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Excavating the landscapes of American literature: Archaeology, antiquarianism, and the landscape in American women's writing, 1820--1890

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**EXCAVATING THE LANDSCAPES OF AMERICAN LITERATURE:
ARCHAEOLOGY, ANTIQUARIANISM, AND THE LANDSCAPE IN AMERICAN
WOMEN'S WRITING, 1820-1890**

BY

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DISSERTATION

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire

in Partial Fulfillment of

the Requirements for the Degree of

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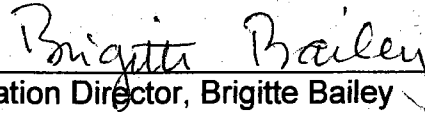
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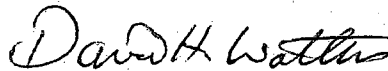
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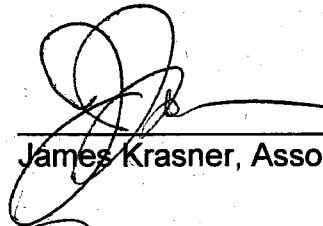
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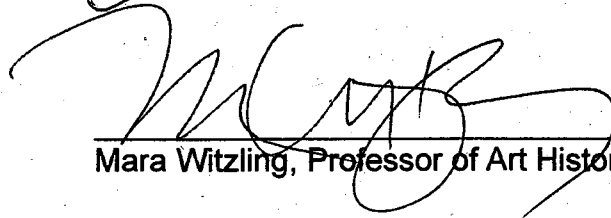
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the late Dr. Rodney K. Delasanta. His wisdom, generosity, and kindness will always be remembered and appreciated.

A.M.D.G.

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ABSTRACT

EXCAVATING THE LANDSCAPES OF AMERICAN LITERATURE:
ARCHAEOLOGY, ANTIQUARIANISM, AND THE LANDSCAPE IN AMERICAN
WOMEN'S WRITING, 1820-1890

by

Christina Healey

University of New Hampshire, May, 2009

This dissertation investigates the ways that women writers made use of the discourses of antiquarianism and archaeology between the years 1820 and 1890. Focusing especially upon the writings of Sarah Josepha Hale, Catharine Maria Sedgwick, Susan Fenimore Cooper, Celia Thaxter, and Constance Fenimore Woolson, the project examines depictions of artifacts, ruins, relics, and other antiquities in literary landscapes. Each of these women presents a unique way of knowing the world that is manifested in the ways their texts join different ways of understanding the landscape, its occupants, the artifacts it contains, its strata and geological history, and its aesthetic value. They provide insight into the act of "reading" the text of the landscape and interpreting its meaning(s). Women writers, I argue, were aware of the traditional connections between the figure of the antiquarian and that of the spinster as they constructed their archaeological landscapes. One of the major claims of this dissertation is that women writers took on the authorial persona of the "antiquarian" in order to comment on three separate but related areas of concern: the single life for women, women's authorship and artistry, and the nature of women's genius. The emphasis in this

study is on the ways that women participated in reading values into actual and textual landscapes, fashioning literary locations for debates on these issues. It investigates the ways that they reproduced these values and meanings in their literary works—how, and to what extent, they took on the role of “antiquarian” when they incorporated ancient subjects and places in their writing.

INTRODUCTION

ARCHAEOLOGY, ANTIQUARIANISM, AND WOMEN'S WRITING IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

I began working on my dissertation project with a broad question in mind: how and why did women writers of the nineteenth century make use of archaeology and antiquarianism in their writings? Both men and women addressed archaeology in their writing in the nineteenth century, but were women's responses to this emerging scientific field somehow "different" or in some way significant? My study has had mixed results. I have found that women writers, like their male counterparts, used images of antiquities in conventional ways; as, for example, meditating upon ruins or other ancient artifacts to reflect upon the fleeting nature of human achievements.¹ However, I have also found that nineteenth-century women writers engaged with antiquarianism as a model of authorship in interesting ways. In her study of women's authorship between 1850 and 1900, Susan Williams argues, "Its features were not wholly separate from those associated with male authorship, but they were discussed and utilized in distinct ways. Moreover, these features did not lead to a single definition of 'the female author,' but rather opened up a variety of practices and authorial

¹ A famous example of this type of meditation is Shelley's poem "Ozymandias" (1818). Susan Fenimore Cooper engages with this type of meditation in "A Dissolving View," when she reflects on the passing of the civilization that created the Egyptian pyramids.

personae" (2). I have found that women employed antiquarianism in "distinct ways," particularly in the way that they adapted and transformed the eighteenth-century figure of the antiquarian as an "authorial persona" for various political and personal purposes. In the 1820s, for example, Catharine Sedgwick uses antiquarianism to create landscapes that expose, and to a certain extent counter, the patriarchal rhetoric of Anglo-American territorial conquest. Antiquarianism also entered into the marriage debates that began early in the century. Women who authored "spinster stories" as a response to this debate drew upon stereotypes of the antiquarian as a "spinster" figure in order to argue that single women were valuable memory-keepers in their communities. As I track the use of antiquarian authorship by writers from the 1820s through 1890, I find that women authors increasingly use antiquarianism to explore topics such as the role of place in the construction of personal and communal identity, the nature of women's genius, and the status of the woman artist in the literary marketplace.

The women I primarily focus on—Sarah Josepha Hale, Catharine Maria Sedgwick, Susan Fenimore Cooper, Celia Thaxter, and Constance Fenimore Woolson—were all important and successful writers. Antiquarian discourse, as well as archaeological images, tropes, and themes, create aesthetic, scientific, imaginative, and cultural connections between these writers. They incorporate ideas concerning archaeology and antiquarianism into their texts in a way that complicates, jars, or upsets our expectations of their writing; that casts their understanding of nature, the landscape, the domestic sphere, and the nation in a

different light; and that gives a fresh perspective on the idea of female authorship and the role of the woman writer in the nineteenth century.

Each of these writers also showed an interest in antiquarianism and archaeological progress, discovery, and debate. Some of them traveled to ancient sites both at home and abroad and witnessed the excavations at popular tourist destinations like Pompeii; and all of them wrote texts that merge interest in these topics with their treatment of the American landscape. Each of these women presents a unique way of knowing the world that is manifested in the ways their texts join different ways of understanding the landscape, its occupants, the artifacts it contains, its strata and geological history, and its aesthetic value. They provide insight into the act of "reading" the text of the landscape and interpreting its meaning(s). As Simon Schama writes, "Even the landscapes that we suppose to be most free of our culture may turn out, on closer inspection, to be its product" (9). The landscapes I will examine in this study represent a contested product: a dramatic field in which cultural values are both encoded and challenged.

