Walter Scott Middle-Age sham civilization and so you have practical, common-sense, progressive ideas, and progressive works, mixed up with the duel, the inflated speech, and the jejune romanticism of an absurd past that is dead, and out of charity ought to be buried. Twain 1986 [1883]: 327.

⁴⁹ There was in fact a steamboat with the name *Walter Scott*. See Owens 1990: 3.

growth and scientific, technological development), that advancement has been brought up on the rocks of sham culture; that all the progress (presently) being achieved is being undone by the southern aesthetic of sham romanticism.

THE WESTERN STEAMBOAT OF THE GILDED AGE

In tracing a picture of the antebellum South, of Mississippi river life, and western steamboat culture in particular, Twain's oeuvre is rich in texture; the steamboat appearing in no less than six novels. Moving from representation to representation, from one book to another, it is thus possible to suture a detailed and encompassing portrait of 'life on the Mississippi' before, or indeed after, the Civil War. That the majority of this material is fictional in no way undermines its authority to accurately represent a specific historical moment, its people and their manner of livelihood. On the contrary, that fiction can function as 'history' or historical narrative is announced in *Life* by Twain's use of material from the (then) unpublished novel *Huckleberry Finn* as a way of representing the age of flatboat and keelboat culture. A fully realised analysis of Twain's antebellum South, or even the dramatic and aesthetic function of the western steamboat across his Mississippi writings, is impractical here. An attempt however, can be made to demonstrate the plurality of Twain's representation and the nature of its intra-textual picture with respect to the opening chapters of *The Gilded Age* – a novel which predates 'Old Times' and introduces in embryonic form a number of the images and associated emotions evident in that later work.⁵⁰

Published to a mixed critical reception in 1873, *The Gilded Age, A Tale of Today*, was borne of a literary partnership between Twain and Charles Dudley Warner, and a collaborative desire to write a satire exposing and condemning the political corruption rife in Washington,

⁵⁰ With the writing and publication date of the novel (1873) so close to the composition of the 'Old Times' sketches for the *Atlantic Monthly*, it is possible to see in these opening chapters, what with their obvious energy and close attention to detail, their intimacy with western steamboat culture, a stimulus or (though unknown at the time), a rehearsal for those sketches.

(roughly spanning the years 1845 to the early 1870s). In Twain's own words, it concerned itself with 'the all-pervading speculativeness' of the American, each with his dream and pet scheme, 'whereby he is to advance socially or pecuniarily'. For Twain however, the opening chapters would equally prove an autobiographical affair, centring on the relocation of the Hawkins family to Missouri, just as John Marshall Clemens and his young wife Jane Clemens had made in 1834.⁵³ Further autobiographical material surfaces in the shape of John Marshall's obsession with his Tennessee land, and Twain's own experiences as a steamboat cub and pilot, specifically, the traumatic events surrounding the death of his brother Henry in the Pennsylvania disaster of 1858.

Nor should the presence of the western steamboat be misjudged as simple plot device. As Nye has shown, the advent of machine technology like the steamboat and railroad gave rise to a 'complex system' of narratives that reflect the beneficial rewards as well as the doubts and concerns of this 'intrusion'. For the western steamboat this entailed narratives that, on the one hand, promoted the positive, transformative influence that meant the settlement and growth of towns, and, on the other, stories of 'exaggeration and fraud', and the dangers associated with steamboat travel (in particular the dramatic loss of life as a result of boiler explosions). Twain incorporates several of these arguments and associations into the opening chapters, having the steamboat serve not only as symbol and practical force of America's rush to modernity, but as a central aspect of frontier life and culture, aiding in the relocation of families. He also offers up two (typically seen as connected) cultural associations, that of a boat in the full flurry of a race and the violent and deadly destruction of its competitor.

Several of these connections are made as early as chapter 1 as Squire Hawkins attempts to convince his wife of the financial rewards of their relocation to Missouri. On the one hand, he contextualises his argument with exclamations of progress and revolution,

⁵¹ Kaplan 2005 [2003]: 293. The novel also 'gave its name to an age in American history'.

⁵² Kaplan 2005 [2003]: 307.

⁵³ According to Fred Kaplan, Twain's autobiographical material 'initially [proves] the engine that drives the novel' and 'provides partly fictionalized portrayals of John Marshall Clemens, Jane Clemens, Henry, Pamela, Orion, and especially James Lampton, transformed into Colonel Beriah Sellers.' Kaplan 2005 [2003]: 293.

differentiating the precociousness of his own thinking from that of the local population by his awareness of the changes heralded by the industrial age or new industrial order. Thus, the local residents are characterised by the scepticism of parochial life, portrayed simply as 'cattle' who 'scoff' at steamboats and 'call them lies and humbug'. He however knows – as indeed does his wife – that 'they're a reality and they're going to be a more wonderful thing some day then they are now; they're going to make a revolution in this world's affairs that will make men dizzy to contemplate.' Nor does he stop with the steamboat, but in the same breath jumps to the role of the railways, and to a time when the railroad and steamboats span the land of the west: "And this is not all, Nancy-it isn't even half! There's a bigger wonder-the railroad!" On the other hand, it is the creation of such a technological network which lies at the heart of his ambition, of what he terms 'the biggest scheme on earth', for it is through such 'improvements' that the value of the land he intends to purchase – the pine forests, the wheat, corn, iron, copper, and coal, either grown on or dormant in the land – will increase. It may take a little time, he tells his wife, but the children of this generation will enjoy the benefits: "We'll never see the day Nancy [...] We've got to drag along, drag along, and eat crusts in toil and poverty [...] but they'll ride in coaches, Nancy!",54

Having resolved to pursue their fortune it is the steamboat that assists in their moving, carrying them up the Mississippi River into the state of Missouri. So it is that after a week's long trek the family arrive at the river and proceed to make camp 'near a shabby village which was caving, house by house, into the hungry Mississippi.' The representation of the steamboat which enters the scene in the guise of a 'monster' is primarily dramatic in tone, and very much the product of the innocence and inexperience of the children and family slaves as they catch a first glimpse of the river. Indeed, the scene is composed within the larger frame of adventure, a 'lagging dragging journey' that has metamorphosed into one full of 'wonder and delight, [...]

