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William Clark's World: Describing America in the Age of Unknowns

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Lukasik shows that Cooper was less concerned with discerning the absence of character than exploring the invisibility of its presence, uncovering the “invisible aristocrat.” One is reminded of the poor but lovely and virtuous servant girl of eighteenth-century sentimental fiction who turns out to be well born. And, in a final inversion and unmasking of the physiognomic fallacy, the title character of Melville’s novel *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities* (1852) is seduced by the power of a female face and its likeness to his father’s, renounces his family and inheritance to atone for his father’s sins, comes to realize that he has mistaken a look for a face, and, ultimately, dies due to his lack of judgment, all the while preserving his distinguished family’s unblemished name. Such was the fraught relationship between physiognomy and social distinction in early America, one that Lukasik outlines with the precision of silhouette.

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PETER J. KASTOR. *William Clark’s World: Describing America in the Age of Unknowns*. (Lamar Series in Western History.) New Haven: Yale University Press. 2011. Pp. 344. \$45.00.

In *William Clark’s World*, Peter J. Kastor considers the relation between representations of the North American Far West and the westward expansion of the United States. In contrast with many works about Meriwether Lewis, William Clark, and the Corps of Discovery, Kastor’s study concentrates on the aftermath of the Lewis and Clark expedition rather than the journey itself, and on the career of the underappreciated and long-lived Clark instead of the words of the poetic and doomed Lewis.

This focus on Clark and post-1806 perceptions of the Far West enables Kastor to explore the question at the heart of his insightful and intriguing book: how did the United States move from the apprehensive understanding of the regions beyond the Mississippi evident in the productions of Clark and his peers in the early decades of the nineteenth century—an understanding in which the transcontinental destiny of the republic was less than manifest—to the brash approach to far western expansion characterizing the 1830s and 1840s? Kastor grounds his response in a wide and thorough examination of explorers’ journals, geographic treatises, personal and governmental correspondence, and many well-selected and elegantly reproduced maps. He traces Clark and his contemporaries through the mazes of the nascent United States publishing industry that would make the Far West known to Anglo-Americans. He navigates with Clark around the rudimentary structures of a U.S. government that was trying to determine the best approach to North America’s western reaches.

Instead of offering a full biography of Clark, Kastor uses Clark’s life as the narrative center of a larger story of national transition. As Clark moved from western explorer to frontier administrator, the eastern republic’s tentative probes into the western unknown gave

way to the United States’ conquest of a continent. In Kastor’s subtle and perceptive rendering of events, early nineteenth-century administrations were far more concerned with the governance of territories acquired by the Louisiana Purchase than with novel imperial projects. The earthy, practical explorers working for them produced portraits of the Far West in which the region’s perils stood out as much as its promise. In part, this was because the region was filled with fearsome mountains, unforgiving deserts, imposing Indian nations, and jealous representatives of foreign powers. It was also because explorers seeking fame, fortune, and position had every interest in emphasizing the difficulties of the obstacles they had deftly and heroically overcome.

As early as the 1810s, however, advocates of western expansion could begin to use the achievements and works of Clark and his contemporaries selectively in support of a more aggressive approach to the Far West. Western enthusiasts could draw valleys and rivers from the maps and journals of western scouts while omitting the Indian communities commanding them. They could add expansive U.S. boundaries to maps that had highlighted physical features rather than political claims. As the imperatives of multiplying, franchise-wielding, land-hungry Euro-Americans displaced concerns about the difficulties of western settlement, the most zealous proponents of territorial acquisitions could simply disregard the cautions of Clark and others.

These expansionist imperatives raise the most substantial question about the western representations Kastor so knowledgeably and lucidly considers: to what extent did the way some Americans depicted the Far West affect the way other Americans acted toward it? Kastor’s book emphasizes the power of representations to shape reality by influencing behavior, but the book offers many indications that rising demands for far western lands were producing visions of the region as much as they were being generated by them. It often appears that Anglo-Americans were coming to the Far West regardless of what figures like Clark had to say about it.

This points to one limitation of Kastor’s semi-biographical approach. The great virtue of centering on Clark is that his tangible life makes accessible the often abstract topic of spatial representation. The semi-biographical structure of the book, however, often obliges Kastor to follow the trajectory of Clark’s life rather than the logic of key arguments. This pulls the book away from the kind of sustained ratiocination needed for a really conclusive statement about the connections between geographic representation and expansionist reality.