Popular archaeology and antiquarianism occur in nineteenth-century American literature in a variety of ways: in the depiction of ruins, both in the Old and New Worlds; in the tropes of excavation and stratigraphic depictions of the landscape; in the treatment of material culture such as monuments, markers, and artifacts in the historical landscape; and the figure of the antiquarian in literature. Interest in the classical world and its ruins and artifacts was widely diffused throughout nineteenth-century American culture. There was a fascination with

ancient Egypt, the Holy Land, and South American ruins and artifacts, and the debate over the origins of America's ancient and colonial antiquities and pre-history continued throughout the century. Literary interpretations of these various ruins range from the sentimental, to the sublime, to the political: in many ways, artifacts and archaeological sites were given meanings that satisfied a wide array of political, cultural, or aesthetic agendas.

I chose 1820 as the starting year for my project because it was the year that the first issue of the American Antiquarian Society's (founded 1812) journal was published. It featured Caleb Atwater's groundbreaking article, "Description of the Antiquities Discovered in the State of Ohio and other Western States." The ending date of 1890 marks the publication and creation of several interesting texts, including Roger Moorehead's "Fort Ancient" and Constance Fenimore Woolson's "Cairo in 1890." It is important to understand the contexts in which nineteenth-century women understood and participated in archaeological discourse, which emerged as a discipline around 1840 out of the long-extant practice of antiquarianism (Lyons et al 64). The first half of the century was a time of broad popular interest in scientific study. There was an increase in basic scientific education for American men and women, as well as in access to and participation in scientific discourse. As Nina Baym has remarked in *American Women of Letters and the Nineteenth-Century Sciences* (2002), "That a scientifically educated populace could be brought into being seemed possible in an era when...the sciences were not yet highly mathematical' when scientific intelligibility 'did not exceed the reach of amateurs and laymen" (3). Scientific

articles written for a general audience frequently appeared in popular periodicals like *Godey's Lady's Book* (40), while lyceums, lectures, books, and periodicals provided the public with access to emerging scientific theories and discoveries. The exclusive jargon and specialized language that marked the professionalization of sciences like archaeology did not emerge in America until after the Civil War, when the sciences increasingly became the province of experts within the auspices of institutions like museums, universities, and scientific societies. As scientific pursuits became more sophisticated and elite in nature, they became increasingly reserved for (mostly) white males with the resources, credentials, connections, and scientific literacy necessary to negotiate an emerging discourse that Baym has described as "speaking in tongues well beyond the interpretive abilities of ordinary people of both sexes" (155). However, activities like antiquarianism and natural history, including the popular pastimes of botany and geology, remained common hobbies for amateur men and women throughout the nineteenth century. And like natural history, botany, and geology, antiquarianism involved "collection and classification on a descriptive basis, regardless of chronology and embracing both text and artifact" (Levine 70-71). Antiquarian pursuits required at minimum the curiosity to investigate everyday artifacts, both natural and man-made, and access to materials to study, rather than special credentials or institutional backing.

Antiquarianism, the collection and study of artifacts, ruins, and landscapes with historical significance, emerged by the beginning of the seventeenth century as a way of investigating and understanding the past (Trigger 55-56). This

"amateur" pastime, often a hobby of gentlemen and scholars in their leisure time, in many cases supplied the discoveries, ideas, and artifacts that helped archaeology to become a more sophisticated scientific field in the nineteenth century. The importance of antiquarianism to archaeology has been well documented by scholars. In his study of classical archaeology, Stephen Dyson writes, "Field archaeology originated with the amateur antiquaries, and for much of Europe the antiquary remained the principal source of archaeological research well into the twentieth century" (xi). Stephen Conn argues that antiquarianism in America between 1780 and 1860 was central to the development of American archaeology (160-61). Although the figure of the antiquary was often mocked in popular literature as a fool or crusty, absentminded scholar, the work done by antiquarians was a necessary precursor to archaeological science.

Before more advanced methods of dating artifacts such as stratigraphic studies were developed in the mid-nineteenth century, antiquarians had to rely on existing written records of ancient sites and cultures to reconstruct the historical context of an artifact (63). Because these records were not always complete, the interpretation of artifacts was often up for debate. The absence of a written record rendered sites and artifacts more open to imaginative constructions—at times as the loci of conflicting values. As Andrew Szegedy-Maszak remarks in *Antiquity and Photography*, ancient landscapes were seen as "a direct connection with the past" (Lyons et al 14). However, they were also

always open to symbolic interpretation and presentation.² Antiquarianism's focus on a broad range of material evidence, and its reliance on history, aesthetics, and literature to create meaning out of this evidence, blurs the boundaries between history, art history, science, and literature. It was characterized by observation, historical literacy, imagination, and rhetoric. A good antiquarian had to be able to make an effective argument for the meaning he assigned an artifact or place.

Throughout the 1990s, scholarship focusing on landscape debated the political, social, and cultural values in representations of the land. Carolyn Merchant has described the imposition of the magisterial gaze—what Albert Boime has characterized as “the will to mastery over the environment” (ix)—upon the natural world as incontestable and hegemonic:

Vision is a dominating way of knowing—a male “enlightenment” category that tells “God’s stories” from a transcendent “view from above,” replacing participatory (use of all the senses), oral, and tactile modes of knowing with the “perspective” of the “witness.” The distancing from nature (as object) inherent in the term “representations” is made possible by sixteenth-century perspective art, the Copernican view of the earth from above, and the voyeurism inherent in scientific instruments such as the microscope, telescope, camera, and space satellite. Through the method of witnessing, Science knows Nature (Merchant 62).

As archaeology and antiquarianism of the period combine scientific empiricism with artistic sensibilities and historical interest, the way that “science knows nature” in these fields becomes far less a matter of the dichotomous subject/object relationship constituted by the magisterial gaze. The intersection of

² See Dyson: “The desire to see symbolic places and to experience their rediscovery vicariously spurred the circulation of images among audiences that enthusiastically supported archaeological research” (22).

nineteenth-century archaeology and literature provides a site in which “a multiplicity of components” (Achilles 53) emerges to determine meanings that may not be sanctioned by scientific fact or the dominant cultural narrative of a particular landscape. The emphasis in this study is on the ways that women participated in reading values into actual and textual landscapes, and the ways they reproduced these values and meanings in their literary works—how, and to what extent, they took on the role of “antiquarian” when they incorporated ancient subjects and places in their writing.

