# Placing Victorian Abolitionism

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ON March 2–3, 1859, the largest slave auction in U.S. history took place in Savannah, Georgia, listing 436 persons for sale. The auction was an effort to save the squandered fortune of Pierce Mease Butler, whose family had operated two large plantations on Georgia's coast since the 1790s.[1] Throughout the sale, rain pounded the site, which some took to be an ecological manifestation of the trauma experienced by those on the auction block, an assertion of nature's sympathy for the enslaved and solidarity against the enslavers. This event thus came to be known as "the Weeping Time." Hitherto, the Weeping Time has featured sometimes in work on slavery but rarely in general U.S. history. This absence, according to Americanist historian Anne C. Bailey, constitutes "a massive breach in historical memory."[2] It is also, I argue, a "breach" in Victorian studies, for this overlooked event, though critically situated as a local trauma, was deeply intertwined with Victorian culture. Recovering that history and the literature around it can help us confront some of Victorian studies' critical assumptions in order to revisit how our work functions today.

Because there is much one could say about this underexamined history, I will focus on how place operates in texts around this event.[3] Representations of place orient identities, map trauma, encode resistance, and narrate history. By reading place—and particularly places that are underexamined in nineteenth-century British and even transatlantic studies—I analyze how the category "Victorian" assumes whiteness and, after the British Slavery Abolition Act of 1833, abolitionism. Reading local and connected places in the southern United States in their transatlantic resonances, I explore how a rice swamp in coastal Georgia can be Victorian—and how it then becomes un-Victorian, an isolated alterity.

British news coverage of the Weeping Time depicted Georgia as a place safely beyond British national and cultural identity. This mapping

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*Victorian Literature and Culture*, Vol. 50, No. 2, pp. 225–259.
© The Author(s), 2022. Published by Cambridge University Press.
doi:10.1017/S1060150320000431

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150320000431 Published online by Cambridge University Press

represents a broader cultural practice whereby white abolitionists located and confined slavery to the U.S. South, constituting historical erasures of the type Jennifer DeVere Brody has read in the construction of Englishness "as a new form of 'white' male subjectivity."[4] However, the Weeping Time, though a localized event, reveals international networks of oppression that resonated transnationally in print. Though I am analyzing this spatial containment in the nineteenth century, one of the broader considerations here is to what extent twenty-first-century readers have accepted and perpetuated that localization, isolating our objects of study within inherited borders of geography and period. In effect, doing so perpetuates the myth that slavery was not part of Britain after 1833. Vanessa D. Dickerson's *Dark Victorians*, a groundbreaking work on Victorian race, frames the fascination of slavery for British commentators: "On coming to America, British men and women found one of the main attractions to be the African Americans, who lived under a system if not completely alien to, then certainly outlawed on English soil by 1772 and rendered commercially obsolete in the British West Indies by the 1830s."[5] The Weeping Time challenges this foundational unfamiliarity, showing that *de facto* slavery was not "completely alien" or "commercially obsolete" in the British Empire, even if it was *de jure* "outlawed on English soil" and eventually in the West Indies. Dickerson captures a story Victorians were invested in telling themselves; by reading skeptically, though, we can move forward from this fundamental assumption of difference.[6] The shock of slavery as an "alien" institution for some British travelers to the U.S. South was a physical confrontation with a system that had been relocated rather than eradicated.

In addition to its massive scale, the Weeping Time in particular caught British attention because it marked the breaking up of an old family estate established by Butler's grandfather—from whom he had inherited a name, an ideology, and a fortune produced from the forced labor of enslaved Africans. In the fledgling United States, Grandfather Butler built the life that had evaded him as a younger son on his family's Irish estate.[7] His grandson Pierce Butler was thus born into landed wealth and old country pedigree, both of which made him a sympathetic figure in British circles. In 1834, after a whirlwind courtship, he married English actress Fanny Kemble, and they settled in Butler's Philadelphia home. Both parties later claimed that Kemble knew nothing about the source of Butler's fortune and that he was ignorant of her abolitionist sympathies.[8] But the marriage splintered around slavery and, in 1849, formally ended in divorce. This, combined with Butler's dissipated lifestyle and

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150320000431 Published online by Cambridge University Press

penchant for speculation, set the groundwork for financial ruin. Within ten years, Butler was preparing for an auction of what he deemed disposable property. The Weeping Time became a transatlantic event immediately and for several years after 1859 thanks to Mortimer Thomson's undercover exposé published in New York and London newspapers and to Kemble's 1863 *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838–1839*.

Though set in Georgia, Kemble's *Journal* is concerned from the start with Englishness. In the following sections, I examine how Kemble constructs southern places in contrast to her own national identity until the realities of slavery up close curtail her narrative power.[9] By then shifting Kemble to the background, I use her *Journal*, periodical coverage of the Weeping Time, and local architecture to identify parallel narratives of resistance in localized topographies that nevertheless operate within a network of global historiography. In these texts, I analyze how the U.S. South appears across four interrelated spatial registers: *ethically*, as a constitutive part of global moral mapping; *aesthetically*, as landscape; *systematically*, as a local node where global networks of oppression and resistance intersect; and *historiographically*, as a record of the past and how Victorianists narrate it.

Because this last register represents a metacritical shift from Victorian to Victorianist, I want to frame it briefly. The U.S. South, while outside the formal British Empire, nevertheless remained of central concern to it; in order to examine nineteenth-century race in Britain, we cannot ignore the places in which Victorians located slavery.[10] However, even transatlantic studies has operated within an underexamined formula of exchanges between Old and New England, as Katharine A. Burnett has recently argued.[11] This practice focuses on interlocutors who locate slavery and attendant examinations of race elsewhere. Meanwhile, race, though a consistent undercurrent, has not been a central topic in Victorian studies, as Carolyn Betensky explains, despite long-standing attention to colonialism and empire.[12] We are only just beginning to build on the work of Brody, Dickerson, Patrick Brantlinger, Daniel Hack, and Laura Callanan to interrogate, for example, the Victorian construction of itself as white.[13] In reflecting critically on what "we" do as Victorianists, I agree with Betensky, who cautions when using "we" that "whiteness is not and must not be the default, unmarked subject position from which or to which this or any other essay in our field should be addressed."[14] But it is important, too, to confront how our discursive methods—our very ways of reading—*are* built

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150320000431 Published online by Cambridge University Press

within a white "default, unmarked subject position." The critical perspectives we have inherited and continue to regard as neutral silently privilege whiteness. In a Victorian text, we can evaluate racism that is explicit or implicit, casual or thematic. But I am suggesting we also attend to the particular epistemological and discursive racisms built into our ways of reading and thinking about those texts.[15] One method for this dually objective and self-critical reading, I argue, is to mark how race shapes Victorian and Victorianist subject positions by locating bodies and ideologies in specific places. These localizations function as a shorthand to evaluate, for example, morality and aesthetics.

Kemble's *Journal* disrupts the entrenched critical tradition of dividing the U.S. South from Britain—a tradition that has enabled much race-blind discourse. Apart from brief discussions by Callanan and Dickerson, scholars have not given Kemble much attention outside biography and theater history.[16] But analyzing Kemble's depictions of the South and her isolationist practices suggests new ways of reading place. Katherine McKittrick has argued that "the plantation, in both slave and postslave contexts, must be understood alongside complex negotiations of time, space, and terror."[17] Space and place, inversely, must be understood alongside the plantation as it is constructed outside and in opposition to Victorian England. One of my aims in this consideration of Kemble and the texts around the Weeping Time is to analyze race as a constitutive structure in literary concepts that assume a default white perspective. Throughout these texts, figurative and literal constructions of the South reveal Victorian Britain's continued imbrication with slavery as a global economic system after 1833. A Victorianist reading of place in the texts around the Weeping Time brings that history to the fore and asks us to acknowledge, as does Kemble, how race-blind modes of representation in nineteenth-century British literature are silently raced as white.

