theories and methodologies

Early America and the Revolutionary Pacific

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IN 1776 THE RUSSIAN MERCHANT GRIGOR IVANOVICH SHELIKHOV OUTFITTED A SHIP BOUND FROM THE SIBERIAN PENINSULA OF KAMCHATKA to the Aleutian Islands, which dot the sea at the westernmost reach of the North American continent. The expedition would hunt sea otters for trade in China, where the pelts fetched a high price.[1] The same year nearly two hundred Spanish colonists arrived at the presidio in Monterey after a six-month journey from present-day southern Arizona. The expedition, led by Juan Bautista de Anza, aimed to populate northern California as part of Spain's efforts to resist encroachment from the north by Russian merchants like Shelikhov. Meanwhile, also in 1776, the explorer James Cook left England for the South Pacific in Britain's continuing attempt to rival France's scientific discoveries and access to potential trade goods in Asia. Throughout the European Atlantic, publications and translations of Cook's final travel narrative circulated details of the profitable trans-Pacific fur trade that until this point had largely been enjoyed by the Russians. Together, the Shelikhov, Anza, and Cook expeditions illustrate inter-European competition for resources and trade in the eighteenth-century Pacific while also suggesting the extraordinary transcultural, intercontinental, and multilingual reach of those encounters—including exchanges between several European nations (such as Russia, Spain, England, France), a variety of indigenous peoples (including Aleuts, Tlingits, Haidas, Ohlones, Tahitians, Hawaiians), and the inhabitants of and visitors to Canton (among them Chinese merchants and laborers, foreign traders from many European nations, and sailors and slaves from the Philippines, India, and other regions of Asia).[2]

By virtue of their shared date, these three expeditions also represent a kind of antipodean 1776, or what Paul Giles refers to as a "parallax" view of a year indissolubly tied to the Atlantic scene of the American Revolution (23). Indeed, the year 1776 exerts an almost gravitational pull in dominant narratives of American history and literature, often yanking efforts at alternative narratives and perspectives back into more familiar temporal and spatial terms the closer

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PMLA 128.4 (2013), published by the Modern Language Association of America

https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2013.128.4.953 Published online by Cambridge University Press

one gets to the revolutionary moment. This essay seeks to circumvent that force field (or at least to reconfigure its terms) by offering a transoceanic paradigm that connects the early Pacific to its Atlantic counterpart in the long (and wide) encounter between European empires and indigenous New World peoples. In doing so, this perspective insists that reimagining early American literature in transnational and global terms requires the rubric of empires rather than that of nation-states.

Narratives of Pacific travel circulated widely in Atlantic publishing networks of the late eighteenth century. One of the earliest of these publications was edited by Alexander Dalrymple, a Scotsman who had spent many years as a British East India Company clerk stationed in Madras, India. During those years, Dalrymple became convinced of the existence of a great southern continent in the Pacific, and he published in 1770–71 a two-volume collection that reprinted the earliest textual accounts, maps, and illustrations of the region in an effort to further the project of finding that continent and profiting from its resources. Dalrymple opens the collection, however, by immediately connecting the Pacific to an Atlantic revolutionary imagination. In remarking on the possibility of rebellion in the American colonies, Dalrymple explains that the colonies were emboldened and empowered by Britain's commercial dependence on them: "the American colonies know the trade from BRITAIN thither is so great a proportion of the commerce of this kingdom, that a stagnation in trade to AMERICA would reduce thousands to clamorous indigence." Far from opposing this resistance, Dalrymple explicitly supports colonial "struggles for independence" and objects to any plans to suppress them. As he explains, "[T]he common rights of humanity entitle them to represent their grievances, and whatever is *thought* unjust is a grievance; the *first* step of tyranny is to *shut* the *ear* against complaints: the *last* to *shut* the *mouth* of the complainant." Rather than suppress rebellion in the Atlantic, Dalrymple sought to avoid it through a strategic use of the Pacific: "if colonies are aiming at independence, and endeavouring to break off all connection with the mother-country, the only means of preventing these intentions, and of securing the power and prosperity of the mother-country, must be by extending its commerce to distant nations who can have no connexion with those discontented colonies" (1: xxvii). Discovery of and trade with the great southern continent that Dalrymple thought existed in the Pacific would relieve Britain's economic and political tensions with North America, maintain British commercial profits, and avoid the prospect of an Atlantic revolution.