Chapter Outline

Chapter I examines the roots of the antiquarian model of authorship that women drew upon in the nineteenth century. I begin with an overview of the different ways that the women writers I am focusing on made use of antiquarianism. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, the figure of the eighteenth-century antiquarian gentleman gradually became conflated with the figure of the spinster in the popular imagination. I discuss how this “spinster/antiquary” figure became a feature in “spinster stories”—short stories that focused on a single woman as the central character—from the antebellum period through the 1890s. The chapter demonstrates that while women made use of antiquarian discourse, they were also ambivalent toward antiquarianism because of its perceived negative characteristics, particularly, as in Catharine Sedgwick’s “An Incident at Rome,” the obsessive qualities of the antiquarian.

Sedgwick feared that such negative qualities could disrupt women's proper domestic roles and could skew their perception of the world around them.

However, women writers also embraced the more positive qualities of antiquarian discourse, such as preservationist tendencies and the power of the antiquarian imagination to create narratives around artifacts and other human traces in the landscape.

In Chapter I, I mention that antebellum women writers used antiquarian discourse to participate in public debates, such as the issue of Indian Removal and the ideological struggle over land rights in the 1820s. Chapter II focuses more closely on Sarah Josepha Hale's and Catharine Sedgwick's use of antiquarianism as a response to land issues in the 1820s. One thread that I also continue from Chapter I is the issue of discomfort that women, especially antebellum writers, experienced in fashioning themselves (if only in part) as "antiquarians." In this chapter, I examine the rhetorical movements that Hale and Sedgwick make in order to free themselves from some of the anxieties with which antiquarianism was associated. I present Hale as a writer who uses antiquarianism and archaeological evidence to bolster Anglo-American land claims. The rhetoric of her 1823 poem, "The Genius of Oblivion," does not differ significantly from that of male writers who wrote around the same time. William Cullen Bryant, for example, created similar nationalistic narratives around antiquities in "The Prairies" (1832). Very little scholarship on Hale's literary intervention in these debates exists, although she is the first woman writer to address American archaeology in a literary text.

In contrast, a great deal of scholarship exists on Sedgwick's 1827 novel, *Hope Leslie*. Sedgwick, I argue, uses artifacts to expose the rhetorical underpinnings of the master narratives of white land conquest in her novel, *Hope Leslie* (1827). In my descriptions of Sedgwick's "multi-vocal, multi-local" landscapes, I depart from critics who try to align her as either pro- or anti-Removal. Chapter II also gives the background of contemporary theories about the "mound builder" civilization that supposedly inhabited the continent in prehistoric times; this background enables readers to understand the interventions that Hale was making in debates over Native territory. I lay out the key ideas that Hale and Sedgwick were working through, including the nineteenth-century theories that objects were "the place where knowledge inhered" (Conn 10) and that ancient landscapes were "direct connection[s] with the past" (Szegedy-Maszak 14). I begin a discussion of how antiquarianism was a point of access to ideas of landscape history and the stadialist model of history, a thread which I take up more fully in Chapter III.

Chapter III is in many ways the hinge that holds the first and second halves of the dissertation together. In part, this is because I am focusing on a mid-century author: I examine Susan Fenimore Cooper's nature journal *Rural Hours* (1850) and her essay "A Dissolving View" (1852). I argue that Cooper wrote *Rural Hours* in part as a reaction against what she saw as dangerous speculation in the western parts of the country, which were aftereffects of westward expansion in the 1830s and 1840s. She was concerned with what she saw as the increasing "homogenization" of the landscape that resulted from

progress and expansion—forces that were destroying not only unique natural species and places but also “antiquities” and other traces of the frontier past. These were important, Cooper argues, because they marked Cooperstown’s place in American history and in frontier history. Cooper positions herself as the antiquarian preservationist who uses archaeological imagery to explain how the Cooperstown landscape has changed over time and why it is important to keep such changes “legible” for future generations.

In Chapters IV and V, I revisit some of the issues that I raise in Chapter III, including my discussion of how Cooper constructs a sense of self—primarily in terms of her family’s history—in relation to her sense of place. Also, in “A Dissolving View,” we have an example of how a woman author expands the scope of antiquarianism to fashion herself as the “creator” of an historical narrative, and also as a kind of “genius” or “artist.” This emerging thread of the “woman artist” within the antiquarian model of authorship becomes more pronounced in the works of Celia Thaxter and Constance Fenimore Woolson, who wrote in the 1870s. I argue that this represents a shift in women’s use of antiquarianism—that sometime after mid-century, “excavation” became less about national landscapes, national history, and national narratives and more about personal history and identity.

In Chapter IV, I focus on New Hampshire author and poet Celia Thaxter. Enlarging upon my discussion in Chapter III of how writers could use antiquities and the archaeological landscape to fashion identity and to evoke memories, I examine how Thaxter shapes her identity through her relationship to place in

Among the Isles of Shoals (1873). A crucial element of my argument in this chapter is that, while most critics have located Thaxter in the regionalist tradition, it is more productive to view her writing on place as part of what I have termed the larger “mythogeographic” tradition of the Isles of Shoals. I go on to explain this tradition as a cultural consensus in which a variety of cultural productions over a significant period of time come to define a place. There is tension in *Among the Isles of Shoals* between a public and a personal representation of the islands, revealing Thaxter’s complex relationship to a place that she both wanted to promote and to protectively shield from the gaze of “outsiders.”

In my final chapter, I discuss a contemporary of Thaxter’s: Constance Fenimore Woolson. Like Thaxter, Woolson is interested in the ways that artifacts and other traces can create a sense of location, can be used to define the self and one’s relationship to the community and to place, and can be viewed as a legible text left by the past upon the landscape of the present. I turn to Woolson at the end of the dissertation because, in her short stories and travel sketches, she implicitly questions the value of the spinster/antiquarian and the antiquarian model of authorship to women writers. In her images of spinsters and antiquarians, particularly in her story, “The Ancient City” (1874), Woolson presents antiquarianism as a limiting and dangerous practice for women who aspired to become artists. I argue that, in Woolson’s depiction of women characters that are struggling to establish a place for themselves in the world, Woolson imposes the “geography” of the literary marketplace over landscapes of physical places in her texts.