## 1. Geographic Morality and Global Trade

More than twenty years before the Weeping Time, when she was still a young wife, Kemble accompanied Butler on an extended visit to his family's cotton and rice plantations in southeast Georgia. Her *Journal* depicts their residence on Butler Island and St. Simon's Island between December 1838 and April 1839. Kemble kept her journal haphazardly, making a fair copy in 1840; after the family returned to Philadelphia, she circulated it privately among her abolitionist friends on both sides of the Atlantic, who pushed her to publish it. She declined, however,

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150320000431 Published online by Cambridge University Press

fearing to destroy her already strained marriage.[18] The public *Journal* would not appear for more than two decades, finally emerging when the United States was in the throes of civil war. This text consists of a series of letters addressed to "E," for Elizabeth Dwight Sedgwick, to whom the *Journal* is also dedicated. Elizabeth and her husband, Charles, together with Charles's sister, the novelist Catharine Sedgwick, were some of Kemble's most significant American abolitionist friends. Though Butler, too, was initially on intimate terms with the Sedgwicks, he explicitly severed their connection with Kemble as the couple neared divorce.[19] By retaining this professed audience, Kemble both ties her expressly English account to a prominent northern U.S. family and reasserts a relationship that her husband had explicitly banned. Moreover, the text models an ideal Union/Britain relationship, wherein these enlightened entities might stand together against the Confederacy.

Nationalist abolitionism is part of the *Journal* from its earliest instantiation. Preparing to journey southward in 1838, Kemble wrote to Sedgwick, "Assuredly, I *am* going prejudiced against slavery, for I am an Englishwoman, in whom the absence of such prejudice would be disgraceful."[20] This letter would eventually serve as the first entry in Kemble's *Journal*, immediately linking her nationality to an inherent disgust of slavery. She reiterates this claim throughout the *Journal*, sometimes eliding English and northern U.S. identities as being likewise united against the distinctly southern problem of slavery. The rhetorical move Kemble makes here is clear: if it is inherent in the nature of an "Englishwoman" to oppose slavery, then sympathies with enslavers render the holder both immoral and un-English. Kemble thus refutes what many regarded as a natural identification of English observers with the self-proclaimed southern "aristocracy." I term this a "geographic morality"—an ethical structure in which a spatial identity doubles as a proclamation of virtue or vice. But Kemble's geographic morality, by which she maps moral depravity on the southern United States in opposition to the righteousness of northern and British antislavery laws, couldn't hold in practice, even within her own domestic circle. For the Butlers were, like many of their peers, absentee enslavers, depending on overseers to run the plantations while passing their own lives in northern and European society.

The geographic morality Kemble's *Journal* constructs thus also proves its own instability, both in word and in global economic practice. For example, despite opening with the claim that "slavery" is inherently antagonistic toward her national identity as an "Englishwoman,"

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Kemble situates her text in a British literary tradition of enslaver narratives when she proposes "keeping a sort of journal, such as Monk Lewis wrote during his visit to his West India plantations" (53). The selection of Matthew Gregory Lewis's *Journal of a West Indian Proprietor* (1834) contextualizes Kemble's *Journal* with contemporary instances of British slavery. Lewis's account, published posthumously just four years before Kemble set out for Georgia, does not share Kemble's insistence on the inherent British opposition toward slavery, of course, but its invocation here as source-text shows that Kemble is far from "oblivious," as Bailey categorizes her, of Britain's role in the creation and sustenance of modern slavery.[21]

In fact, early in the *Journal*, Kemble maps the global reach of slavery. She describes "rough barges piled with cotton," explaining how they travel "lazily down the river, from the upper country to Darien . . . where the cotton is shipped either for the Savannah, Charleston, or Liverpool markets" (96–97).[22] The inclusion of Liverpool with the Savannah and Charleston markets here acknowledges that the goods produced through forced unpaid labor in the southern United States supplied English factories, destabilizing the geographic morality that would absolve Britain after 1833 marked slavery as both past and elsewhere. Economic historian and Butler biographer Malcolm Bell Jr. concurs, "Cotton from the St. Simons plantations brought a fat premium in the Liverpool market, where its long staple made for superior cloth that was much in demand by the widespread clients of the English mills. The relationship prompted some observers to note that English demand for slave-state cotton was a principal support of the system of slavery the English were so quick to condemn."[23] More broadly, Nancy Henry's recent work on Victorian finance shows how British manufacturing, economics, and culture continued to be tied up with slavery after 1833.[24] Kemble's natural English "prejudice" thus both conceals and depends on exploitation. She reveals the hypocrisy of her own geographic morality that represents slavery as local. Kemble, and perhaps her English readers, wants slavery to be someone else's problem; however, the scale of the system and its integration with the global economy ensures that the absentee owners, the northern manufacturers, the European merchants, and the international buyers of slave-generated materials are more alike than they are different.

While some northern and European places formed regional identities in opposition to southern slavery, these places remained entwined in slave-based capitalism—a capitalism that, as Henry has shown, provided

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an opportunity for women like Kemble to demonstrate economic power. Kemble, though, recognizes the loss of this power as a consequence of her marriage. When she discovers that an enslaved woman named Psyche, along with her children, is threatened with separation from her husband, Joe, Kemble considers "a long chain of all my possessions, in the shape of bracelets, necklaces, brooches, earrings, etc.,. . . .with many hypothetical calculations of the value of each separate ornament, and the very doubtful probability of the amount of the whole being equal to the price of this poor creature and her children" (139). She wants to use her own economic agency to save Psyche but tallies her own worth and finds it less than Psyche's value. She underscores this awareness when she notes that marriage has divested her of economic power and, thus, autonomy: "the great power and privilege I had foregone of earning money by my own labor occurred to me, and I think, for the first time in my life, my past profession assumed an aspect that arrested my thoughts most seriously. For the last four years of my life that preceded my marriage I literally coined money, and never until this moment, I think, did I reflect on the great means of good, to myself and others, that I so gladly agreed to give up forever for a maintenance by the unpaid labor of slaves" (139). Kemble's lack of capital reveals her helplessness; however, the only ethical solution she can imagine is itself imbricated in the problem, for by earning money to buy Psyche, she would contribute to the global slave system she opposed. Her lack of purchasing power erodes her individual agency despite her efforts to write an independent identity for herself in the *Journal*.

When Kemble first looked southward, she had set her national identity against slavery. Once in Georgia, though, she amends this supposedly inborn "prejudice[] against slavery," reflecting that her time on the plantation is warping her abolitionism. She confesses, "I am afraid the horror of slavery with which I came down to the South, the general theoretic abhorrence of an Englishwoman for it, has gained, through the intensity it has acquired, a morbid character of mere desire to be delivered from my own share in it. . . . [M]y zeal for the general emancipation of the slave has almost narrowed itself to this most painful desire that I and mine were freed from the responsibility of our share in this huge misery" (233). In effect, her awareness of her dual personal guilt—both as a member of the Butler family and as an Englishwoman—subsumes her opposition to slavery as a unique southern U.S. depravity. But even as an "Englishwoman" she recognizes both her "own share in it" and "our share in this huge misery"—a twice-repeated "share," with all its

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economic resonances, that extends beyond the Butler plantation and beyond the southern United States to encompass global markets built on slave labor.

For Kemble, the crisis becomes not slavery itself but her proximity to it. At home in Philadelphia or in Europe, her "abhorrence" can be a comfortable theoretical opposition to others' wrongdoing; in Georgia, though, it is personal and urgent, holding her own guilt constantly before her eyes. Nevertheless, she tries to reassert geographic morality: "Sometimes . . . I think how near our West Indian Islands and freedom are to these unfortunate people, many of whom are expert and hardy boatmen. . . . [B]ut, unless Providence were compass and steersman too, it avails nothing that they should know how near their freedom might be found, nor have I any right to tell them if they could find it, for the slaves are not mine, they are Mr. [Butler]'s" (233). In effect, Kemble tries rhetorically to fulfill the "narrowed" desire not to be personally culpable when she insists "the slaves are not mine, they are Mr. [Butler]'s," symbolically separating herself from her husband in the process. This is a division of gender (as a woman, she portrays herself and Psyche as similarly helpless) and of nationality (as an "Englishwoman," she is morally opposed to slavery and thus not culpable). Kemble's geographic morality underwrites her sense of Englishness—a national identity in which, as Brody explains, "[r]epeated ruptures in the narration of the nation are smoothed by sanitized, sanctified versions of history."[25] "[O]ur West Indies" aligns Kemble with the British as a distinct group opposing slavery after 1833. But she also reiterates specific British colonial geographies where those like Lewis, her express literary progenitor, had prospered as enslavers, and where, in practice, "freedom" in the 1830s meant formerly enslaved laborers were fighting against government-mandated "apprenticeships" under their enslavers.[26]

The *Journal*'s fracturing geographic morality redefines the nation as an ethically constituted concept separately from its economic structures. But England cannot isolate the South or locate its own identity strictly within its national borders. One way we can understand this global reach of the southern plantation economy is through Sukanya Banerjee's concept of "the transimperial," which "underlines the Victorian Empire in all its freightedness and relationalities."[27] Here, the transimperial reminds us that nineteenth-century Georgia is at once colonial and postcolonial, driving modern global economies via exploitation.[28] A transimperial perspective can help us read Kemble's southern landscapes and their contingent geographic morality for a

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transatlantic audience. As Banerjee shows, a "transimperial frame" that does not "discount[] the transnational, can nonetheless take into account what has not circulated, or does not readily circulate, thereby proffering a methodology that can searchingly, continually, and reparatively rescale what constitutes 'Victorian.'"[29] Geographic morality for Kemble depends on "the South" as a contained and isolated place, but she reveals its aporia as soon as she tries to represent it. In accounting for the specific place, she uncovers its function as an informal outpost of British empire. Yet, of course, Kemble herself circulates, drawing attention to how she must renegotiate her identity as "an Englishwoman" in different places. In Georgia, she encounters enslaved people whose condition is expressed in the enforced and restricted movement of their bodies via the slave ship, the auction block, and the plantation. Through these encounters, she demonstrates how movement through, and position in, space signals identity and agency.