⁵⁴ Twain 2002 [1873]: 15-16. As Kaplan has succinctly summarised, these two men personify, 'a fatal genius for impractical ideas and inventions, an obsessive, unbalanced preoccupation with inevitably unsuccessful schemes to make themselves and their families rich, a failure of business sense and economic realism that make them both painfully pathetic.' Kaplan 2005 [2003]: 293.

peopled with the mysterious dwarfs and giants and goblins that figured in the tales of the negro slaves.' Seen in such light it is hardly surprising that the river's breadth, grandeur and solemnity, not only arouses the sensations of astonishment, but sees their talk tinged by the supernatural; 'with invisible spirits'. It is at this point, and into this realm of awe and makebelieve, that there intrudes a 'deep coughing sound' and 'a fierce eye of fire' – a coughing that only grows 'louder and louder, the glaring eye [...] larger and still larger, glar[ing] wilder and still wilder.' The unknown is a steamboat, but Uncle Dan'l, one of the slaves in charge of the children, proclaims it to be 'de Almighty', and starts to supplication and prayer. As it comes closer and closer, the gloom becomes a 'huge shape' with 'tall duplicate horns' from which 'dense volumes of smoke, starred and spangled with sparks' pour forth; the steamboat nothing short of a bilious, horned 'monster'. ⁵⁵

A similar representation occurs in *Huckleberry Finn* when during their descent of the Mississippi one night Huck and Jim encounter a steamboat heading up river and straight for them. In almost every other respect, and every other instance, the impression conjured by the steamboat on the imagination of Huck is positive in nature, and consistent with Twain's image of adolescent boys living on the banks or within sight of the great Mississippi. For example, not only is the possibility of a steamboat ride greeted by Huck with enthusiasm, but he himself reveals his familiarity with steamboat culture – architectural details and terminology, as well as facts regarding navigation.⁵⁶ Here however (narrative demands of), darkness and situation conspire in making the mind conjure something 'looking like a black cloud with rows of glowworms around it', transforming the revered steamboat into a monster: 'all of a sudden she bulged out, big and scary, with a long row of wide-open furnace doors shining like red-hot teeth, and her monstrous bows and guards hanging right over us.' The essential difference between the two scenes, of course, is that while Huck is very much aware of what it is that is

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⁵⁵ Twain 2002 [1873]: 24-25.

⁵⁶ For example, when he climbs on board the wreck of *The Walter Scott* he makes specific reference to the Texas. ⁵⁷ Twain 1994 [1885]: 97. The passage is also the reverse of a scene that occurs in *Life* when the steamboat

charges at a raft in the middle of the river.

rushing up to meet him and Jim, and that smashes straight through their raft; Uncle Dan'l and the children belonging to Squire Hawkins and his wife, have never seen a steamboat, or have any idea, what one is.

The following morning, and despite learning that the monster of the previous night was a human contrivance, the children and slaves are no more at ease when the family first boards a small steamboat: 'they started, in fright, every time the gauge-cocks sent out an angry hiss, and they quaked from head to foot when the mud-valves thundered. The shivering of the boat under the beating of the wheels was sheer misery to them.' Familiarity however, soon modifies and metamorphoses the anxieties of the children into pleasure: 'a glorious adventure, a royal progress through the very heart and home of romance, a realization of their rosiest wonderdreams.' ⁵⁸ Such associations are arguably the prevailing ones in Twain's oeuvre, whether it is the representation of his own ambitions in 'Old Times' and *Life*, the lives of his friends and other boys in the community, or the fictional sentiments of Tom Sawyer or Huckleberry Finn. In *Huckleberry Finn*, for example, Huck is not slow to express his keenness and excitement, his obvious pleasure and enthusiasm, at being confronted with the prospect of a steamboat voyage: 'I didn't have to be ordered twice, to go and take a steamboat ride.' ⁵⁹ Similarly, in *Tom Sawyer, Detective*, the link is made between childhood and travelling and the excitement of being on a steamboat: 'But it warn't dull – couldn't be for boys that was travelling'. ⁶⁰

The form that this romance and pleasure assume is briefly elaborated in *The Gilded Age* where it involves running races up and down the deck, climbing about the bell, 'making friends with passenger-dogs chained under the life-boat', ⁶¹ or enjoying the movement of the boat and the changing scenery from the shade under the pilot house. The ultimate wonderment however, comes, perhaps unsurprisingly, from the lure of the pilot house itself, a prize that the children approach tentatively. On their being invited in; 'their happiness was complete'. As

⁵⁸ Twain 2002 [1873]: 28.

⁵⁹ Twain 1994 [1885]: 157.

⁶⁰ Twain 2002 [1896]: 748.