I introduce the term “the New Spinster” in this chapter, explaining that this figure was a version of the New Woman and, I argue, was an especially important figure for Woolson, an artist who never married. Ultimately, Woolson implies that a separation between the spinster and the antiquarian is necessary for the New Spinster to gain the freedom to establish her own location. While earlier writers portray the archaeological landscape in terms of the imaginative possibilities it offered, Woolson seems to view it as a restrictive landscape that is at the mercy of the misreadings of male gatekeeper figures: primarily represented in these stories as elite white Eastern males and male critics.

Woolson engages each of the major threads of antiquarianism that I have addressed in the first few chapters of my dissertation. Like Cooper, she voices concerns about the destructive effects of “progress,” industrialization, and national expansion on the frontier, using antiquarianism and archaeology to question how well the white, Eastern, male gaze reads history in the landscape, particularly during a time of unprecedented industrialization and environmental destruction. However, her primary concern is the problem for the woman artist of finding critical acceptance and thus establishing a place for herself in a changing literary marketplace. Many of her stories engage with questions about the nature of women’s genius and the difficulties that women writers faced in claiming the identity of “artist” in the late nineteenth century. As she uses the antiquarian model of authorship to address these problems, Woolson also critiques it, especially in the self-conscious way that she blurs the problematic gaze of the tourist with that of the antiquarian. If her predecessors worked through their

ambivalence toward the antiquarian persona by establishing themselves as “antiquarians” within normative parameters of womanhood and femininity, Woolson more directly challenges the connections between antiquarian discourse and women’s authorship.

CHAPTER I

OLD MAIDS AND OLD THINGS

"An old maid is not merely an antiquarian, she is an antiquity; not merely a record of the past, but the very past itself; she has escaped a great change, and sympathizes not in the ordinary mutations of mortality. She inhabits a little eternity of her own." As this passage from the brief, humorous article, "Old Maids" (1832),¹ proclaims, the spinster not only seems quite at home among artifacts and antiquities, but can be grouped among them. The space she occupies is "her own," separate from and untouched by the rest of the world. And like the antiquities surrounding her the spinster seems to have no practical use. She stands apart from the activities of the world rather than participating in them. In the author's words, "There is a something about them which is not of the earth, earthly. They are spectators of the world; not adventurers nor rambles; perhaps guardians, we say nothing of tatlers." The author of "Old Maids" treats the spinster with fond, patronizing humor, connecting her with the world through antiquarianism and the image of the artifact. In nineteenth-century literature, antiquities are frequently depicted as timeless bridges between the worlds of the present and the past. In a similar manner, women who take on the role of

¹ Originally published in the "Englishman's Magazine."

“antiquarian” embody an intimate connection to the past that is often expressed through their relationship with relics of the past.

This chapter will examine the relationship between the trope of the “female antiquarian” and antiquities in the works of four writers: Sarah Josepha Hale, Catharine Maria Sedgwick, Constance Fenimore Woolson, and Rebecca Harding Davis. Each used conventions from the antiquarian tradition, including the gendered treatment of artifacts, to reflect on the nature of artistic creation and women’s genius. These writers invest artifacts with meaning in their fiction, poems, and essays; the artifacts in turn affect the construction of space and place in these texts. Once they are recovered through “excavation”—whether dug out of the earth or discovered in an archive—material fragments of the past require recontextualization in space and time. These dimensions shift to accommodate the artifacts as the writers bring them into the present course of the human narrative.

In her study of ruins in eighteenth-century culture, Sophie Thomas defines this shift as part of the continuous act of “reassembly”—“something to be simultaneously done, undone, and redone” (178). Thomas points out that ancient remains simultaneously signify both “time suspended” and time’s passage (181). In *Excavating Victorians* (2008), Virginia Zimmerman uses Paul Ricoeur’s idea of the “trace,” or an object’s ability to link past and present, to talk about what artifacts’ duration meant to writers in Victorian Britain (Zimmerman 8). Zimmerman argues that, for the Victorians, “Excavation was a way of knowing and conquering the depth of time” (8). The women I focus on here express

interest in archaeology's ability seemingly to place one "outside" of time, but their chief interest in artifacts is in their ability to reflect the social and political conditions of nineteenth-century America, and in the way artifacts, antiquarianism, and archaeological language help them to articulate their own status as women, authors, and artists.

Throughout the nineteenth century there is a gradual change in the treatment of artifacts and antiquarianism in women's writing. While antebellum authors like Hale, Sedgwick, and Cooper appear more concerned with elaborating the ways that antiquities connect American society with great civilizations of the past, postbellum writers like Thaxter, Davis, and Woolson articulate different visions. They increasingly focus on the value of artifacts as symbols of artistic and personal achievement. The power these postbellum writers seek is not over time but over narrative: the issue of which vision, context, form, or history is ultimately privileged over another. In what Naomi Sofer describes as "The struggle to transform the United States from a nation of 'toil' to a nation of 'art'" in the face of "the urgent need to produce American culture" (Sofer 5), postbellum writers used the tropes of antiquarianism and archaeological imagery to redefine the role of the woman artist and her place in the future of American literary culture.

The shift in the use of antiquarian and archaeological imagery and language I have described here also raises the question of how these women, depending on their historical situation, defined the artifact. In his "Afterward" to *Objects and Others* (1985), James Clifford makes the point that the meaning of

an artifact depends on the specific historical context in which it appears. These objects might appear as “antiquities,’ ‘curiosities,’ ‘art,’ ‘souvenirs,’ ‘monuments,’ [or] ‘ethnographic artifacts,’” depending on the social and market concerns of the moment (Stocking 240). I would add that an artifact might be simultaneously defined by more than one, perhaps even all, of these terms at any given moment, depending on the rhetorical situation of a text; it may also be gendered “masculine” or “feminine” in response to an author or poet’s rhetorical needs. These needs, in turn, depended upon the social and political atmosphere in which each writer lived and wrote; it is no coincidence that writers between 1820 and 1860 were more interested in artifacts, particularly Native American ones, as objects of ethnographic information and as curiosities and monuments, while postbellum writers concerned with the work of women artists debated artifacts’ aesthetic value as monuments, curiosities, and art. I generalize here to make the point that the writers I reflect on in this chapter made use of archaeological images to individual ends but within larger national conversations.