## 2. Transatlantic Aesthetics on a Georgian Plantation

While Banerjee leads us to "rescale what constitutes 'Victorian,'" it is perhaps helpful here to consider how Kemble's *Journal* troubles disciplinarity.[30] Part of the complexity of Kemble's *Journal* is that its 1863 publication signals it as mid-Victorian. However, Kemble's Georgia residency occurs in the critical no-man's-land of the 1830s. As such, it makes sense to keep in mind not only literature of the later nineteenth century but also Kemble's beloved Romantics and the aesthetics they popularized, especially regarding the representation of nature. "In their thinking on the poetics of place," Kate Rigby explains, "the romantics conjoined a sense of the power of memory and imagination to refashion reality with an appreciation of the power of place to alter human moods and sensibilities."[31] Paul Outka has made a compelling case for reading "the wilderness" as a racially and culturally particular construction with intellectual and aesthetic origins in Romantic sublimity and American transcendentalism.[32] And Kemble does try to evacuate the southern landscape of people and represent it through Romantic aesthetics as a "fantasy of the 'nonracial,'" thereby skirting the horrors of slavery and her own culpability.[33] These supposedly race-blind representations of place, however, rupture in the plantation landscape, revealing how they were racially constructed all along. Kemble moves from reading geography as a moral basis to reading landscape for ideology and sociopolitical complexity. Her dense narrative landscapes are both past- and

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future-looking in an attempt to "refashion" the plantation. That is, until the reality of domestic space erodes the Romantic topography she sets up in nature. In this attempt (and its failure), she depicts a key function of Romantic aesthetics: erasure.

In Georgia, with physical distance no longer obscuring slavery, Kemble tries to assert control over an unfamiliar and potentially threatening place via aesthetic representation. These moments did not go unnoticed or unappreciated among Victorian readers. The *London Review*, for example, declared Kemble's "glimpses of Georgian scenery" "very charming," and the *Athenaeum* concurred, calling Kemble's southeast Georgia "a region of no ordinary loveliness."[34] One of Kemble's most quoted landscape passages describes "a thicket of glittering evergreens, over which hung, in every direction, streaming garlands of these fragrant golden cups, fit for Oberon's banqueting service. These beautiful shrubberies were resounding with the songs of mockingbirds. I sat there on my horse in a sort of dream of enchantment, looking, listening, and inhaling the delicious atmosphere of those flowers" (226). Here, Kemble fully inhabits the subject position of the Romantic Shakespearean actress. The scene she paints, alluding to the enchantment of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, bespeaks harmony and beauty across multiple senses, making it a distinctly tangible "dream of enchantment." Moreover, her Shakespearean allusion briefly rewrites the landscape as canonically English, albeit an English alternate reality.

Georgia is not a Shakespearean bower, however, and the dream cannot hold in what Kemble terms a "scene of material beauty and moral degradation" (226). She interrupts her own reveries, stating, "[T]he next object that attracted my attention was . . . an enormous cypress tree which had been burned, stood charred and blackened, and leaning toward the road so as to threaten a speedy fall across it, and on one of the limbs of this great charcoal giant hung a dead rattlesnake" (226–27). Throughout the *Journal*, Kemble fears snakes; the dead one here ignites her disgust while also reminding her of the beautiful scene's latent danger, with the burned cypress "threaten[ing] a speedy fall" onto her path.[35] As Kemble observes the landscape, she is torn between contrasting views of nature, at once beautiful and dangerous, because she knows the "dream of enchantment" conceals, and is supported by, horrors just like her flimsy geographic morality. Callanan reads this passage as "a turn to fiction," in which Kemble "begins to aestheticize her reality, both as an escape from the horrors of the plantation and as a palette with which to express her ideals. As Kemble's faith in her ability to effect change on the

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plantation falters, she turns to the aesthetic in order to assuage a sense of anxiety produced by a confrontation with racial otherness and systemic oppression."[36] I agree with Callanan's view so long as Kemble remains in "nature," but because she's drawing on Romantic aesthetic traditions, this isn't "fiction" so much as a construction for artistic interest. It's nonfiction selectively curated for subjective pleasure. When it succeeds, it is "charming" (for white readers). And when it fails, the racial underpinnings of this aesthetic system manifest in the fissures. Even when Kemble actively tries not to see slavery—in contemporary phrasing, to stop making everything about race—and even when she evacuates the landscape of enslaved persons by constructing the Romantic meditation of a lone subject in nature, her subjectivity is still racially constructed. Indeed, these descriptions of place dramatize how Kemble's aesthetics depend on erasing racial violence on the plantation.

Because her perspective presumes whiteness, explicit observations of race disappear until Kemble encounters nonwhite bodies that forcibly recall both her own privilege and its dependence on the sustained abuse of Black people. Nature's dangers prove to be only a preamble—subsumed into sublimity via distancing description. Kemble explicitly marks how the tree and snake make "a curious contrast to the lovely bowers of bloom I had just been contemplating with such delight" (227), evacuating the negative landscape of its horror and elevating the contrast within Romantic aesthetics—a "wilderness . . . constructed as a white-only space" without ever mentioning race overtly.[37] But in the next sentence, Kemble jumps to the "settlement at St. Anne's," where she finds "the wretchedest huts, and most miserably squalid, filthy, forlorn creatures I had yet seen here" (227). The imaginative process whereby beauty and sublimity in nature complement each other for the viewing subject's edification utterly falters in these domestic spaces.

St. Anne's is not part of the narrative picture, but Kemble does not edit it out to maintain the empty (white) wilderness. Instead, she peoples the domestic space, describing a woman named Hannah "whose face and figure" were "seamed with wrinkles, and bowed and twisted with age and infirmity" (227). Hannah appears highly detailed and active, forcing Kemble from the aesthetic subject's crucial distance into physical engagement. "As she crawled to me," Kemble narrates, "almost half her naked body was exposed through the miserable tatters that she held on with one hand, while the other eagerly clutched my hand, and her poor blear eyes wandered all over me as if she was bewildered by the strange aspect of any human being but those whose sight was familiar to her"

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(227–28). There is much worth noticing here about the picture Kemble paints, including the authority of the gaze—the power of which the two women share—and the vividness of Hannah asserting her place in this scene and testifying to a bigger story that Kemble cannot access. But I want to focus on Hannah's power here to arrest the flow of aesthetic description. By placing her body in a landscape Kemble was narrating through a tacitly white-only aesthetic, Hannah disrupts race-based organizations of space. As Barbara Harris Combs explains, "[W]hile certain bodies are presumed to belong in certain places and be out of place in others, the mere act of traversing—either for the purpose of remaining in the space or traveling through it—is itself an act of resistance."[38] And this scene completely changes Kemble's subjective experience. From St. Anne's, she explains, "I came home without stopping to look at anything, for I had no heart any longer for what had so charmed me on my way to this place" (228). "Charm" thus proves contingent on erasure for Kemble.

Kemble operates within an imperialist logic of place and race, but her *Journal* pushes this logic to its breaking point. From the loss of aesthetic control at St. Anne's, this entry shifts from places to people, listing nine enslaved women who had visited Kemble in one day. This offers an unadorned record of Black women's plantation life, inevitably a genealogy of oppression and suffering. Along with each woman's name, Kemble writes the number of children each has borne, the number of those children who are dead, and the reason for each woman's visit (229–31). This list both inscribes maternal labor as such into her record and surrenders narrative resolution to the reality of domestic horror.[39] But perhaps most significantly, these accounts populate the plantation—a "particular space[] of otherness . . . designated as incongruous with humanness," as McKittrick argues.[40] Kemble emphasizes both the horror of domestic space and the human lives contained therein. Much of the *Journal* follows this pattern, with Kemble narrating beauty and sublimity in nature, then faltering when she goes into hovels, infirmaries, other plantations, and her own home. Callanan asserts that, in these moments of deep aestheticizing, Kemble's "thoughts drift to a time when she will leave the plantation" and its "chaos."[41] However, I read these flights as fundamentally unstable in Kemble's text because true separation from slavery is impossible. There is no getting outside the system. She knows slavery shores up global modernity, and so white fancy's escapism surrenders to reality's inescapable horror.