Dalrymple believed that Pacific commerce would help to regulate North American resistance to British empire, but the narratives reprinted in his volumes reveal that resistance was already a regular response to European arrival and contact in the Pacific. From the Spanish voyage of Pedro Fernández de Quirós to the Dutch voyage of Jakob Le Maire and Willem Schouten, the arrival of Europeans in the Pacific repeatedly results in violent skirmishes with indigenous peoples. Native resistance to European empire in the Pacific ranges in intensity and effect from the Native pearl divers of Sooloo, who "rub off the outer coats of the pearl" to reduce them to a size the divers are allowed to keep instead of turning the pearls over to their masters (1: 11), to the thirty tattooed men with clubs on Takapoto island who confront the men sent ashore by Le Maire and Schouten (2: 10). Uprisings, revolts, and rebellions were a regular feature not only of the historical narratives collected by Dalrymple but also of the many European and American accounts of travel in the Pacific produced in the decades following the publication of his collection. These narratives suggest that the region operated less as a safety valve for an emerging Atlantic rebellion than as its own cauldron for insurrectionary violence. Wil-

https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2013.128.4.953 Published online by Cambridge University Press

liam Coxe's 1787 *Account of the Russian Discoveries between Asia and America* describes the quick and steady Native resistance to the early-eighteenth-century Russian entry into the North Pacific. In 1741, for example, the Tlingit Indians attacked Aleksey Chirikov's two boats and their men. This event was followed by a series of Native uprisings against Russian fur hunters, from the "numerous body of . . . natives" who killed two Russians after they had tried "to violate some girls upon the island Unyumga" (Coxe 73) to the 1763–64 rebellion of the Aleuts that resulted in the deaths of 150 Russians. Even after the 1766 retaliatory Russian massacre of the Aleuts (Taylor 451–52), Native resistance continued, and nearly thirty years later George Vancouver recorded the murder of a Russian by a group of Natives and the Russian murder of six Natives in response (3: 225). Coxe attributed an anti-imperialist imperative to such Native violence, for "all agree in hating the Russians, whom they consider as general invaders, and therefore kill them whenever they can" (216).

Spanish encounters in the Pacific met with similar resistance. The French explorer Louis-Antoine de Bougainville mentions in his narrative the 1757 revolt of the Guarani Indians in Paraguay against the authority of the Spanish king, whose forces responded by killing over two thousand Indians (99). In fact, Bougainville's observations of Spanish America lead him to revise utterly his romantic assumptions about the Spanish missions. He reports that the Indians' "ardent desire of forcing the walls which confined them" was driven by being "subject to a miserable, tedious uniformity of labour and repose" (106). In 1769 the Kumeyaay Indians attacked the Spanish mission in San Diego, likely in response to the destruction of food sources and the abuse of Native women. In 1771 at Mission San Gabriel in southern California, a Native chief was shot and beheaded for attacking a soldier who had raped his wife (Jackson and Castillo 74, 73). In 1775, while en route to Monterey, several members of the Anza expedition took a detour to San Diego to investigate a recent Native uprising against the mission. According to the expedition's chronicler, Pedro Font, approximately four hundred Native Americans from about forty villages banded together and stole items from the church, "breaking in pieces with a stone the chest of the vestments" and "dispatching their women to the mountain with the plunder. Then taking some firebrands from the guardhouse, they began to set fire to the same guardhouse, to the church, and to the houses of the fathers which, being built of tule and logs, easily caught fire" (199). Earlier that year, the crew of a ship led by the Spaniard Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra landed on the Pacific Northwest coast, near what is now Washington State, and found themselves "ambushed by some three hundred Indians. Seven men—half of the *Sonora*'s crew—were killed while Bodega stood powerless to avenge his loss" (Engstrand 95). From its establishment in 1776 until the 1830s, resisting Indians at the newly established mission in San Francisco were flogged (Hackel 330–32), while Natives at San Luis Obispo set fire to several mission buildings (Sandos 163). Plots to destroy the San Gabriel mission in Los Angeles were discovered as well in the late 1770s and again in 1785.[3]