In spite of their differences, Hale, Sedgwick, Woolson, and Davis each constructed texts around antiquities, relics that pertained as much to the present and future as they do to the past. Reports of archeological discoveries throughout the world filled these writers’ imaginations with the possibilities of excavation for the recovery of hidden treasures. They responded to archaeological reports, catalogs, and sites by creating literary landscapes that could be mined for meaning, and by constructing space and place through depictions of depth, strata, and geological time. In some cases the writers delve

into these archaeological landscapes in imaginative acts of “literary excavation,” opening up the spatial and temporal strata that contain an artifact and bringing hidden meanings to the surface of a text. “Literary excavation” is the technique that writers and readers use to reveal landscapes or domestic spaces as places-in-process that contain meaning in the form of fragmentary artifacts, which must be located and pieced together in a new narrative context. For example, Celia Thaxter’s island landscapes in *Among the Isles of Shoals* (1873) are composed of strata that contain colonial artifacts, particularly the remains of early settlers’ houses. Thaxter uses these to reconstruct early life on the Isles of Shoals, to “people these solitudes again” (Thaxter, *Among the Isles* 30). In another type of literary excavation an author may position herself as the antiquarian interpreter of a “textual artifact.” One example of this is in Davis’s “A Faded Leaf of History” (1873), where the narrator positions a colonial captivity narrative as an antiquarian text that she must then reinterpret for her audience. The term suggests an emphasis on the literal depth of meaning and history inherent in places, marking their importance beyond that as settings for stories or poems. The processes that constitute both landscape and domestic space are active beneath the surface as much as they are comprised by visible elements. The past in this sense is continually performing cultural and aesthetic work beneath the surfaces of the present, and when drawn out can be used to redefine personal, regional, and national identity.

The meanings contained by fragments in the archaeological landscape are not static; because they demand imaginative negotiation and renegotiation

on the part of the antiquarian or archaeologist who discovers them, they emphasize the creative process rather than its product. Artifacts demand the action of the historical imagination to make sense of them and of taste to appreciate their aesthetic qualities. The persistence of the artifact—its constant presence in space, time, and the human imagination—and its character as not just a found object, but as a created and re-created one, made it an evocative symbol of artistic spirit throughout the nineteenth century. Artifacts and antiquities that were gendered “feminine”—including intaglios, jewelry, and other decorative objects²—provide the link between the idea of artistic genius and the work of female artists that these women drew upon in their writings. This link is often portrayed in terms of personal intimacy and relationships as these writers engage with artifacts, ancient sites, and female figures to imagine networks of intimacy on a personal and global scale. As heirs of a discourse of antiquarianism that was explicitly gendered, they wrote and revised their inheritance.

I have divided this chapter into five sections. The first examines the relationship between the terms “antiquarian” and “spinster” in the nineteenth century. I argue that the image of the spinster became linked with that of the antiquarian before 1820, and that the relationship of the unmarried woman to antiquity continued to develop throughout the nineteenth century as writers

² In a study of the connections between gender, personal identity, and collecting, Russell W. Belk and Melanie Wallendorf theorize that different collected objects are assigned a gendered meaning depending on a number of characteristics. They point out that phallic objects like amulets were often gendered masculine, while decorative antiques were typically classed as feminine. Belk and Wallendorf conclude that collections of men and women often reinforce stereotypes of gender roles (Belk and Wallendorf 10-11).

explored issues of women's traditional social roles. The debate over the choice of the single life for women that began early in the century spawned a number of short stories and poems featuring unmarried women who become linked to ideas of personal and collective memory through images of artifacts. By mid-century women writers were transforming the negative associations between the old maid and the antiquarian into a more positive, romanticized version; this version often serves as a "memory collector" who uses her wisdom to protect and guide younger women. She uses artifacts to reconstruct an idealized version of single life. The realist Rebecca Harding Davis later called this romantic version into question in her short story "An Ignoble Martyr" (1890). Unlike earlier stories, in which artifacts symbolized the fullness of the single life and the wisdom of the spinster, Davis's story critiques the suffocating power that the past can hold over the present. Collectively, these spinster stories problematize women's relationships to artifacts; authors address the dangers of materialism and antiquarian obsession, the need for artifacts to be placed in an appropriate context, and the problem for the spinster of being simultaneously "outside history" while preserving her relationship to the historical narrative.

The second section addresses these issues through a discussion of "spinster stories," in which images of ancient artifacts are linked to contemporary domesticity, domestic space, and intimacy in women's personal relationships. In sections three and four of the chapter I analyze the trope of the "found text" and textual artifacts in postbellum writings, and I am especially concerned with the role these artifacts play in the construction of "public" history and "private"

memory in the second half of the century. In sections four and five I relate these ideas to the topic of the authors' conceptions of the profession of writing and contemporary debates over women's roles in producing literature, art, and culture toward the turn of the century. Over the course of the century, antiquarian discourse became useful as an approach to issues of personal identity as well as to authorial identity within the literary marketplace.

I. Spinsters and Antiquarians in American Literature

In Catharine Sedgwick's short story "Old Maids" (1834), Mrs. Seton muses on the popular image of the old maid:

It calls up a faded, bony, wrinkled, skinny, jaundiced personage, whose mind has dwindled to a point—who has outlived her natural affections—survived every love but love of self, and self-guarded by that Cerberus suspicion—in whom the follies of youth are fresh when all its charms are gone—who has retained, in all their force, the silliest passions of the silliest women...who, in short, is in the condition of the spirits in the ancients' Tartarus (Koppelman 13).

Mrs. Seton goes on to attack this stereotype, citing instances in which unmarried women lead productive, womanly, and motherly lives. Written in defense of the single life for women, Sedgwick's story uses these examples of dutiful women to vindicate those who have chosen the unmarried life. As this and many other texts show, the image of the spinster was contested ground for women writers and for nineteenth-century society. Originally denoting "one who spins," the word "spinster" came to be defined as an older, unmarried woman by the eighteenth century (OED). The derogatory term "old maid," as Mrs. Seton has demonstrated, came to characterize one as "prim, fussy, or timid" (OED). The

number of “old maids” increased in the nineteenth century as more women either chose the single life or for other reasons never married (Wayne 6). According to Tiffany K. Wayne, “The number of ‘spinsters’ rose steadily between the American Revolution and the Civil War, and peaked with nearly 11 percent of American women born in the immediate post-Civil War decade of 1865-1875 remaining single” (6).³ She points out that while young, working-class single women were literally “spinsters” in that they formed the majority of the labor force in the North’s booming textile industry, middle- and upper-class women were more likely to retain some domestic role in the household to which they were attached (7).⁴ Nathaniel Hawthorne’s Hepzibah Pyncheon is a famous mid-century spinster character that performs a genteel domestic role; she has the care of her ancestral home and her brother Clifford in *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851).