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Contrary to nature's charms, Kemble's domestic scenes are by turns horrible and quotidian and often both, each amplifying the other, as when she hears one woman's "miserable story" but is equally affected by the woman's method of narration, a "low, plaintive, monotonous murmur of misery, as if such sufferings were 'all in a day's work'" (231). Because, of course, they were part of this woman's daily forced labor. This is, as McKittrick argues, "the mundane terror of plantation life."[42] Work here not only fails to liberate, as Kemble nostalgically depicts her own work, but also actively furthers oppression. Indeed, she begins a letter stating that life as a plantation mistress is "pleasant enough . . . for one who, like myself, has a passion for dullness" (205). Yet after Butler forbids her from voicing the people's "petitions," she continues, "I must return to the North, for my condition would be almost worse than theirs—condemned to hear and see so much wretchedness, not only without the means of alleviating it, but without permission even to represent it for alleviation: this is no place for me, since I was not born among slaves, and cannot bear to live among them" (210–11). Kemble centers her own feelings as a witness to slavery's atrocities—not an unwilling witness initially, given that she had desperately wanted to visit the plantations. When she is incapable of writing a valiant white-savior narrative, though, she pivots to her own fragility and determines to "return to the North," where she can more easily "bear" her role as Mrs. Butler.

Kemble's racism manifests throughout the *Journal*, and she often perpetuates racist stereotypes even while attempting to denounce others. As an "Englishwoman," Kemble is the product of a racist system, and that ideology clouds her observations and her ensuing narrative. The structure of the *Journal*'s antislavery sentiment, too, remains unnuanced as she sees her imbrication in slavery initially as a "power and opportunity to do a great work."[43] When confronted by her own impotence, her objective seems to be to arouse pity. Sometimes she does this powerfully by narrating individual identities and even voices, as with Psyche and Hannah, thereby reiterating their humanity as she commits their histories to written record. English literary tradition maintains power in naming individuals, and Kemble registers these lives within the discourse of Western individualism. Other times, Kemble uses racist stereotypes to ridicule or lament those she casts as lesser humans. Ultimately, she writes herself as a would-be moral hero who, unfortunately, discovers her own impotence as a married woman stripped of economic agency.[44] The plantation is "no place for me," she concludes, leaving unexamined which bodies are "plac[ed]" here according to her logic. When she

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tries to be individually kind, her kindness proves inadequate and hypocritical because she subsists on the continued oppression of the people she wants to solace.

It would be easy to fixate on Kemble's racist abolitionism in this moment; yet, as Betensky shows, "any confident portrayal of the Victorians (or indeed of any culture of the past) as racist that does not include an acknowledgment of structural racism in our own moment is decidedly premature."[45] What strikes me most in this passage is not Kemble's nineteenth-century racism and fragility but how easily her rhetoric maps onto twenty-first-century white liberal discourse.[46] Through ethics and aesthetics, Kemble tries and fails to represent the plantation in a way that centers her own feelings while maintaining her distance from slavery physically, economically, and ideologically. It is, therefore, in the representation of place that Kemble, through her failure, achieves uncomfortable, nuanced abolitionism.

## 3. The Weeping Time's Transatlantic Networks

What might happen if we decenter Kemble, her fragility, and her disappointed abolitionist intentions? It might seem strange to pivot away from her narrative authority, but perhaps that strangeness results partially from the rigidity of our discursive objects. Perhaps it shouldn't be so strange to proceed from the awareness that, though Kemble's account is certainly a construction, it is not fiction, and the community she describes existed beyond her representation of it. When Kemble leaves the Butler plantations, these places continue to exist, to enslave, and to finance her family. What more could we know about the people with whom Kemble's life physically intersects for five months in Georgia? Bailey's history of the Weeping Time attempts to trace these histories by reading across different kinds of archives, including family and oral histories.[47] Standing back from Kemble's narrative authority, we can ask how the people enslaved by the Butler family construct and represent place, examining the transimperial resonances of their stories and amplifying local histories of resistance.

The pull Kemble depicts between, on one hand, a desire for a geographic morality that would exonerate those outside the southern United States from their "share" in slavery and, on the other hand, an awareness of economic complicity also manifests poignantly in the Weeping Time as it was made an international event via news reporting. In 1849, after Butler and Kemble divorced, Kemble settled in Massachusetts, earning

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money in part through her dramatic and literary talents.[48] Butler, conversely, looked to support his accustomed lifestyle by liquidating his human assets. The Weeping Time became a flashpoint for nonsouthern white abolitionists eager to revel in the South's peculiar depravity. Horace Greeley, editor of the *New York Tribune*, sent one of his most popular reporters (disguised as a buyer) to cover the event. Mortimer Thomson's ensuing six-column exposé, published in the *Tribune* on March 9, 1859, depicted the sale in heartrending detail. A condensed version of the article appeared in London's *Times* on April 12, 1859, bringing the event to international attention. Alongside individual narrative portraits, Thomson's article excerpts selections from the auction catalog so that "readers may have an idea of the exact manner in which these things are done."[49] Thomson's "readers" are northerners, the morally victorious "us" rather than the morally bankrupt "them"—southerners who are, as in Kemble's *Journal*, always only white.

But like Kemble's, Thomson's geographic morality proves flimsy in practice. He bookends his article with repeated reminders that Butler himself is a "resident in the City of Philadelphia, in the free State of Pennsylvania," is "of Philadelphia," and is "of the free City of Philadelphia" (3, 20). The *Times* picks up this language with decided sarcasm toward the abolitionist cause.[50] But Thomson also says, after describing the indecencies suffered by an enslaved woman named Frances, "This sort of thing it is that makes Northern blood boil, and Northern fists clench with a laudable desire to hit somebody. It was almost too much for endurance to stand and see those brutal slave-drivers pushing the women about" (19). As with Kemble, the burden is to "see," to witness firsthand with no abstracting distance, that provokes an urgent desire to retaliate. Indeed, the anger Thomson embodies for his "Northern" readers dissipates as soon as distance is achieved. He closes with two juxtaposed descriptions of place:

> That night, not a steamer left that Southern port, not a train of cars sped away from that cruel city, that did not bear each its own sad burden of those unhappy ones, whose only crime is that they are not strong and wise . . . But the stars shone out as brightly as if such things had never been, the blushing fruit-trees poured their fragrance on the evening air, and the scene was as calmly sweet and quiet as if Man had never marred the glorious beauties of Earth by deeds of cruelty and wrong. (20)

Kemble's geographic morality reverberates through Thomson's designation of "that Southern port" and "that cruel city." The syntactic

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parallel of "Southern" and "cruel" codes the map for Thomson's "readers," who are reminded that their "Northern blood" is not implicated in the auction. From here, Thomson's anger abates into sadness and then a wistful melancholy. Like Kemble's "charming" (white) landscapes, Thomson's final image abstracts the scene, removing the people and painting nature over the horror of the families enclosed in the steamers and trains. He ends in a reversal from Kemble, with a final assertion of aesthetic resolution.

As the people disperse, trafficked via every available technology, the narrator's description dilutes the localized trauma—a description that gazes downward to pity those who "are not strong and wise," even though this same account reveals both their strength and wisdom. For example, throughout Thomson's article, in which he records the words of those facing the auction block, we can see a shared "awareness of the economic system in which their physical bodies held value" and a careful leveraging of that system to serve their own ends.[51] Though narrators like Thomson and Kemble often failed to comprehend the strength and wisdom of enslaved persons, resistance nevertheless manifests in these texts, even occasionally contradicting narrative authority. For example, Kemble's *Journal* reduces the enslaved people in the rice fields to "hands," even while the Butlers subsisted on their prodigious skill (63). Growing rice competently—let alone successfully enough to net a literal fortune annually—required complex knowledge. Butler and others like him strategically enslaved people and exploited their expertise. As Bailey argues, "Their work encoded and reflected memories of technology and know-how learned on the African continent from their forebears. Furthermore, not only were they more than hands, their work made an invaluable contribution to their masters' plantations, the American economy (both North and South), the New World, and the World at large."[52] When those from the Butler estate were trafficked during the 1859 auction, the slave brokers recognized the specific expertise of these "hands," advertised it, denoted it in the catalog, and charged accordingly to a knowing set of buyers, who were likewise willing to pay for that knowledge. In fact, looking in from the economic context of the Weeping Time, Thomson notes that the large attendance of far-flung buyers to Butler's auction arises precisely because those for sale are "known to be a choice lot and very desirable property" (2). The economic narrative of value that emerges belies race-based hierarchies of worth, contextualizing the breach Kemble describes when she calculates her net worth against Psyche's and finds herself without economic power or value.