⁶¹ Twain also mentions a passenger-bear which is perhaps a knowing reference to T. B. Thorpe's famous tale, 'The Big Bear of Arkansas.'

with Twain's own represented experiences, the pilot house signals the apex of the children's desire; presented as a 'cosy little house, built entirely of glass and commanding a marvellous prospect in every direction.' Indeed, not only is their enjoyment characterised as 'boundless', but the very place is described as that of 'a magician's throne'.⁶²

From the moment that Squire Hawkins and his family board the steamboat, until the time the children settle in the pilot house, the narrative evokes a typical everyday voyage of a western steamboat. Twain chooses to do so through the eyes of youth, and allows impressions to be dominated by a sense of wonder and novelty, of fun and amusement. So it is that, while the children sit on the hurricane deck in the shade of the pilot house, the steamboat pushes onward up river, fighting the mid-stream current and passing the verdant world on either bank - passing the over-hanging willows, log cabin homes and wood-piles. More significantly, the narrative charts the steamboat's navigation of the river, offering an intimate description of the river's particular and peculiar features (sand-bars, shoal water, as well as the actions of the boat itself), whose specificity clearly foreshadows the knowledge of Huck: 'they go out and follow the bars and hunt for easy water under the reefs.'63 On closer inspection however, it becomes obvious that, while it is the experiences of the children that are being projected, it is the 'voice' of the former pilot Clemens which dominates. Indeed, it is clear to see that the children are themselves, in part, just a narrative device allowing Twain to present the pleasures of the steamboat voyage and move action from one location to another; the remainder of the chapter given over to the activities of the pilot, the race that ensues and to the destruction of the chasing boat as well as its aftermath.

For example, in the description of the boat's progress there is a knowing deployment of terminology, of a lexicon particular to steamboat culture that speaks of 'points', 'bluffs', and 'chutes': how the boat 'regularly crossed the river every five miles, avoiding the "bight" of the

62 Twain 2002 [1873]: 30.

⁶³ Twain 1994 [1885]: 97. Equally: '[...] but we wouldn't have to light it [a lantern] for up-stream boats unless we see we was in what they call a 'crossing'; for the river was pretty high yet, very low banks being still a little under-water; so up-bound boats didn't always run the channel, but hunted easy water.' Twain 1994 [1885]: 69.

great bends and thus escaping the strong current.'64 Equally, when events switch to the pilot house and action centres on the occupation of the pilot, Twain's mastery of steamboat culture is given free reign as he focuses on two quintessential aspects of that culture: those of racing and (infamously) boiler explosions. Here, and in passages which invite comparison with those of the later 'Old Times' and Life, Twain evokes all the thrill and excitement of competition and the horror of violent destruction. On the one hand, the narrative dramatises the 'royal fun' of racing as the Boreas and Amaranth compete, the action replete with steamboat technicalities, procedures and vocabulary, its structures and codes of practice. 65 Thus, reference is made to the work of the leadsman, determining the depth of the river at a particular point, and of the communication that occurs between the pilot and engineer via the 'bells'. Similarly, there is an implicit, general demonstration of the relationship existent between captain and pilot, the latter crowned in all his status and authority – the respect with which great pilot's are honoured and the value of their attained reputation: '[he is] a regular gold-leaf, kid-glove, diamond-breastpin pilot [...] We won't take any tricks off of him. '66 Indeed, the techniques or practices implied in racing are offered in all their idiomatic glory: "Break into that rosin on the main deck [...] Break up the casks of bacon in the forrard hold! Pile it in! Levy on that turpentine in the fantail – drench every stick of wood with it!" And again in the phrase: "nigger roosting on the safety-valve!" that refers to the dangerous practice of weighing the safety-valve cord that allows steam to build up for ever greater pressure.⁶⁷

On the other hand, Twain's portrayal of the *Amaranth's* destruction (the aftermath of the booming roar and thundering crash), is rendered in vivid violent detail, and foreshadows the *Pennsylvania* disaster that claims the life of his brother Henry. Here, Twain writes of the shapeless ruin that imprisons a dozen victims 'alive and wailing for help', and how matters are only exacerbated when the boat catches fire, scorching the clothes and singeing the hair of

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64 Twain 2002 [1873]: 28-29.

⁶⁵ In Life on the Mississippi Twain famously writes, 'Racing was royal fun.' Twain 1986 [1883]: 139.

⁶⁶ Twain 2002 [1873]: 34.

⁶⁷ Twain 2002 [1873]: 34.

those working to free the trapped; driving them back into surrender; leaving the imprisoned voices beseeching: "Don't leave us!" Meanwhile, those that are rescued are accommodated in the saloon on board of the Boreas, where they are encountered by the Hawkins's children the next morning: 'Eleven poor creatures lay dead and forty more lay moaning, or pleading or screaming, while a score of Good Samaritans moved among them doing what they could to relieve their sufferings; bathing their skinless faces and bodies with linseed oil and lime water.' However, while the scene evokes an impression similar to the disaster recorded in Life, 68 the chapter's closing lines are cloaked in a different form of realism, one not evinced in that narrative: 'A jury of inquest was impaneled, and after due deliberation and inquiry they returned the inevitable American verdict which has been so familiar to our ears all the days of our lives - "NOBODY TO BLAME",69

Like 'Old Times' and Life after it, these chapters from The Gilded Age offer a representation of western steamboat travel that is coloured by several of its central associated images, and by a professional and personal intimacy. Unlike the innumerable tourists that visited the Mississippi Valley before the war, and who furnished details of western steamboat culture – whether it was the steamboat's aesthetic appearance and technological apparatus, or merely the character and composition of on board activity and society – Twain has the authority to portray that culture from within and without. In fact, in light of his experiences, it is interesting to note the choices he makes in 'Old Times' and *Life* with regards to a representation of the antebellum western steamboat; that there is little or no information about the daily activities of passengers; little elaboration of the differing types of work carried out by many of its officers and crew; and little or no information with respect to machinery. Instead, in 'Old Times,' western steamboat culture is focused largely on the profession of the pilot, on his skills and ability, his lifestyle

⁶⁸ Twain 1986 [1883]: 161-165. ⁶⁹ Twain 2002 [1873]: 35-37.

and his achievements. In *Life*, the scope of that portrait was enlarged with the intention of producing what Fred Kaplan describes as being 'the first and only book readers need open to find out everything about the Mississippi River Valley, from it geological inception to the late nineteenth century.'⁷⁰ As such it incorporates and coalesces many aspects of Mississippi life, pulling together practices, events and a range of historical representations, and presents them in the clear voice of their own rich language.