In her introduction to an anthology of nineteenth-century women’s short stories about spinsters, Susan Koppelman argues that depictions of domestically inclined old maids like Hepzibah helped extend the calling of “true womanhood” to the unmarried woman. She observes that:

in many of the stories, the old maid is presented as more pure, more pious, more modest than other women; she is even seen as more maternal than

³ One reason for the increase of unmarried white women in the South directly after the Civil War, according to S.J. Kleinberg, was that a large number of men were killed during the conflict. Kleinberg also notes that African-American women also found potential marriage partners scarce at mid-century, due to the higher population of African-American women than men after 1840 (139).

⁴ However, according to Nancy Cott, even unmarried factory workers often maintained links to domestic service, sending home their pay to support their parents’ households (55).

women who marry and have children. This presentation of old maidism as possessing the attributes of the cultural ideal of 'true womanhood' provides some indication of the context in which these stories were written—and the model of women with which unmarried women had to contend (1).

This "domestic" version of the old maid counters the negative connotations of the term, though it does not quite place the spinster's state on par with that of married women. The existence of this alternative model of spinsterhood also suggests that the image of the old maid was a potential site for negotiating women's roles in the public and private spheres. Koppelman contextualizes this debate within the political world and "The Woman Question," arguing that women writers frequently rejected pejorative representations of the single life and countered them with stories of independent single women who, as in Sedgwick's tale, were "useful" to the family and "traditionally virtuous and womanly" (3).⁵ The figure of the self-sufficient unmarried woman was at the center of this positive model of single life (4). The comparative leisure of the unmarried woman allowed her time to cultivate her intellect and aesthetic taste; women who had to work to support themselves could put their education to use to earn money. Educated middle- and upper-class white women in the antebellum period were better able to participate in more "intellectual" endeavors that were considered socially acceptable, such as editing, writing, and teaching, than single women of the lower classes (Kleinberg 39). Positive models of spinsterhood include connotations of intelligence, wisdom, and accomplishment, countering the

⁵ As Cecilia Tichi points out, the figure of the "new woman" was an important one toward the end of the nineteenth century. The debate over the unmarried woman's comparative (and relative) independence was part of the development of the idea of the new woman (590).

negative trait of narrow-mindedness.

While many unmarried women found themselves single through circumstance rather than choice, a number of others found personal and intellectual fulfillment in the single life. Nancy Cott presents diary entries in which genteel nineteenth-century women recorded their frustrations with the limitations of marriage compared with the freedoms of a single life (52-54).⁶ Wayne points to Louisa May Alcott as one who was satisfied with spinsterhood; Alcott was genteel, educated, and white—characteristics that she shared with most “spinsters by choice” in the nineteenth century (6). In literature, the spinster is at times isolated by her rarefied intellect, such as the “bluestocking” Aunt Prudence in the satirical poem “The Enraged Antiquary” (1841). In other cases, her folk wisdom gives her a special place or identity within the community, as Aunt Roxy and Aunt Ruey hold in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *The Pearl of Orr’s Island* (1862). In these cases, the single woman is characterized in part by specialized knowledge that defines her niche in society outside of the traditional marriage market. She shaped spaces for other intellectual possibilities, particularly in her cultural connections to popular antiquarian discourse.⁷

⁶ In *Sex and Citizenship in Antebellum America*, Nancy Isenberg notes that the marriage laws of this period caused women to lose autonomy and identity and came under debate. She writes, “The legal identity of the wife had been stripped of any means of subsistence or power of self-protection and self-preservation. She represented...a citizen without the basic rights of life, liberty, and property.” Thus the “choice” of spinsterhood could be reconstrued as a choice for citizenship (155).

⁷ However, in the antebellum era it seems that women adopting the mantle of “antiquarian” could only comfortably do so under the aegis of true womanhood. As I will show in my reading of “The Genius of Oblivion” (1823) in chapter 2,

I have used the term “female antiquarian” in this study because of the traditionally gendered connotations of the word “antiquarian.” While the essay “Old Maids” explicitly links spinsters with the study of antiquity, antiquarians are most often depicted as men of leisure in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature. The eighteenth century saw the establishment of the antiquarian as a subject for satire, where the antiquarian character is often a foolish, hapless old man engaged in endless debates with fellow antiquaries over obscure curiosities and illegible ruins (Goode 55-56). He is commonly irascible, proud, pedantic, misanthropic, and eccentric—characteristics often imputed to spinsters. Stories of antiquaries are typically humorous in nature, owing to antiquarians’ alleged propensity to misinterpret artifacts and landscapes and to invent imaginative and romanticized “tall tales” to explain them. In keeping with their essential disconnection from other people and from history itself, antiquaries’ pursuits are often characterized as quixotic adventures. Perhaps the most famous antiquarian in literature appears in Sir Walter Scott’s *The Antiquary* (1816). As Scott’s caricature of an antiquarian, Jonathan Oldbuck of Monkbarrow often misreads evidence and prefers fanciful explanations for Scotland’s landscape history rather than more likely ones. For example, Oldbuck proudly shows the young hero Lovel a plot of land that he claims was once a Roman camp:

Here, then, let us take our stand, on this tumulus, exhibiting the foundation of ruined buildings,—the central point—the *praetorium*, doubtless, of the

Sarah Josepha Hale takes on the isolated identity of “antiquarian” in connection with her domestic and family duties; these “normalize” antiquarian discourse within a familiar and appropriate domestic milieu.

camp. From this place, now scarce to be distinguished but by its slight elevation and its greener turf from the rest of the fortification, we may suppose Agricola to have looked forth on the immense army of Caledonians, occupying the declivities of yon opposite hill... (Scott 40).

Oldbuck is soon interrupted by the mischievous mendicant Edie Ochiltree, who explains away the landscape features as the remains of a wedding party held in the field. Of course, as critics like Ferris have noted, it is uncertain whether Edie is lying to Oldbuck about the field's history (277); however, the incident illustrates the role of imagination in antiquarian practice, sometimes at the expense of "true" history.

A similarly fanciful antiquarian appears in Washington Irving's *Tales of a Traveler* (1824). Irving's "Little Antiquary" is a doctor by profession, described as "a...rusty, musty Old fellow, always groping among ruins" in Italy (Irving 158). Far from being a systematic scientist, he is "buried in his reflections,—his wits no doubt wool-gathering among the Goths and Romans" (159). However, the central joke in Irving's tale is the little antiquary's attachment to his oversized Venus seal ring. His pride is offended when a gang of banditti declare it to be "a counterfeit—a mere sham": "Here the ire of the antiquary arose: the doctor forgot himself in his zeal for the character of his ring. Heaven and earth! his Venus a sham! Had they pronounced the wife of his bosom 'no better than she should be,' he could not have been more indignant. He fired up in the vindication of his intaglio" (161). Sculptures, paintings, and other images of Venus, the Roman goddess of love, beauty, and fertility, were often collected by and shared among men in nineteenth century America (Winterer 94). In Irving's tale, the "sham" Venus is pointedly not circulated: lacking both use-value and exchange-value,

she is rejected by the virile Italian robbers, who prefer “full purses, merry companions; pretty women” (Irving 160).