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Economic narratives are multifaceted, involving a confluence of power relations and figurative meaning beyond simple exchange. Alongside Kemble's demonstration of women's value, we can read two competing monetary layers to the Weeping Time. At the close of the auction, Thomson tells how Butler "solac[ed] the wounded hearts of the people he had sold . . . by doling out to them small change at the rate of a dollar a-head" (20). This is a symbolic act of gift-giving from Butler's perspective that, in Thomson's sarcastic telling, signifies the opposite. Butler in fact "netted $303,850" (equivalent to almost $9.4 million in today's currency) ahead of the U.S. Civil War.[53] Thomson offers an equation and an image calculated to shock, and it was successful: Georgia historian Kwesi Degraft-Hanson claims the Weeping Time, via its news coverage, "became, ironically, an important catalyst for the war that led to the emancipation of all the enslaved in the United States."[54] It also contributed to a transatlantic conversation about U.S. slavery that drove Kemble to publish.

While British periodicals covered the Weeping Time, the tone was far from uniformly abolitionist.[55] As the United States launched into civil war, Kemble worried about this widespread support for the Confederacy. As she wrote in 1861, "I hope to God that neither England nor any other power from the other side of the water will meddle in the matter—but, above all, not England."[56] Hoping to redirect British sympathies, she published her *Journal*, now more than twenty years old, not in Georgia but in England and the Union.[57] Though reviewers remarked on the book's delay, *Sharpe*'s asserted, "It has been wisely kept. For never could such a book speak with such power as at this moment."[58] Kemble's *Journal* was thus, from its outset, a transatlantic text, appearing first in London in May 1863 (Longman and Co.) and then in New York in July 1863 (Harper & Brothers).[59] The British periodical reviews of the *Journal* and accounts of the Weeping Time put both in context with *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, though the *London Quarterly Review* claimed the *Journal* was "a book more damaging to the South than all the novels ever written, inasmuch as its statements cannot be disproved or even disputed."[60] After the 1863 publication of Kemble's *Journal*, Thomson's 1859 article was reprinted as a pamphlet under the title "What Became of the Slaves on a Georgia Plantation?" setting it up as a direct sequel to Kemble's account, which, though neither under Kemble's authority nor casting her as heroine, it was.[61] The transatlantic infrastructure that facilitated slavery thus enabled abolitionism as well, but not always from the outside in.

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The Weeping Time and its transatlantic coverage assert that neither global systems of slavery nor abolitionism can be contained within the places where enslaved people labor. I want to conclude by considering resistance from within spaces of oppression rather than from the outside looking down. To show how topography can be refigured and represented in opposition to global exploitation, I will return to the *Journal*, diverging from the narrator's authority, then examine the history of resistance recorded in local architecture. Though Kemble didn't say much about Savannah (she only stopped briefly to await the steamer to Darien), she expresses a peculiar regard for nearby Charleston: "In walking about Charleston, I was forcibly reminded of some of the older country towns in England—of Southampton a little. The appearance of the city is highly picturesque . . . and although the place is certainly pervaded with an air of decay, it is a genteel infirmity, as might be that of a distressed elderly gentlewoman" (37). Through Charleston, Kemble frames the South as a charming Old World place, previewing how she will attempt to soften the plantation landscape. But this is, of course, a race-based aesthetic that erases trauma by substituting a "charming," "picturesque" landscape designed to appeal to white readers. I want to keep in mind the "ruinous" aesthetic appeal of southern cities while looking more closely at Savannah in consideration of the broader questions I've raised about slavery, place, ethics, and history.

## 4. Disrupting the Charm

Today, Savannah, Charleston, and other southern U.S. cities brand themselves as "charming." This is the same aesthetic charm Kemble tries to construct via landscape and that her London reviewers noted as such. But Melissa L. Cooper has asserted that "Savannah's racial history needs to be unpacked"—a process she calls "disrupting the charm" in places where landscapes are carefully curated to obscure historical trauma and its enduring legacies. Burnett agrees, insisting that "the boutique South of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries only tells half of the story, and recognizing continuities between antebellum representations and modern conceptions of the region is necessary to understanding the evolution of the United States and the transatlantic world as a whole."[62] The representative "continuities" are both political and aesthetic, for, as Combs shows, "The ontological expansion of white space is utilized as a tool to (re)claim space and help whites feel safe."[63] Savannah was not, however, just a white southern city waiting for outside

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liberation. As McKittrick argues, "The geographies of slavery, postslavery, and black dispossession provide opportunities to notice that the right to be human carries in it a history of racial encounters and innovative black diaspora practices that, in fact, spatialize acts of survival."[64] When Kemble stopped in Savannah, it was still fairly remote; by the time Thomson described "that cruel city," it had become a major port connecting the Atlantic world and the rural U.S. South.[65] With this infrastructure came more and easier travel, which brought diverse people and ideas into places that had long been isolated—a veritable "contagion of freedom" much bigger than just Kemble (*Journal*, 211).

One side effect of the city's cosmopolitanism—unforeseen and unwelcome for slavery's supporters—was a system of reconnaissance and resistance. Historian Susan Eva O'Donovan explains how enslaved domestic workers forced to travel alongside their enslavers "became, through their work, slavery's chief ambassadors to free-labor states"; moreover, she explains, "Public roads and public spaces are not empty places. Caught up in a traffic that made a mockery of slaveholders' figurative, literal, and legislative attempts to quarantine slaves from outside influences, slaves on the move invariably came into contact with the rich diversity of American society."[66] Enslaved people recognized these new avenues of information and made use of them "to expand their geosocial literacy: memorizing the lay of the land, its roads, its villages, and, above all, the people who inhabited it."[67] Even those who were violently confined to specific places deployed others' mobility for resistance. We can see this, for example, in Kemble's descriptions of her conversations with Jack, the enslaved young man who attends her on Butler Island. Jack encourages her to tell him "about Philadelphia, about England, about the Atlantic, etc.," thereby expanding his geographic knowledge despite his enforced placement (161). We don't know what is contained in the "etc." because Kemble controls the narrative as speaker and commentator, dismissing Jack's questions as idle curiosity. Yet, by considering him within this regional context, we can read against Kemble's authority here, to see her from Jack's perspective as a two-way conduit, bringing world-knowledge to Butler Island and Jack's history to the world.

Although Kemble may fail to recognize resistance, it still manifests in her descriptions of life on the Butler plantations. For example, she records a secret literacy that has persevered despite bans on slave education. Kemble notes the request for "a Prayer Book and Bible" from a man named London who nevertheless refuses to tell Kemble how he learned to read (169). When she is preparing to leave Butler Island for

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St. Simon's Island, she returns to literacy, and London's request has expanded to "an earnest petition that I would send him from the North a lot of Bibles and Prayer Books; certainly the science of reading must be much more common among the Negroes than I supposed" (193). Kemble's mobility serves London as a resource; he knows he can leverage it to import forbidden materials.

Kemble inscribes the people's resistance—even their resistance to her—within her *Journal*. These passages suggest that enslaved people know the limits of both her sympathy and her power better than she does herself. As such, they refuse to risk more harm by indulging her. After acknowledging that "the science of reading must be much more common," Kemble continues:

> There is, however, considerable reticence upon this point, or else the poor slaves must consider the mere possession of the holy books as good for salvation and as effectual for spiritual assistance to those who cannot as to those who can comprehend them. . . . I have had repeated eager entreaties for presents of Bibles and Prayer Books, and to my demurrer of "But you can't read, can you?" have generally received for answer a reluctant acknowledgment of ignorance, which, however, did not always convince me of the fact. (193–94)

Though she often occupies the position of authoritative tour guide, Kemble equivocates in this moment, caught in the double bind that declares enslaved people are simultaneously cunning and unintelligent, helpless and devious. Her supposition that "the poor slaves" might want the "holy books" because of a regard for the objects themselves falls flat as even she remains unconvinced.