⁷⁰ Kaplan 2005 [2003]: 377-378.

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CONCLUSION

Ever since the first newspaper reports announcing the voyage of the *New Orleans* in 1811, the printed media has been the source for an inestimable number of representations of the American antebellum western steamboat. Whether written or pictorial, authors and artists have utilized a variety of literary genres and visual styles to create an expansive library of material pertaining to most, if not all, the aspects of its cultural history: from the aesthetic and technological, to the everyday work culture of officers and crew, recording the duties and practices of the captain, the pilot, steward and fireman. It similarly sheds light on the variety and social activities of on-board society; from the fatigues of cabin passage to the hardships of those huddled amongst the freight on the main deck below. Nor is that library complete, as scholars continue to explore that history and its heritage, and newly imagined portraits are brought to life in the words of novelists. Indeed, the importance of the western steamboat to American history, as both a practical tool and a cultural icon, is reflected not only in its proliferation of contemporaneous discourse and representation but also modern historical analysis and cultural recreation.

In the close to two hundred year history of its representation the quantity of literary material in which even a cursory portrait of the antebellum western steamboat is offered is sufficient to comprise at least five generic groups.¹ Firstly, there is the plethora of journal, newspaper and pamphlet articles written, published and circulated at the time.² Secondly, there are the observations and evaluations of domestic and (notably) foreign travellers for whom the experience of steamboat travel was typically a short trip in a longer American sojourn ('Tour'). Thirdly, there are the novels, sketches and autobiographical accounts of

¹ As Chapter 1 has shown – and as Smith discusses in more detail – the connection between the rivers and steam technology precedes Roosevelt's *New Orleans* by several decades. The time of two hundred years then, is used to signify the time since that voyage.

² Private diaries and letters by comparison are rare.

former steamboatmen who used their experiences to recreate the past. Fourthly, there are those authors who have written about antebellum steamboat culture in particular or about life in the Mississippi Valley in general, setting their narratives at that time and in that geographical locale. Finally, there are the representations of scholars: historians proffering studies of technology, aesthetic appearance and work culture, and biographers chronicling the lives of former steamboatmen, in particular, pilots and captains. (This latter group can also be extended to include the broader historical studies in which the western steamboat is, more often than not, no more than a cursory figure.)

On the one hand, the historical impact of the western steamboat is registered in the references and representations that saturated early nineteenth century printed media, from the illustrative newspaper stamp used in daily advertisements, to the detailed, novel length depiction.³ Together such representations testify not only to the role of steamboats in the daily lives of businessmen and residents, serving as an invaluable means for transporting people and goods, but, and precisely because of the geographical reach of the Mississippi, Missouri and Ohio rivers, its status as an object of extensive national interest and debate.

As such, contemporary representation reflects the modernising role of the steamboat to regional and national economic prosperity, providing vital lines of commercial and cultural communication. Indeed, before its supercession by the railroad, the western steamboat was essential in opening up the Western territories to settlement, in bringing produce and crops to market, as well as manufactured goods, immigrants and migrants to the western frontier. Moreover, such a practical application was frequently phrased in distinctly ideological terms, where the steamboat was not merely a symbol or and agent for the spread of liberty, democracy and egalitarianism, but the practical embodiment of those ideals.

On the other hand, scholarly, historical analysis has located the western steamboat in larger narratives of American history. For example, there are the narratives that treat of the American South, West and the 'Western' rivers in particular, demonstrating the impact of the steamboat on commercial, cultural, sociological and political development. In much

³ The are various different types of visual styles / forms of representation, for example, the periodical sketch or the literary drawing, or the colourful gigantic panoramic paintings of the Mississippi River Valley. See, for example, McDermott 1998 [1968] and Smith 2007.

the same way, cultural history has begun sketching the connections between the steamboat and the centrality of the Mississippi River Valley to American discourse and imagination, serving not just as raw material for literary production but as a space onto which ideas and aspirations (personal, imperial for example) could be projected, or in fact, realised. Indeed, even before the Louisiana Purchase there were those who recognised the potential of the western waterways to the future prosperity of an expanding America. It was the steamboat that proved vital in realising many of those ambitions. So it is that historians have shown the role of the western steamboat in the process of colonization, the importance of its role in migration, communication, settlement and resettlement, as well as with respect to its economic and military value. It has also been discussed in the larger context of America's technological history, considered in its complementary role to the construction of canals and railroads. In many ways, the history of the western steamboat is the history of the antebellum Mid-West and South.

From the outset this thesis has sought to examine some of the more prominent and enduring representations from amongst this literary crop, focusing exclusively on those published during the first century of western steamboat history. It has equally sought to go beyond that familiar and iconic image of the steamboat as giant 'floating palace', an image that testifies not only to the reverence in which it is held (though in its modern context it is the 'imagined' more than the 'historical' steamboat), but to the part it played in American history. Nor has this thesis simply limited itself to the exploration of the different aspects associated with western steamboat culture but extended its focus to their place in the light of regional and national characteristics and ideologies. As such, the western steamboat has served as both focal point and lens, providing a unique set of representations for examining nineteenth century America.

For example, this thesis has considered the western steamboat within contemporary debates concerning the significance of technology to the development of American society – America's drive towards industrial modernity, its colonial ambitions and the growth of a market economy – and with respect to the realization of its constitutionally declared ideals. It has also explored cultural and societal issues such as those pertaining to manners and the

relation of the sexes (specifically the ideology of 'women's sphere'), and to the Southern 'institution' of slavery. On a more literary note, it has examined the use of the steamboat as both symbol and narrative device ('boat-as-nation'); as the stage for a more encompassing and critical pronouncement of contemporary American society. Finally, with respect to the steamboat itself, this thesis has not only laboured to fix its position in regional history and essential aspects of its work culture, but show how aspects of its appearance and design (its 'gingerbread' structure, painted paddle-boxes and elaborate decorations), fit with dominant Southern, or frontier cultural aesthetic tastes.