The antiquary's connection to his work, epitomized by his feelings toward this “sham” Venus, has interesting implications for antiquarianism and gender. His semi-sexualized relationship with his artifacts and antiquarian writings, which habitually dangle behind him in a “voluminous book” “banging against his rear as he walked” (159), points to his impotence and isolation as opposed to the virility and lively community of the banditti. Irving's description here also suggests that antiquarianism is an auto- or (perhaps) homoerotic pleasure that is essentially unproductive. In his study of eighteenth-century critiques of antiquarianism, Mike Goode characterizes this unproductive pleasure as a liability for the nation: “antiquaries had acquired a reputation for neither selecting nor reflecting anything useful and, therefore, for rejecting historical ‘direction’ in favor of the pleasure of historical reflection as an end in itself” (61). This emphasis on “pleasure” versus progress, suggests Goode, feminizes the figure of the antiquary. Additionally, he describes late eighteenth-century discourse on antiquarians as sexual deviants in his discussion of *The Antiquary*, discussing how antiquarianism was thought to pervert men's sexual behavior:

Romantic-era verbal and visual texts routinely represent antiquaries as nonvital men whose pleasures in the past's material presence compete with, or disqualify them for, ‘proper’ sexual relations with the living. In the standard formulation, an antiquary does not just live among the dead; the past and its remains, even the act of examining and thinking about them, become a kind of replacement bedfellow (68).

One interesting development in Goode's discussion is the idea that the sexualized passion of the antiquarian for the artifact cannot be designated as

either homo- or heterosexual behavior, but is “a sexual persuasion all its own” (72).

While Goode’s argument is persuasive, I would propose that artifacts are often gendered female in antiquarian discourse, particularly in nineteenth-century American literature. For example, there is a suggestive connection between the antiquarian and a “feminized” artifact in Irving’s tale. His antiquary is an intellectual “voluptuary” (160) not only in his admiration of the Venus seal, but also in his other “spoils of antiquity”—including his “voluminous book” (159). The Little Antiquary’s seal is described in terms of a woman, not as an inanimate object. Irving’s parallel between the Venus and “the wife of his bosom” suggests an intimate connection between the antiquary and his artifact. The Venus is ready to receive the meanings and historical importance that the little antiquary wishes to assign to her image, which is a suitable ornament for his “groping” fingers. As an icon in the form of a hollowed-out intaglio, the Venus is an appropriately “empty vessel,” and is, as Caroline Winterer describes her, “lover to many, wife to none” (91). And as the only “female figure” in “The Adventure of the Little Antiquary,” the Venus focuses female sexuality into an artifact that is then objectified by male speculation and valuation. Irving feminizes the Little Antiquary in part by having him project a sexual relationship onto a feminized object rather than a flesh-and-blood woman. This suggests that depictions of antiquarians’ “uneasy relation...to domesticity and to traditional virility” (Ferris 282) in British texts of the late eighteenth century were current in early nineteenth-century American culture.

Irving's descriptions of the antiquary's social disconnection and penchant for autoerotic pleasure connect that figure with the old maid. Like the spinster in "Old Maids," Irving's antiquary is an impotent figure whose sexual nature has diminished, reflecting his lack of prowess as an historian and emphasizing his focus on the trivial rather than the necessary or important. Scott articulates this connection between antiquarianism and "trifling" female domestic occupations in a journal entry from March 1828:

I do not know any thing which relieves the mind so much from the sullenness as trifling discussions about *antiquarian old-womanries*—It is like knitting a stocking, diverting the mind without occupying it, or it is like, by our lady, a mill dam which leads the attention gently and imperceptibly out of the channel [sic] in which they are chafing and boiling—to be sure it is only conducting them to turn a child's mill...the diversion is a relief though the object is of little importance (Anderson 441).

Scott's language signals antiquarian study as a non-productive sexual outlet as well as a kind of anti-intellectual activity, echoing contemporary discourses that equated rigorous intellectual activity with masculine sexual prowess. In Goode's words, antiquarianism was "not perceived as dangerously feminine so much as sentimentally and sexually unmanly" during the period between 1790 and 1820 (79). The gendered, domestic language of his metaphor firmly situates antiquarianism, as both Goode and Ferris have pointed out, in the context of anti-masculinity by comparing it with mindless women's work.

However, there is evidence that, in American literary culture after 1820, the traditional figure of the antiquarian gentleman became associated with images of independent, intelligent, unmarried women; these women antiquarians appeared in scenes of domestic space organized in ways similar to (public)

museum spaces. In his introduction to the "House / Text / Museum" issue of *Image [&] Narrative*, Anthony Purdy muses on the connection between domestic and museum space in the nineteenth century: "The house is a cosmos, claims Bachelard...a theatre of memory combining cradle and crypt, a place where the unconscious and the imagination can spread themselves out and feel at home. But it is also a museum, a house of fossils and fetishes, in which time stands still and distance is abolished." Purdy links the relationship of home, museum, and text to the idea of self-creation—the concept that one may manage space to support a particular idea of one's identity and position in space and time.

Historian Steven Conn also notes some interesting connections between museums and narrative form that emerge in museum culture during the last third of the nineteenth century. He writes, "The intellectual architecture used to build the museums of the late nineteenth century was predicated on the assumption that objects could tell stories 'to the untrained observer,' an assumption I will call an 'object-based epistemology'" (4). Conn goes on to note that, by the second half of the century, "Americans held a belief that objects, at least as much as texts, were sources of knowledge and meaning"—museums were to be "open books" for patrons (4). Also importantly, the museum, like the home, was a disciplinary institution, particularly of use in acculturating immigrants (6). Conn writes, "museums functioned—and continue to function—as places of 'civilizing rituals'" (6).