Literacy is a point to which Kemble returns in a persistent attempt to discover the sources of slave education and, therefore, of resistance. "In my farewell conversation with London," she writes,

> I found it impossible to get him to tell me how he had learned to read. . . . Such a man as London is certainly aware that to teach the slaves to read is an illegal act, and he may have been unwilling to betray whoever had been his preceptor even to my knowledge; at any rate, I got no answers from him but: "Well, missis, me learn; well, missis, me try"; and finally: "Well, missis, me 'spose Heaven help me;" to which I could only reply that I knew Heaven was helpful, but very hardly to the tune of teaching folks their letters. I got no satisfaction. (193–94)

Kemble glimpses a world she doesn't understand. While she often voices her powerlessness to interfere productively on behalf of enslaved persons and notes the harm her attempts sometimes cause, she both

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recognizes that London has good reason to preserve his silence and presses the point. She fails to comprehend London's foundational assurance; namely, that he does not owe her "satisfaction." Kemble's record thus reveals its author's own illiteracy in this place, her inability to read and understand on the plantation.

Local narratives can potentially add more to the story than just the accounts written by and for white outsiders, though traditional methods of reading are not designed to recognize them. Leslie M. Harris and Daina Ramey Berry, for example, discuss Savannah itself as a complex history of resistance, describing "geographies of autonomy and control" where rural and urban constantly intersected.[68] Notable spaces of autonomy include the "First, Second and Third African Baptist Churches of Savannah," which "form together one of the most intriguing areas of compliance and negotiation of black and white Christians entangled together in southern slavery."[69] In these places, despite restrictions and hostilities, "Savannah's blacks managed not only to maintain sizeable congregations . . . but also to own land and erect church buildings rivalling similar structures in northern cities—property holdings that survive to this day."[70] The First African Baptist Church, for example, was a place for history, community, and spirituality in more than just the white Christian sense; it "spatialize[s] acts of survival." As guides point out today, the enslaved workers who made the pews included "writings done in a classical West African Arabic script from the 1800s" and created "holes in the floor . . . in the shape of an African prayer symbol known to some as a BaKongo Cosmogram. In parts of Africa, it also means 'Flash of the Spirits' and represents birth, life, death, and rebirth."[71] The church itself kept a history and sense of community, which these builders inscribed around a shared traumatic dislocation; but its resistance was multifaceted, too, as the church sheltered those traversing the underground railroad. Worshippers hid refugees under the holes and then escorted them onward under cover of the congregation dispersing after service.[72] First African Baptist and churches like it were "the focal point of resistance to the institution of slavery," directly on the front lines—in this case literally next door to the "slave pen" operated by Butler's own broker, Joseph Bryan, the architect of the Weeping Time.[73]

First African Baptist Church narrates resistance through place, but it denies contemporary readers the characters English literature trains us to crave. As a reader of Victorian novels, I want the kinds of individuals Kemble and Thomson write. But I am not owed satisfaction any more than Kemble. How, then, might we begin to read this spatial text of

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resistance? Beyond the integration of disparate theologies, First African Baptist Church itself is architecturally composite: on the outside, its arches, symmetry, and solid steeple assert autonomy, wealth, and prestige in a language white Savannahians and travelers could understand; inside, it narrates a particular spiritualism legible to those literate in West African iconography and script. Paul Gilroy shows how exploitative transnational systems can "unwittingly supply a vehicle for circulating . . . new and unpredictable forms of identification and cultural affinity between groups that dwell far apart."[74] These integrated narratives both conceal and perpetuate resistance while also attesting to an existing strength and wisdom that were strategically obscured from white commentators on Georgia, such as Kemble and Thomson. First African Baptist Church, then, functions as a manifesto inscribed in space.

Of course, reading language, space, and even place together isn't new. Scholars have long sought to read how resistance is encoded within "the oppressor's language," to follow bell hooks's reading of Adrienne Rich. hooks understands English spatially "as a territory" that "hides the loss of so many other tongues." But even within this "territory," enslaved persons remake "the oppressor's language," enabling their discourse to "speak beyond the boundaries of conquest and domination."[75] Still, this work challenges us to continue recognizing how our methods and epistemologies, too, are "the oppressor's language." Like Kemble, I am not adequately literate. My methods of accounting for aesthetic and political meaning mark the boundaries of my understanding, beyond which there is much more to know. While I can glimpse resistance and point to texts that offer complex narratives, I lack the education to read them as thoroughly as I can read Kemble's constructions of place—analytically, within broader aesthetic and political traditions. In demonstrating this failure, I hope to show how our epistemologies of knowledge are insufficient for reading what McKittrick calls "decolonial poetics."[76] To read such texts with the epistemologies crafted within the "oppressor's language" is only to glimpse them insufficiently. In part, I have had to expand my conception of "a text" to shift freely among a book, periodicals, and a building. Perhaps this is the kind of shift for which we must be equipped if we want to read the extant narratives of those who were violently shut out from education that might "challenge the authority of the ruling power."[77] This illiteracy cannot be corrected by learning another language in the literal sense of amassing grammar, vocabulary, and syntax; it demands a broader definition of language and text. But when we recognize varying literacies of space, we must then also

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account for how our traditional methods of reading, like Kemble's aesthetic representation of the South, have been tacitly raced white. If we want to read more and different texts—and I think we must—if we want to read even the same texts with an awareness of their location within English "as a territory," we will have to prioritize learning how.

Savannah's First African Baptist Church is not a purely regional point of interest but a transimperial text and an example of "a poetics that envisions a decolonial future."[78] This place, written contemporaneously with works such as Kemble's *Journal*, Thomson's article, and the international conversations surrounding the Weeping Time, intersects with these texts spatially as well as temporally. One notable difference, though, is that Thomson's and Kemble's abolitionist texts were written explicitly for white audiences distanced from the southern United States; First African Baptist Church was written by and for free and enslaved Black people who circulated in this space—sometimes by force, sometimes as resistance to force—remaining largely illegible to white audiences during the nineteenth century. "To turn to decolonial poetics produced by diasporic communities who have survived violent displacement and white supremacy," McKittrick argues, "allows us to identify unseen and uncharted aspects of city life. . . . [B]lack perspectives on the city reveal spaces of absolute otherness, so often occupied by the racially and economically condemned, are geographies of survival, resistance, creativity, and the struggle *against* death."[79] The "decolonial poetics" of such texts remain largely absent in contemporary scholarship, attesting to the ways "racisms work insidiously and consistently to deny both historicity and cultural integrity to the artistic and cultural fruits of black life."[80] For Victorianists, this is, in part, a legacy of isolating our field to white writers in the British Isles for decades. But it is also a legacy of transatlantic work that quarantines the U.S. South and a geographic morality that places it in opposition to the virtuous North and England.

Our geographic morality results in two false assumptions that continue to shape contemporary racial inequity. The first assumes that there is no racism outside the former Confederacy or outside the United States. This allows us to ignore the many instances proving the opposite, not least the lack of inclusion in academic spaces. The second assumes that the South is where racism, and not resistance, lives. This silently empties the South—past and present—of any but white voices. It ignores resilience and resistance, in particular by erasing diversity and refusing to ask how representation has been raced all along.

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White commentators operating from this assumption amplify only the story of oppression—often to congratulate themselves for their pity, like Thomson—at the expense of histories raised against that master narrative. To see and hear and acknowledge only white supremacy elsewhere is to perform racist abolitionism through the violence of erasure, which tells nonwhite populations their existence does not count, their experiences do not matter, their pasts are not history.

When Kemble and Thomson travel southward, they depict a charming natural landscape overrun by a local oppressive regime. This not only attempts to limit slavery to the South but also tries to construct northern and European identities in opposition to it. But just as southern slavery fueled global capitalism, so too did resistance flourish in nineteenth-century Georgia—something Kemble and Thomson glimpse but misread because their literacy itself and their methods of representation are exclusively white. As Betensky argues, though, "There is no such thing as a neutral discussion of other people's racism."[81] It is worth pursuing these failures productively and reconsidering the South and transatlantic race more broadly within Victorian studies, for as Combs argues, "Intellectual activities such as thinking, reasoning, and remembering involve processes that are imbued with hidden racial dimensions and logics. Underexplored cognitive aspects of place (both as a geographical and social construct) can prove helpful in understanding the continuing assault against black bodies in US society."[82] These are critical areas of inquiry we've overlooked, perhaps because of how powerfully Victorian authors coded the world as white and the South as elsewhere. As Victorianists, we should guard against silently reproducing nineteenth-century divisions of places, texts, and communities. Burnett shows how "southern literature and the South as we know it today were created out of discursive processes"; I have attempted to show how some of those processes worked to construct a place where slavery could be imagined as a local phenomenon rather than as the cornerstone of modern global economics.[83] Yet, while our field becomes more global, there remains a dearth of work on exiled subjects like U.S. slavery. Perhaps like Kemble, we want to be "delivered of our share" in dealing with fraught histories and uncomfortable complicity. Perhaps we have fallen for the Victorian transfiguration of global injustice into local immorality. If we neglect to account for how our notion of "Victorian" is raced and artificially localized, how our epistemologies are calibrated to white Englishness, we discount the ways that slavery built modern economies and even made our notions of Victorianism possible.