These Pacific revolts do not seem now readily to fit into the political and narrative models of revolution developed out of contemporaneous Atlantic events. But what Europeans saw then when they entered the Pacific was determined by their experience of the revolutionary Atlantic. When the French explorer La Pérouse arrived on Marivelle Island in the Phillipines' Manila Bay, for example, he reported that the chief Indian—who possesses "the pompous title of alcalde" and practices "considerable authority over the Indians"—also enjoys

> the baneful monopoly of selling, on behalf of the government, the tobacco of which the

https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2013.128.4.953 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> Indians smoke a great deal and almost continually. This impost is fairly recent; the poorest members of the population can hardly bear this burden: it has already caused several rebellions, and I would not be surprised if one day it led to the same outcome as the tea and stamp duties had in North America. (230–31)

On the other side of the Pacific, the American David Porter reports arriving in the port city of Valparaiso, Chile, in 1812 to learn that the Chileans had "shaken off their allegiance to Spain" and that "they looked up to the United States of America for example and protection" (103). The women at the dinners, balls, and evening parties in Valparaiso identify themselves as supporters of "a strong and secret party opposed to the present administration" in Chile, according to Porter, by "wearing their hair gracefully brushed over on the left side of the face: they seem to have entered into the spirit of the revolution" (115).

Such accounts make it clear that Atlantic revolutionary ideas were framing European and American responses to Pacific events. British and French narratives in particular display an Enlightenment sensibility that, like Dalrymple, acknowledged the human right to rebel against tyranny. During his visit to the San Carlos mission, near Monterey, in 1786, for example, La Pérouse predicted an eventual revolt by the Indians in response to their treatment by the Franciscans (180), a prediction renewed six years later when George Vancouver remarked that "should a conspiracy for their destruction take place, the mission would soon fall, and there would be little doubt of the conspirators being joined" by the approximately six hundred additional "Indians of the village" (2: 12).[4] While men like Dalrymple, La Pérouse, and Vancouver clearly carried revolutionary thinking from the Atlantic with them as they traveled into the Pacific, some ships traveling to the Pacific carried Atlantic revolutionary texts and activists with them.[5] A Boston sealing ship that left Australia's New South Wales for Alaska's Nootka Sound in 1796 carried Thomas Muir, an escaped Scottish convict who had been sentenced to the penal colony at Botany Bay and whose sedition conviction had included charges that he was "advocating the writings of Thomas Paine" (Kirker 105). Ten years before David Porter remarked on the revolutionary spirit in Valparaiso, a New Englander engaged in trade in China distributed copies of the Declaration of Independence translated into Spanish when his ship stopped there (Cleveland 174; Kirker 86). And the Boston merchant and captain Samuel Hill reportedly "discarded his copies of Voltaire and Thomas Paine in favor of religious tracts" after he was converted by a missionary at the trading factories in Canton in 1811 (Kirker 174). Revolutionary writing and thinking from the Atlantic clearly made their way into the late-eighteenth-century Pacific, where they provided a framework for understanding indigenous, creole, and shipboard violence as acts of rebellion against injustice and tyranny. As Greg Dening points out, news of the mutiny on Bligh's *Bounty* arrived in an Atlantic where "American merchants were celebrating the new freedom of their revolution" and where the "French King had lost his freedom and was on his way to prison and death" (253).