Biographical conventions also draw attention away from one of Kastor’s great achievements. Authors of biographical or semi-biographical studies are often compelled to trumpet the important or representative features of figures like Clark. But Clark’s less significant and typical qualities are in many respects more instructive. A persistent puzzle of the Lewis and Clark Expe-

dition is why it is so fun to write about but so difficult to integrate into the larger historical narrative of the United States. Kastor suggests an answer. Western accounts and images like Clark's that emphasized western dangers and the rare heroism needed to surmount them ill suited a burgeoning United States that would come to deny all barriers to the western movement of tens of thousands of ordinary people. Kastor skillfully and appropriately uses Clark as a guide through issues of western exploration, representation, and expansion. In doing so, he helps us to see that Clark was, in his relation to some of the larger trends of the nineteenth-century United States, a guide pointing to a North American past rather than the American future.

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ANDREW J. LEWIS. *A Democracy of Facts: Natural History in the Early Republic*. (Early American Studies.) Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 2011. Pp. 204. \$39.95.

Once in a while a book pulls together the scholarship of a generation, synthesizes it into a coherent and persuasive account, and thus becomes the platform from which new scholarship must necessarily launch. This is one of those books. In this survey of how Americans thought about and practiced science from the 1780s to the 1840s, Andrew J. Lewis uses archival research and perceptive analysis to deepen our understanding of science in the early American republic. To some degree, Lewis tells a familiar story. One well-known arc of change is the shift in this period from natural history as a unified investigation into all terrestrial natural phenomena to its disaggregation into modern sciences like geology and zoology. Another theme is the concern to root American identity in the natural world, a topic that has become a virtual cliché among scholars of early American science. However, this book is about much more than either of these concerns: Lewis is interested in how people think, and that makes all the difference.

In five chapters, each structured around a story, Lewis examines the tension between claims by elite men to authoritative knowledge and assertions by more ordinary men of the right to think for themselves, as well as the tension between establishing matters of fact and the processes of reasoning from those facts to causality and meaning. Chapter one recounts debates over swallow submersion, the belief that as winter approaches swallows sink into ponds and hibernate until the return of warm weather. Observations by credible witnesses of swallows seeming to plunge into water in the fall and of torpid swallows warming themselves in the spring sun were pitted against assertions that examinations of bird anatomy and experiments in which swallows plainly drowned when plunged into water made swallow submersion implausible. Here educated men's desire to lead an "empire of reason" (p. 16) was undercut by their aspiration to distance themselves from what they saw as the premature and inaccurate systematizing of Euro-

peans (epitomized by the degeneracy theory of Georges-Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon) and by more modest men's belief in their own abilities to observe natural phenomena reliably. Hence the epistemic valorization of credible eyewitness testimony, coupled with widespread hopes that the American natural world would have possibilities for knowledge undreamt of in Europe, shifted Americans toward "a democracy of facts" in which any credible man could participate. While elite men were successful in establishing formal science in college curricula, learned societies, and publishing ventures, Americans moving across the Appalachians in pursuit of economic opportunities found elites' knowledge of natural history of variable benefit as they sought to commodify natural resources. Chapter three addresses interpretations of the origins of the great mounds found in the trans-Appalachian West. The refusal of white Americans to believe that contemporary Native Americans were related to ancient mound builders has drawn many historians' attention as an example of race-making in the early republic. Lewis acknowledges this issue but here concentrates on how and why the nascent field of archeology reopened a space for speculation about phenomena, especially among non-elites. In the 1820s the development of a "theology of nature," the subject of chapter four, similarly contributed to the reopening of a space for thinking about causality, particularly in the emerging field of geology. In the final chapter, Lewis describes how educated men, now often specializing in geology, successfully obtained government patronage from states eager to locate mineral deposits and canal routes. Thus Lewis analyzes the reasons for the initial diminution of elite credibility in realms of science, the rise of widespread participation in natural "fact-making," and the slow reassertion of the claims of educated men to superior knowledge, as well as the broader movement away from system-building and causal explanation followed by their relegitimation, however "unsteady, unstable, [and] sometimes unconscious" (p. 1) these movements were.

This book should find a wide audience. Lewis builds on the work of a generation of historians of science who have shown how critical the participation of people beyond the educated elite was to the development of science, how diverse and interpenetrated the subjects of science were before the development of modern disciplinary divisions, and how thoroughly scientific inquiry was embedded in wider cultural developments. Historians of the early republic will find a jargon-free account of this aspect of their era. While they will certainly also notice the absence of attention to race and gender, this omission allows Lewis to tell a complicated story clearly. Historians of nineteenth-century science will find this an admirable case study useful for comparative work. The citations are a guide to virtually all of the important recent literature on this subject from both sides of the Atlantic, which graduate students embark-