In the light of such interests this thesis proffers a distinctive exploration of western steamboat culture that not only recognises the steamboat as a practical object and physical space, but also as a fictional ('imagined') construct, where the difference between the two is sometimes immense. Such interests have resulted in a notable literary bent with respect to the material selected and in its methodological approach – a union that can be stated in terms of three mutually complicit concerns. First, there is the steamboat itself; its function, appearance, technology and work culture, as well as the societal activities which occur onboard. Second, there is the cultural, historical context in which the studied representations were written and consumed; the context of authorship, publication and the prevailing ideas that potentially determined interpretation (its place in contemporary discourses). And third, there is the representation itself; the myriad elements that constitute its composition

Firstly, attention was aimed at the particular aesthetic qualities or techniques of each representation; i.e., the language of its articulation. On the one hand, this involved all the elements particular to 'close-reading', such as each author's chosen vocabulary, of her or his use of syntax, metaphor or simile. On the other hand, it meant the lexicon particular to western steamboat culture, or more correctly, the transcription (use) of that language in subsequent 'literary' representation, what Twain calls 'steamboat technicalities'. The latter case, for example, comprised specific idioms or 'turns-of-phrase' such as "nigger roosting on the safety-valve!", or signalled new ways of 'seeing' nature (as when Twain writes of reading the face of the river in describing 'the science of piloting'), or in the application of

⁴ Twain 2002 [1873]: 34.

idiomatic names to mechanical devices, such as 'doctor' and 'hog-chains'. The former, in contrast, has entailed the characterisation of the steamboat in symbolic terms, as indicative of America's governing ideology of 'haste and dispatch', or its ambivalent designation as a 'fort'. Less politically, it has meant the characterisation of its unique aesthetic as 'ramshackle', 'gingerbread' or 'gaudy', or anthropomorphizing the steamboat into a veritable monster, displaying a range of physiological characteristics such as eyes and teeth, while its mechanical operations are likened to strenuous coughing or panting.

The two, however, can variously be seen to overlap, when, for example, considered in the larger context of Southern or Southwestern culture. The synthesis is best exemplified in the work of Twain where he combines local idioms (in literary terms, the style particular to the Southern humourists), patterns of speech and steamboat culture. In writing of the South or life on the Mississippi, he records western steamboat culture in the language of the steamboatmen that comprised it and the local citizens for whom it was variously a matter of livelihood, a means of travel, a site of possible employment or the image of adventure. Thus, Twain not only preserves all the vernacular richness of communication between officers and crew, pilot and engineer, but, at one and the same time, also testifies to the cultural proliferation of the steamboat; to its part in the imagination of individuals and the status and sense of identity conferred or felt by the steamboatman. For example, in 'Rank and Dignity of Piloting' he writes how the 'Negro firemen, deck hands, and barbers' who belonged to 'distinguished' boats were similarly 'distinguished personages in their grade of life'. Equally, in The Adventures of Tom Sawyer he portrays the ambitions and play of the local children who dream of being pilots or play at being steamboats: "Let her go back on the labboard! Ling-a-ling-ling! Chow-ch-chow-chow!""9

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⁵ Doctor refers to the 'auxiliary engine used either to pump water to the boilers or to work the bilge pumps or fire hoses.' Hog-chains, meanwhile were 'iron rod[s] passing over braces, used to prevent the hull from hogging or sagging.' Kane 2004: 147-148.

⁶ Chevalier 1967 [1838]: 60

⁷ Melville 1990 [1857]: 13.

⁸ Twain 1986 [1883]: 124.

⁹ Twain 1986 [1876]: 15. It is Ben Rogers who plays at being the steamboat *Big Missouri* 'and considered himself to be drawing nine feet of water. He was boat, and captain, and engine-bells combined, so he had to imagine himself standing on his own hurricane-deck giving orders and executing them.' Twain 1986 [1876]: 15.

Secondly, there is the connected matter of context, whether it is the larger, 'internal' context of the narrative in which the representation appears, the context of authorship, such as the particular ideological prejudices underlying the text's composition, and the historical context of production and consumption. On the one hand, the 'internal' context entails not only the narrative space occupied, or the part played, by the representation but also the nature (genre) of the work in which it appears. For example, in addition to its particular 'textual' description, such an analysis considers whether the representation should be interpreted mimetically and / or figuratively (as indicative of American modernity), and with respect to which discursive (discourse) frames, as when Trollop offers the evaluation that the separation of the sexes 'is no where more remarkable than on board the [western] steam-boats.' It could similarly mean positioning a particular representation within the technological context of American 'internal improvements' or the cultural history of the Mississippi River and the South.

On the other hand, the bias of authorship, and the interrelated context of production and consumption, entails not just the specific 'intentions' of the author or the societal (or better, cultural) attitudes that may influence and determine what and how a specific subject is written about, but prevailing ideological discourses that shape debate. The difference here is between the political and cultural affiliations (implicit or otherwise) informing individual opinion, the circumscriptions (for example social propriety) placed upon the nineteenth century female author, and finally, the competing contemporary ideas and preoccupations. In short, it means acknowledging how personal ideas and beliefs (of technology, nature, aesthetics and politics) have shaped representation, and historically, how every representation can be read in the light of collective debates about industrialisation, settlement, design and democracy. Indeed, it is important in reading representations of the western steamboat to recognise the interconnected nature of those representations; that in the course of its literary history there appear diachronic and synchronic patterns of signification, as well as deliberate acts of appropriation.