Explorers, merchants, scientists, and sailors explicitly connected the Pacific and Atlantic as they moved from one ocean to the other. In 1787, for example, as La Pérouse visited the Spanish mission at Monterey on the coast of California, toured the presidio, and observed the dwellings of the Spanish, he reported that the latter "brought to mind a homestead in Sto Domingo or any other colony" (180). And when, the same year, Joseph Banks persuaded the British government to transplant Tahitian breadfruit trees to the West Indies to serve as an inexpensive and low-labor source of food for slaves, he was looking to the Pacific for a solution to difficulty and conflict in the Atlantic, much as Dalrymple had sixteen years earlier, when he sought in the Pacific a solu-

https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2013.128.4.953 Published online by Cambridge University Press

tion to the likelihood of colonial rebellion in the Atlantic. The projects of Dalrymple, Banks, La Pérouse, and Bligh suggest how frequently and significantly conditions in the revolutionary Atlantic determined Europe's presence in, imagination of, and response to the Pacific. These transoceanic connections illustrate what Elizabeth DeLoughrey neatly describes as "an ideological *contraction* of island space and time between the Atlantic and Pacific" that is itself "a product of European *expansion*" (19).

Bruce Cumings has recently urged that America be recognized as "simultaneously an Atlantic and a Pacific nation" and that the overwhelmingly Atlanticist perspective that has dominated accounts of American international relations be supplemented by a "Pacific dimension" (x, ix). When Cumings locates Americans' first encounters with Pacific peoples in the mid-nineteenth-century gold rush, however, and claims that Americans only "met them in economic exchange after 1960" (5), he astonishingly overlooks some of his own evidence, for he notes that the *Empress of China* departed from New York in 1784 with wild ginseng root from North America and returned from Canton in 1785 "loaded with tea, silk, and porcelains, having made a whopping profit of $30,000, a net gain of 25 percent on the original investment" (8). This Pacific voyage was, moreover, financed by none other than Robert Morris, who is perhaps better known as the primary financier of the American Revolution.

Approaching the revolutionary Atlantic from the Pacific reveals features of the former that are too often lost in a narrative overdetermined by the nation. Part of the reason European voyagers so easily identified Pacific uprisings with Atlantic revolutions, for instance, is that the latter were perceived in the late eighteenth century as more fragile and uncertain than they would later come to seem. Even recent studies that position the age of revolutions in a more global framework routinely overlook the kinds of Pacific insurrections documented above, for reasons that have to do less with geographic distance than with political definition. Because these uprisings neither resulted in the formation of new nations nor depended on new ideas about political rule and human rights, they don't register as revolutions, just as the region doesn't count as American in a national or continental framework. Whether calculating by geographic relevance or by political import, the Pacific simply hasn't measured up to the standards governing our models of the revolutionary age. But even once we acknowledge the history of violent resistance by Aleuts or Ohlones or Hawaiians, can their oppositional acts qualify as revolution in the way those in British North America, France, and Haiti do?

The problem with such a question, however, is that it is already the product of powerful dominant narratives about revolution. Hannah Arendt, for example, differentiates "revolution" from other "rebellions," "uprisings," and "insurrections" (34). Although all share the condition of violence, only in revolution is violence used "to constitute an altogether different form of government, to bring about the formation of a new body politic," whereas other types of rebellions "never indicated liberation as the revolutions understood it, and even less did they point to the establishment of a new freedom" (35, 40). While revolutions are differentiated here from lesser uprisings by what amounts to different narrative plots, the plots are distinguished largely according to later outcomes that retroactively shape the political narrative. As Wim Klooster notes, late-eighteenth-century Atlantic revolutions—in British North America, France, and Haiti—did not aim at democracy and were contingent affairs whose results were not predictable or determined (2, 158–62). It is precisely for this reason that Europeans and Americans traveling from the Atlantic in the late eighteenth century could so easily

https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2013.128.4.953 Published online by Cambridge University Press

recognize the specter of revolution in the relatively indeterminate acts of rebellious violence they encountered in the Pacific. When these acts are understood not as attempts at democratic nation building but as expressions of outrage against global empires, Pacific and Atlantic revolts begin to look far more alike.