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## Notes

I am grateful to my students at Georgia Southern University, whose questions and conversations required me to shift my ideas of Victorian studies. When I came to Georgia in 2018, they pushed me to create scholarship that accounted for the continuities between British imperialism and inequities they still saw around them. I therefore undertook this project as an experiment to explore what it might mean to do Victorian studies in this place and also to consider what might happen to Victorian and transatlantic studies if they take the South into account. Thanks also to Sophia Hsu, whose conversation and feedback have been crucial to this project, and to Abby Goode and AnaMaria Seglie, who have been generous and insightful readers. Finally, I am indebted to the editors and anonymous readers at *VLC*, whose suggestions were invaluable.

1. Butler's grandfather, Major Pierce Butler, was instrumental in writing slavery into federal and state law; on the establishment of the Butler estates, see Bell, *Major Butler's Legacy,* 68–81 and 106–11. For this auction, the normal markets in Savannah were too small, so broker Joseph Bryan moved the auction to the Ten Broeck Racetrack just outside town (Bailey, *Weeping Time*, 3–18). On the changing landscape of Ten Broeck, see Degraft-Hanson, "Unearthing the Weeping Time."
2. Bailey, *Weeping Time*, 22.
3. Throughout this article, I use "place" to capture the materiality of my referents. However, "space" in a social-scientific sense is interrelated here, especially in my later discussion of academic spaces that depend on, and invisibly hearken to, historically racialized places. See Combs on "space and place" in examinations of racism ("Everyday Racism Is Still Racism," 41 and 49).
4. Brody, *Impossible Purities*, 7.
5. Dickerson, *Dark Victorians*, 13.
6. Reading against the grain of a text's authority is not new; Black feminist historical scholarship has a well-established practice of, for example, reading marginalized voices in documents kept by and for the oppressors. For example, LeFlouria's *Chained in Silence* reverse-engineers the stories of resistance latent in archives of policing, and Hartman's "Venus in Two Acts" uses "critical fabulation" to "make visible the production of disposable lives" (11).

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7. See Bell, *Major Butler's Legacy,* 24, 2, 19. Butler gave up his commission in the British army in 1773 to establish a plantation in South Carolina. He protected his investment and his grandson's eventual inheritance by enshrining slavery into law.
8. Multiple biographers have noted how unlikely this claim is, but even if we accept it, Kemble certainly knew about the plantations by March 1836, when Butler came into shared ownership with his brother and aunt, and Butler knew about her opinions when he stifled the publication of her "long and vehement treatise against negro slavery" in 1835 (Bell, *Major Butler's Legacy,* 267, 266).
9. As Baucom shows, there is a long-standing tradition of defining "Englishness" via "appeals to the identity-endowing properties of place" (*Out of Place*, 4). Brody, too, analyzes the imagination of "Englishness" as "pure" (*Impossible Purities*, 1–13).
10. In addition to Dickerson's work, recent studies on the intersections of Victorian and African American literature include Lootens's *Political Poetess* and Hack's *Reaping Something New.* Still, much of this work focuses on the abolitionist texts circulating between New England and Europe and travel narratives by canonical writers on tour, like Charles Dickens and Harriet Martineau. Gilroy has argued that "the New Left heirs to the aesthetic and cultural tradition in which Turner and Ruskin stand" have "compounded and reproduced its nationalism and its ethnocentrism by denying imaginary, invented Englishness any external referents whatsoever. England ceaselessly gives birth to itself, seemingly from Britannia's head" (*Black Atlantic*, 14). Yet we have been slow to challenge "invented Englishness" in our research and our classrooms.
11. According to Burnett, transatlantic studies largely ignores the southern United States, particularly in the antebellum period (*Cavaliers and Economists,* 13).
12. Betensky argues for examining race even in Victorian texts that are not invested thematically in it. She explains, "Victorian studies does not situate slavery or emancipation at the core of its self-definition. While eminent Victorian scholars have made serious study of race, the field has generally been slower to address constructions of race than of imperialism. . . . [U]nless they come wrapped in the mantle of empire, inscriptions of racism in Victorian literary texts do not necessarily trigger the kinds of analysis we've been trained to do" ("Casual Racism in Victorian Literature," 726). Using Betensky's model, I read Kemble's *Journal*—which *is* explicitly concerned with

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race—in order to analyze the racism at work when Kemble tries (and ultimately fails) to focus her narrative on something besides slavery. On how race, gender, and class are mutually constitutive components of imperialism, see, for example, Makdisi, *Making England Western*; and McClintock, *Imperial Leather*.

13. Recent work has begun to examine transatlantic race as a topic specifically relevant to Victorian literature. Like Dickerson, Hack considers the intertextuality of Victorian canonical works and African American literature. His intertextual analysis relies on distinct literary categories by necessity (*Reaping Something New*, 9–10). But as Wilson cautions, Victorianists need to be aware of how our critical practices have silently reproduced Victorian racial and imperial ideologies ("The Changing Same," 91). Betensky, too, has shown how Victorianists "learn, like the Victorians, to take [casual racism] for granted," amplifying silent assumptions about race in our classrooms particularly through literature that does not take race as a central theme ("Casual Racism," 723). There are always blind spots, but making race central to Victorian studies will allow us to examine it with the benefit of multiple perspectives.
14. Betensky, "Casual Racism," 727.
15. Even while this article was under review in spring 2020, new calls have arisen for Victorian studies to account for its displacement of race. Most emphatically, Chatterjee, Christoff, and Wong's "Undisciplining Victorian Studies" insists we "render explicit the racism that subtends the history of aesthetics, canon formation, and curricular bias . . . and by doing so, make space to read, think, and write otherwise."
16. David's *Fanny Kemble: A Performed Life* focuses on Kemble as a "performer" but also offers many keen critical insights beyond Kemble's stage life.
17. McKittrick, "Plantation Futures," 3.
18. See Scott, Introduction, xliv; and Clinton, *Fanny Kemble's Journals*, 164.
19. Butler demanded Kemble cease all communication with the Sedgwicks as a condition of access to her daughters. She initially agreed, but Butler still barred her from the children (Bell, *Major Butler's Legacy*, 299, 314; David, *Fanny Kemble*, 154–55, 206–7). In 1850, after the divorce, Butler published these demands, along with two hundred pages of other documents and explanations that had served as legal evidence, ostensibly in an attempt to salvage his

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reputation (Butler, *Mr. Butler's Statement*, 125; see also Bell, *Major Butler's Legacy*, 611n7).

20. Kemble, *Journal*, 11, emphasis original. All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically in the text.
21. Bailey, *Weeping Time*, 46.
22. Kemble does not simply gesture toward trade but traces the markets and values of Butler products over time, showing how they operated in a global economy: "I wonder if I ever told you of the enormous decrease in value of this same famous sea-island, long-staple cotton. When Major [Butler], Mr. [Butler]'s grandfather, first sent the produce of this plantation where we now are to England, it was of so fine a quality that it used to be quoted by itself in the Liverpool cotton market, and was then worth half a guinea a pound; it is now not worth a shilling a pound. This was told me by a gentleman in Liverpool who has been factor for this estate for thirty years" (*Journal*, 202). Kemble reveals the depth of her knowledge of transatlantic economics and marks the recent shift from cotton to rice as the preeminent Butler crop.
23. Bell, *Major Butler's Legacy*, 111.
24. Henry explains, "[T]he cotton trade on which the textile factories depended was indeed global, encompassing cotton grown in the USA, Egypt, and India, turned into textiles in the north of England and then exported to the south of England and the rest of the world" (*Women, Literature and Finance*, 99). But, as Viswanathan has shown, "Nothing less than the most extraordinary political agility was called for in reconciling the democratic promise with the division of labor required for a capitalist system of production to flourish. The price of failure of course was the exposure of the moral pretensions of British colonialism" (*Masks of Conquest*, 164). Kemble acts as a typical liberal British imperialist whose ideology ultimately falters on the Georgia plantation.
25. Brody, *Impossible Purities*, 6.
26. As a consequence of the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833, Bailey notes, British enslavers "would receive over 20 million pounds in compensation for their losses. Slaves would receive nothing" (*Weeping Time*, 55). See also the Legacies of British Slave-ownership database from University College London. It's helpful here to understand Kemble's simultaneous making of her individuality and her national belonging through Brody's *Impossible Purities*, which argues that ideas of Englishness and English purity depend on "erasure" (2).