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¹⁰ Trollope 1997 [1832]: 138.

¹¹ Intentions here means only those explicitly offered by the author her or himself, whether, for example, in the preface or in text itself, or in her or his private correspondence, diary or journal.

Arguably the most common pattern used and identified is the trope of nature versus technology. As contemporary debates concerning internal 'improvements' show, the impact of 'new technologies' on the future form of the New Republic gave rise to an extensive and 'complex narrative system' that either endorsed, celebrated or questioned such activities. ¹² Indeed, precisely because America was at the time typically envisioned as a 'garden' (the Jeffersonian agrarian or pastoral ideal), whose identity derived from the very landscape itself, the clash of ideals registered in both practical and paradigmatic terms. So it was that politicians and public figures, travel writers, novelists, journalists and promoters, variously employed this trope as they endeavoured to either demonstrate the benefits and rewards of modernisation, in terms of economic and cultural prosperity, or to express doubts and raise concerns about attendant dangers of, for example, steam technology, and the detrimental ecological effects.

As this thesis has shown, within this complex system of technological narratives, those of the western steamboat divided between signalling the positive effects on western migration and settlement (of opening up new territories), on national economic and cultural consolidation, and most commonly, the deadly nature of travel (snagging, fires and boiler explosions). There were also other, less dramatic, but perhaps no less politicized narratives that celebrated the congenial nature of steamboat travel or condemned it for the unpleasant and culturally impoverished society that took cabin passage or presented more pleasurable alternatives, like a journey by keelboat. Such dominant patterns in narrative representation, however, should not obscure those discernable within specific genres, which not only see a repetition of characterisation and vocabulary but also its particular formal structure.

Especially guilty in the construction of such patterns is the multitude of antebellum travel accounts that gave rise to a repetition of incident, activities, occurrences and sentiments as well as evaluation. Not only would authors borrow material from other travellers, or frequently delve into local guides or the works of anterior travellers, either as a substitute for the absence of personal experience or as a means of achieving a fuller picture, they also used the representations of others as means of gaining authority for their

¹² Nye 2003: 12.

own work or simply in order to contradict or corroborate their presented versions. A number of European authors would also purposefully position their representation along political lines that argued for the success of the 'great experiment' or its failure. As a result, most travel accounts make reference to issues of safety, of on-board society and activity, aspects of technological and aesthetic design, all typically contextualised in descriptions of landscape and climate. Such formal and lexicographical repetition resulted in the creation of generic impressions and the perpetuation of specific cultural archetypes.

Such close scrutiny of each representation did not, however, overlook the changing design and function of the steamboat, the dramatic rise in numbers and in its geographical proliferation, or the form of western steamboat culture in general. Indeed, in the fifty years that separate Nicholas Roosevelt's *New Orleans* and the Civil War, the western steamboat underwent a series of remarkable aesthetic and technological developments that witnessed changes in everything from structural composition (layout) and dimensions (length, height, width), to the methods of construction and machinery. It also entailed a change in the type or elaborateness of accommodation and the various comforts and amenities on offer. Such modifications had a corresponding effect on the experience of travel and representation. In fact, a close study of contemporary portraits, such as travel accounts, might be employed to chart, not only the various stages of western steamboat development but also their regional and national impact as they rapidly became an accepted part of frontier culture, assisting in the expansion of communities, industries and territories, and economic wealth.

As a result, representation of the antebellum western steamboat is particularly rich, proffering a myriad of complementary, contrasting, sometimes contradictory, insights and evaluations. Indeed, the prevailing aim of this thesis has been to explore this very diversity of representation, to assemble them together and, in-doing-so, demonstrate the breadth of generic interest and range of subject matter. At the same time, it has sought specificity across that diversity, examining in close detail the observations of a few key authors. On the one hand, this has resulted in entire chapters being given over to individual conceptions such as those of Herman Melville and Mark Twain. On the other, it has seen the coupling of texts and or authors along the lines of thematic interest. Such an approach, at once

cultural history and literary in form, is most suited to reflect not just the practical and cultural dominance of the western steamboat, but also how practical application, culture and cultural incarnation are all inter-connected.

For example, there is the connection between the practical utility of the steamboat in the colonization of western territories and the representation of that settlement in terms of 'Manifest Destiny'; narratives that 'explained and validated [American] expansion'.

Indeed, the western steamboat was taken up as the exemplar, par excellence, of prevailing American attitudes of industry and speed. Connectedly there are the contemporary debates of America and American ideals that wedded culture and technology, that not only saw the steamboat as the conveyor of culture, uniting East and West through the honing of cultural parity, but a space in which such activity was enacted. Thus, in addition to providing vital evidence of river frontier life, representations such as travel accounts located the western steamboat in discussions of American societal attitudes and practices, whether that meant social manners (drinking, gambling, and tobacco chewing), the separation of the sexes, or entrepreneurial enterprise. In short, as a tool and emblem of democracy the steamboat was considered within the frame of America's democratic experiment.

To underline the complexity of such representations this thesis has also considered the part played by the western steamboat in the lives of African American slaves. Here the connection between practical utility, culture and cultural signification has concentrated on the vital role of the steamboat to the economic vitality of the 'peculiar institution', not only as the purveyor of the products of slave labour but also in the mechanisation of the slave labour market. Indeed, in the national context of slavery and the anti-slavery (specifically abolition) movement, the image of the western steamboat is the focus of several competing lines of signification. For example, there are the various paradoxical associations of liberty, separation, violence and flight, and as well as those pertaining to its status as a cultural and commercial bridge to, and consolidator of, national prosperity. Central to this discussion has been the literary genre of slave narratives that became a vital force in the abolitionist movement. Such narrative, while offering visceral testimony to the conditions of slavery,

¹³ Nye 2003: 5.

of the steamboat as a method of transporting gangs of human cargo from state to state and plantation to plantation, have simultaneously helped frame and reframe debates, pitting regional interest with national interest and state sovereignty against constitutional ideals.