Another way of putting this is to suggest that the Pacific world appears to have nothing to do with early America and the revolutionary age largely because all the stories we're told about early America and the revolutionary age have nothing to do with the Pacific. National and revolutionary narratives have, of course, long depended on each other, since traditional stories about America have been plotted around a particular definition of revolution that makes it inextricable from the nation that eventually took shape in its aftermath. A model of transoceanic global empires demands an alternative emplotment for revolution, one that might produce a more episodic narrative held together by anti-imperialist insurrection rather than a linear narrative held together by the nation-state. Reminders by historians and literary scholars that the revolutionary age was characterized not only by nation building but also by empire suggest a promising way into this alternative narrative. David Armitage and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, for example, insist that "the major political units of the era (and for long beyond) were not states, national or otherwise, but empires" (xxii), and they argue that one of the challenges in understanding the revolutionary age is the need to "scrape away" the long-standing assumption that revolutions "had to be understood and analysed in a national (and nationalistic) framework" (xxxii). Likewise, Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra points out that "for all the new emphasis on the global and the transnational, the teleological and the national have yet to loosen their grip on U.S. colonial historiography" and suggests that the recent proliferation of post-nationalist paradigms in American studies "may simply be a new response to the pedagogical and ideological demands of a nation that is, in fact, a global empire" (215). Ed Larkin, too, recognizes that the American Revolution becomes in these newer paradigms "a bottleneck interrupting the imperial story" and encourages a greater recognition of the ways in which the logic of empire was part of the national project from the beginning (502).

The Pacific uprisings documented above constitute a series of anti-imperialist acts waged by various surprised or enraged indigenous inhabitants of the Pacific Rim, from the western coasts of North and South America, the far eastern edges of Asia and Australia, and islands throughout the Pacific Ocean. These far-flung political plots in the Pacific cannot be narrated so as to constitute the single and linear narrative demanded by traditional Atlantic conventions of revolution. They neither add up collectively to the kind of spatial self-containment represented by a continent nor move individually toward a temporal endpoint represented by a nation. They are, it might be argued, too episodic, too isolated, too limited, and—perhaps most damaging—insufficiently transformative (of political or cultural or economic forms) to qualify as revolution. The very geography of the Pacific—where late-eighteenth-century explorers encountered thousands of islands and circuitous coastlines instead of the great southern continent Dalrymple expected them to find—might offer one way to imagine these differences. These uprisings replace the geographic coherence and political magnitude of a continent or nation with the scattered arrangement of islands and coastlines both connected to and separated from one another by varying routes and distances. A transoceanic perspective admittedly decenters the American Revolution from narratives of American literature, culture, and history—not because it isn't important but because its importance has been so magnified, mythologized, and multiplied that it has become difficult to see and to study late-

https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2013.128.4.953 Published online by Cambridge University Press

eighteenth-century America in a truly global—transnational and transoceanic—context.

Notes

I thank the Huntington Library and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for a short-term fellowship that enabled me to conduct research at the Huntington for portions of this essay. I also thank Naomi Andrews, Juliana Chang, Christine Skwiot, and Juan Velasco for their readings of and feedback on earlier versions of the essay. And I thank Terry Beers, my colleague and editor of Heyday Books' California Legacy Series, whose delivery of a copy of La Pérouse's journal to my office door several years ago helped to set me on the course of this project.

1. For more on Shelikhov, see Pierce; for a wonderful account of early Russian-Native relations in Alaska, see Miller.

2. Van Dyke surveys Canton during this period.

3. Hackel 263; Sandos 4. As numerous scholars note, the number and variety of acts of Indian resistance to the mission system far exceeded what is recorded in print. See esp. Hackel; Sandos; and Bouvier. For a chronological summary of these events, see Ojibwa.

4. Active resistance in the Pacific was not limited to its indigenous peoples. The sailor William Moulton published in 1804 an account of his six-year voyage from Connecticut to the Pacific that indicts the tyrannical, abusive, and exploitative treatment of sailors by ship captains and merchants by repeatedly framing sailors' complaints in the context of the American Revolution.

5. As Blum has noted, voyages during this period regularly carried highly literate crews (5) as well as sometimes extensive shipboard libraries (30).

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