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27. Banerjee, "Who, or What, Is Victorian?" 221.
28. Postcolonial analyses of race and imperial economies have long investigated Englishness in compelling ways, such as in Viswanathan's *Masks of Conquest*. Chatterjee, Christoff, and Wong have drawn attention to how the "radical intervention" of postcolonial approaches were "managed by being shunted off *historically* as a twentieth-century concern, or enclosed in specialized spaces" ("Undisciplining Victorian Studies," emphasis original).
29. Banerjee, "Who, or What, Is Victorian?" 221–22.
30. This text resists twentieth-century critical divisions of British from American, Romantic from Victorian, and fiction from nonfiction, which we have largely deconstructed in our scholarship but that nevertheless continue to influence the shape of our curricula.
31. Rigby, *Topographies*, 13. Rigby examines the "romantic reconceptualization of nature" through both Abrams's theory of secularized hope and Lussier's "reenchantment," analyzing the "poetics of place" and the "problems of social relations" together to reexamine ecocritical and religious components of Romantic nature, place, or "topography" (*Topographies*, 12–13).
32. Outka, *Race and Nature*, 2. Also of interest on Romantic aesthetics and race is Younquist's "Black Romanticism."
33. Chatterjee, Christoff, and Wong, "Undisciplining."
34. "A Residence in Georgia," 609; "Review of *Journal*," 737.
35. Outka argues that "race and nature should always be understood as historically interdependent constructions" (*Race and Nature*, 5). In this instance, we might read the imagery of the "charred and blackened" tree as an evocation of the South's racial violence.
36. Callanan, *Deciphering Race*, 3–4.
37. Outka, *Race and Nature*, 3.
38. Combs, "Everyday Racism," 40.
39. Kemble's treatment of domesticity, unlike her nature scenes, is closer to domestic realism or even "domestic gothic" than Romantic aesthetics (Russell, "Domestic Gothic," 771). Most likely it is both, if we understand "the familiar terrain of realism as the other side of the gothic," as Armstrong suggests (*How Novels Think*, 3). In this case, domestic horror encodes racial as well as gendered violence —an intersection well explored in Black feminist scholarship, such as Spillers's "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe" and Hartman's *Lose Your Mother*.
40. McKittrick, "Plantation Futures," 6.

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41. Callanan, *Deciphering Race*, 4.
42. McKittrick, "Plantation Futures," 9.
43. Clinton, *Fanny Kemble's Journals*, 91. On Kemble's shifting abolitionism, see Scott, Introduction, xxix–xxxv.
44. Kemble wrote elsewhere about laws prohibiting married women from accruing economic power; twice in May 1842 she wrote to Harriet St. Ledger about the inability of married women to own their intellectual property or earnings. "[U]pon my being reminded that whatever I write is not my own legal property, but that of another," she says, "I confess to something very like wrathful indignation; impotent wrath and vain indignation, to be sure—not the less intense for that, however, for the injustice is undoubtedly great" (Clinton, *Fanny Kemble's Journals*, 167).
45. Betensky, "Casual Racism," 734. Betensky calls "casual racism in Victorian literature and culture" a "Victorian *studies* problem" ("Casual Racism," 736, emphasis original).
46. See, for example, Anthony's blog post, "5 Racist Anti-Racism Responses." While it might be more comfortable for white readers to focus on Kemble's good intentions and personal feelings, doing so shifts the reading from critical scholarship to moral apology. One cost of this shift is that it marks Kemble's racism as historically specific (and thus contained), obscuring how well-intentioned but ultimately racist discourse persists among white commentators on racism today.
47. Bailey's historiography arises from her object of analysis. She builds a methodology capable of accounting for the Weeping Time as a historical event. See especially Bailey's discussion on "the democratization of memory" (*Weeping Time*, 153–77).
48. On the terms of the divorce, see Bell, *Major Butler's Legacy*, 310. On Kemble's postmarital life, see David, *Fanny Kemble*, 222–53.
49. Thomson, *What Became of the Slaves*, 11. All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically in the text.
50. The *Times*, in its coverage of the Weeping Time, considered the real tragedy to be "the ruin of the speculative southern gentleman." It describes Butler as "a gentleman once well known in London" and who is "a citizen of the free state of Pennsylvania, and inhabitant of the most respectable city of Philadelphia," even "though we know from the constant reiteration of Americans that the Free States have nothing whatever to do with slavery."

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51. Burnett, *Cavaliers and Economists*, 174. For example, Thomson tells "The case of Josh's Molly," in which a woman insisted that she "was lame in her left foot" despite the testimony of an "eminent physician" that she "was not lame, but was only shamming." Thomson notes that Josh's Molly is exercising autonomy over the knowledge of her own physical self, saying, "Whether she really was lame or not no one knows but herself" (*What Became of the Slaves*, 19).
52. Bailey, *Weeping Time*, 58.
53. Degraft-Hanson, "Torn Asunder," 63; calculations of inflation have been made using the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Consumer Price Index (CPI) and inflation calculator as of December 2019.
54. Degraft-Hanson, "Torn Asunder," 63.
55. Callanan explains, "Abolitionist rhetoric" in Britain shifted between 1833 and 1860 "as the economic problems of the newly emancipated West Indies and the conflict over slavery in the American context reached new levels" (*Deciphering Race*, 15).
56. Clinton, *Fanny Kemble's Journals*, 188.
57. On the publication history and reception, see Scott, Introduction, li–lii.
58. "Our Library Table," 163.
59. Scott, Introduction, l.
60. "A Residence in Georgia," 150.
61. Venet notes that "the *Standard* [of] 12 Dec 1863, reported the Union League as the publisher" (*Neither Ballots nor Bullets*, 181n90.)
62. Burnett, *Cavaliers and Economists*, 205–6.
63. Combs, "Everyday Racism," 50. See also McKittrick on "uninhabitable" space ("Plantation Futures," 5–8).
64. McKittrick, "Plantation Futures," 2.
65. This was due in large part to booms in the major export crops of cotton and rice as well as to infrastructural developments, largely carried out by forced labor (O'Donovan, "At the Intersection," 42–68).
66. O'Donovan, "At the Intersection," 56, 58. See also McKittrick.
67. O'Donovan, "At the Intersection," 64.
68. Harris and Berry, "Slave Life in Savannah," 93–94.
69. Harris and Berry, "Slave Life in Savannah," 100.
70. Harris and Berry, "Slave Life in Savannah," 101.
71. First African Baptist Church.
72. Michaels and Michaels, *Hidden History*, 59.
73. Sheehy and Wallace, *Savannah*, 113; and Bailey, *Weeping Time*, 9.
74. Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*, 194.

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75. hooks, "Language," 168, 170. We might also think of Viswanathan's "failure of English" here (*Masks of Conquest*, 142–65). Wilson explains that reading African American space requires a distinct literacy: "Since the majority of states denied blacks the right to vote, and the right to associate became increasingly restricted—thereby changing the meanings of space for blacks, changes of space were exacerbated by the Fugitive Slave Law—African Americans had to become even more strategic about developing the means to engage with the political sphere" (Wilson, *Specters of Democracy*, 5).
76. McKittrick, "Plantation Futures," 5. I think also of how Hartman describes a kind of productive failure: "The necessity of trying to represent what we cannot, rather than leading to pessimism or despair, must be embraced as the impossibility that conditions our knowledge of the past and animates our desire for a liberated future" ("Venus in Two Acts," 13).
77. Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest*, 144.
78. McKittrick, "Plantation Futures," 5.
79. McKittrick, "Plantation Futures," 14, emphasis original.
80. Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*, 188.
81. Betensky "Casual Racism," 732.
82. Combs, "Everyday Racism," 41. McKittrick, too, argues, "[T]he struggles we face, intellectually, are a continuation of plantation narratives that dichotomize geographies into us/them and hide secretive histories that undo the teleological and biocentric underpinnings of spatiality" (12).
83. Burnett, *Cavaliers and Economists*, 12.

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