This thesis has also shown the centrality of the western steamboat to the cultural imagination, whose immense practical and symbolic currency is underscored by Melville's use of a Mississippi steamer in his satire of the American nation. More than any other work of the antebellum period, *The Confidence-Man* combines a mix of popular cultural associations pertaining to both western steamboat culture and western rivers, with those of the larger the American nation. Not only is the steamboat a narrative device that stands in for the urban, labyrinthine streets with their teeming heterogeneous population, but whose location on the frontier draws on contemporary conceptions of the Mississippi as an haven for murder, violence, gambling and prostitution. In fact, so varied is Melville's cast of players, so wide-ranging the substance of their conversation, that it is hard to perceive the absence of any aspect of American culture.

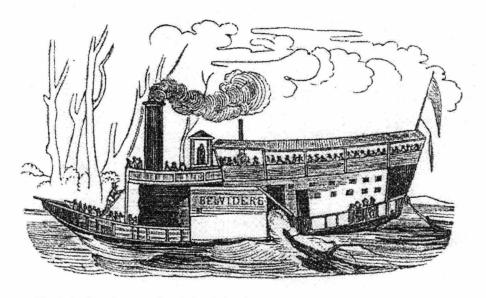
Melville's allegory, however, makes little use of the steamboat itself (its technology and work culture), preferring instead to challenge dominant ideological values and beliefs, specifically notions of trust in an increasingly atomised and shifting society. Indeed, apart from a few aesthetic characterisations and similes that hint at the violence of colonization and an all-consuming commercial (money-getting) spirit, the novel relies on the reader's knowledge and familiarity with existent images of the western steamboat. By comparison, Twain not only conjures up a poignant, nostalgic portrait of western steamboat culture, but situates that world in its regional and national, historical context. As such, he is unarguably responsible for the inauguration of some of its most enduring images; portraits which have proved a paragon for subsequent authors and image makers; a well-spring for inspiration, information and plagiarism.

Twain, of course, was not the only author to merge personal experience and literary creativity, but his unique position as a former pilot combined with his creative (humoristic) talents and sensitivity for local idioms and speech have resulted in portraits earning lasting historical credence, as well as greater imaginative authority. For example, when writing of

the 'science of piloting' he fuses the regional voice of the author with the unique voice of steamboatmen – their own identity, language and patterns of speech – to paint an intimate portrait of life in the pilot-house. More evocatively, in writing a 'standard work' about life on the Mississippi, Twain not only re-contextualises this portrait with respect to the larger scope of western steamboat cultural history (for example, the many dramatic changes that he encounters on his 1882 return), but the longer cultural history of the Mississippi and its importance to both the regions through which it runs and the national events that surround and contributed to its definition. It is similarly a portrait that brings into focus a variety of theoretical concerns, most provocatively, how best to write cultural history. So it is that he debates the relative merits of personal experience and or imagination, specifically the very question of representation, utilizing a variety of voices, extra-literary material and literary techniques for content and context. In fact, more than any other literary work, *Life on the Mississippi* (or rather, the impact of *Life on the Mississippi*), demonstrates just how porous the boundary is between historical 'reality' and literary representation in securing a hold in the cultural imagination.

In many ways this thesis has sought to emulate Twain's endeavour of constructing a polyphonic and polygeneric narrative of life on the Mississippi – a type of 'cultural history' in which the western steamboat takes centre stage. Like him this thesis has sought, not only to pull together a diversity of representations, from a variety of differing perspectives, and, in this case, spanning almost a hundred years, but to locate western steamboat culture both regionally and nationally, and with respect to a range of contemporary discourses. As such, it has set out to proffer a distinctive historical, cultural and literary, study of representations pertaining to the antebellum western steamboat, showing not just how individual portraits fit into larger patterns of cultural signification but are themselves composites of prevailing, complementary and competing ideas and beliefs. In short, just as the western steamboat proved revolutionary in regional and national events, so its literary representation reflects that historical role.

APPENDIX



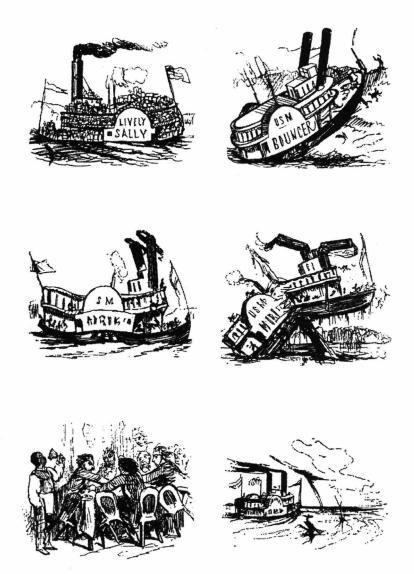
The Belvidere, from Richard Griffin's The Domestic Manners of the Americans (Glasgow: Richard Griffin, 1836).



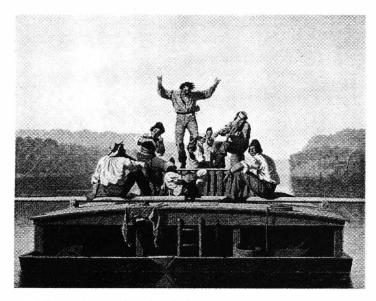
Explosion of the Moselle, from Lloyd's Steamboat Directory and Disasters on the Western Waters (Cincinnati: J. T. Lloyd, 1856).



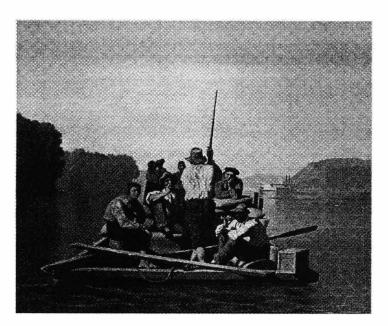
Tom rescues Eva from the Mississippi. From Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (London: C. H. Clarke, 1852), 125.



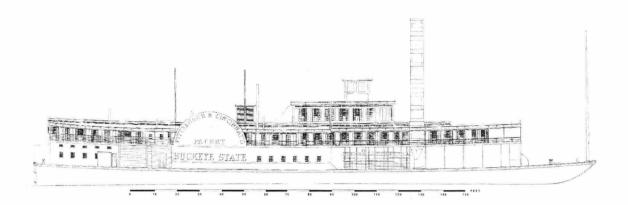
Selection from Arrowsmith's Panorama of Western Travel (designed for exhibition in England), from Harper's New Monthly Magazine 18, no. 103 (December 1858).

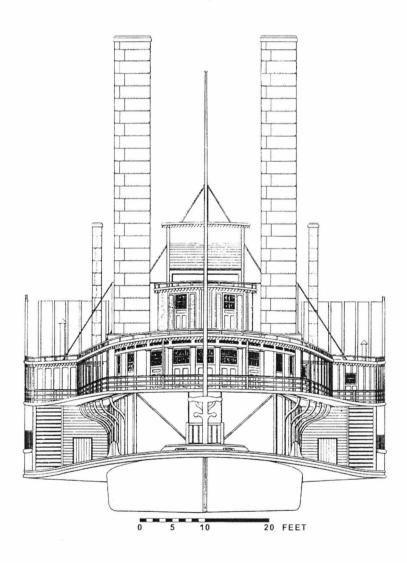


George Caleb Bingham, *The Jolly Flatboatmen* (1846). Manoogian Collection. Image © Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington.

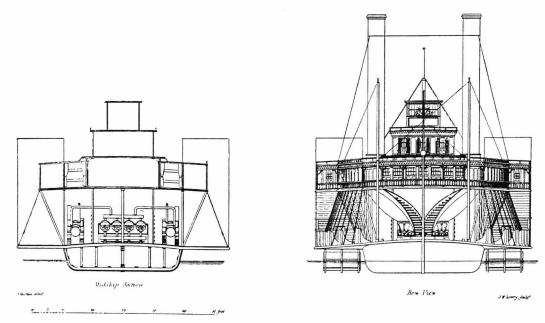


George Caleb Bingham, *Lighter Relieving a Steamboat Aground* (1846–47). Courtesy White House Historical Association (White House Collection).

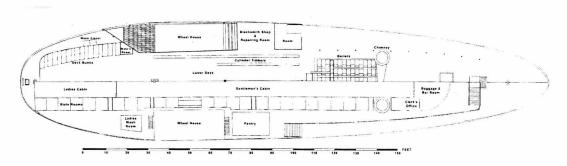




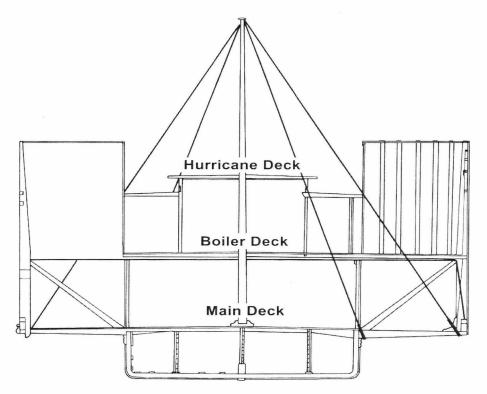
The two views show the 'Buckeye State' (1850), a typical western river packet steamboat of this era. A side-wheeler, she had a length of 260 feet; a beam of 29 feet, 5 inches; and a depth of 61/2 feet. These drawings represent the earliest detailed schematics of a western river steamboat known to exist



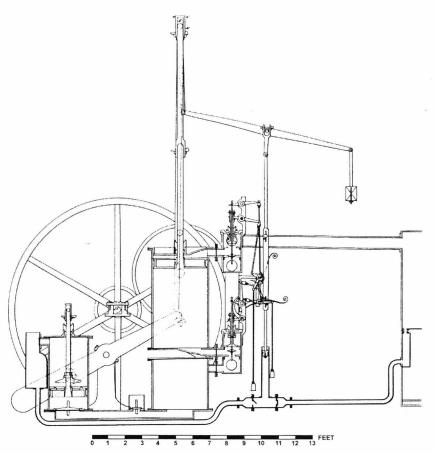
Midship section and bow view of a typical western river steamboat of the 1850s



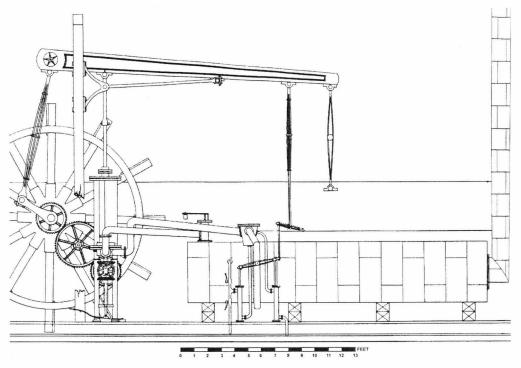
A plan view of the 'Buckeye State' showing the layout of the main deck in the upper half and boiler deck in the lower half



A midships cross-section of 'Buckeye State'



A cross-section of the low-pressure condensing engine from the steamer 'Robert Fulton'



An early high-pressure steamboat engine, much like those used on vessels of the western rivers

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