In her study of collecting practices in nineteenth-century France, Leora Auslander argues that the practice of collecting antiquities was gendered

masculine and was a way for elite men to solidify their personal and public identities, both by shaping the home (or a masculine space within the home) and by displaying their collections (89). She comments that women increasingly “appropriated” collecting, and that within the institution of the domestic museum there was space for “the possibilities for transgression”: “Museums, like schools and the army, became sites outside the home for the making of the nation. It is not surprising, perhaps, that the form of private consumption most closely resembling state consumption should have been the one defined as appropriately masculine” (89). Auslander’s point about state consumption replicated in the home has further implications for the complicity of domestic space in colonialism and cultural imperialism, both at home and abroad. However, I am more concerned in this chapter with women’s antiquarianism and “textual collections” of objects and artifacts, which were certainly coded as “transgressive” in America as well as in France. The work of Auslander, Conn, Purdy, and others has demonstrated that museums and domestic spaces came to share similar roles in educating and disciplining the populace, but that this role was certainly not stable and could be appropriated and transformed.

The literary spinster often occupies texts in which domestic space takes on the characteristics of museum space. A negative stereotype of the female antiquarian depicted her dwelling within a home that is not organized around virtuous principles such as those cultivated by the nationalistic male collector; instead, this space represents a threat to the sound education of the young and

endangers a family's moral wellbeing. W.J. Walter makes this point in relation to a spinster's home in the 1841 poem "The Enraged Antiquary":

My Uncle has a sister, too,
 Versed in the mysteries of vertu,
 In taste, and studies, quite "a blue."
 The reader has divined already
 That dame to be a maiden lady.
 Yes, for dead mummies she's a taste....

Here Walter connects the non-traditional home of the spinster—a "preserver" rather than a "procreator"—with museums, creating a hybrid domestic space that has taken on the characteristics of public space rather than a private family refuge. Instead of a home of "virtue," it is a home of "virtu"⁸ distinguished by a taste in curios. The bluestocking "maiden lady" is "rare and curious," a resident of a museum rather than the "proper ornament" for a home—a married woman. Furthermore, she takes on the characteristics of her curios and becomes a kind of object in her own home. Her predilection for artifacts changes the nature of domestic space, transforming it into an exotic place defined by intellectual taste and rarities rather than the traditional "comforts" of home.⁹

Aunt Prudence is particularly fascinated by "dead mummies," a reference to the Egyptology craze of the nineteenth century in which Egyptian mummies and architecture attracted wide admiration and attention among the general public (Kuklick 19). The maiden aunt's "taste" for mummies recalls the sexualized

⁸ According to J.G.A. Pocock, "one context for republican 'virtue' derived from the classical concept of *virtu* (the source of 'virility')" (qtd. in Gould 642).

⁹ In her short story "An Incident at Rome" (1844), Catharine Sedgwick also picks up on the idea of antiquarian women as women who lack the ability to comfort and nurture.

relationship between antiquarian and artifact, evoking popular images like Thomas Rowlandson's *Modern Antiques* (1811)¹⁰ or the Little Antiquary's affection for his Venus. However, the poem's speaker chides the spinster not for her sexual predilections but for her inability to foster the "rising fires" of her nieces' and nephews' minds and spirits. In the course of the poem, these young children "steal into the room forbidden, / Where Uncle's tempting store was hidden." They proceed to "plunder" his treasures until they are surprised and caught by the "enraged" elderly pair. Walter's language in these lines carries undertones of inappropriate sexual exploration, adding another layer of critique to the dangers of this domestic interior. Because it is not directed here toward the practicalities of nurturing and educating the young, particularly in regard to disciplining the children's sexual experimentation, woman's taste and intellect is depicted as wasteful and dangerous. The artifacts that the antiquary and his maiden sister have collected are also worthless unless they are put into the service of this higher goal:

Far better, Uncle, that your store
Of prized antiques should charm no more,
Than minds like these should be averted
From tastes, by nature's self asserted (Walter).

Here the home, culturally designated as a private space reserved for the female work of raising children, is instead a monstrously exotic space that tempts the children without providing them with the nurturing guidance they need to

¹⁰ Reproduced in Goode, p. 70. *Modern Antiques* depicts an old antiquarian closely examining the genital area of a sarcophagus while his young wife embraces a naval officer in another sarcophagus nearby. According to Goode, the illustration alludes to the affair between Emma Hart, the mistress of Sir William Hamilton, and Admiral Nelson in 1798.

negotiate its assembled artifacts. It can neither fulfill the public mission of a museum nor the private one of the family.

Walter's poem references stereotypes of the antiquarian to portray the maiden aunt as one who cannot guide a child's education properly; antiquarian excess corrupts the bond between caregiver and child, and discipline, particularly sexual discipline, is wanting. In her short story of a young man whose passion for antiquities causes him to lose his reason, Catharine Sedgwick also uses antiquarian stereotypes to critique child-rearing practices that indulge the "feminine" tastes of the young instead of disciplining them in self-control and rational behavior. Sedgwick's "An Incident at Rome" (1844) brings the female antiquarian outside the home and places her in the midst of the ruins she loves. While the story does not include a spinster, it does position another category of single woman—the widow—as antiquarian. Sedgwick, who never married, wrote the story following fifteen months of travel in England and on the continent.¹¹ Like Walter's poem, "An Incident at Rome" suggests that women must properly manage the "antiquarian obsessions" of young people and should take care not to overindulge in antiquities themselves. Obsession with antiquities not only affects the gender-identity of a young man by "feminizing" him, but may also compromise a woman's maternal identity by distracting her so that she is unable to properly discipline her child.

¹¹ Sedgwick traveled from 1839-40 to England, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, France, and Italy, and devoted the second volume of her two-volume collection of travel writings, *Letters from Abroad to Kindred at Home* (1841), to her experiences in Italy and travels on the Continent (Damon-Bach and Clements xxxvii).

The story focuses on both of these problems, presenting us with a mother whose obsession with antiquities prevents her from providing a balanced education and upbringing for her son. In fact, she supports his excessive antiquarian passion by bringing him to Stonehenge and encouraging his complete imaginative freedom (Sedgwick, "An Incident" 105). The widow, Mrs. Bathurst, has cultivated an unhealthy interest in antiquarian research. When describing her son Murray's descent into obsession over antiquities, she tells the charitable Lady C. that it was "my fatal pride to instruct him on these subjects, which had always interested myself, and which had occupied much of my poor husband's life. I developed prematurely, and most unwisely, his taste, and so concentrated his mind on the study of antiquities, that it became a passion" (105).¹² His interest in antiquities "consume[s] the poor boy," who "wasted his health in midnight antiquarian research" (105). Not even his engaging cousin Clara, who is "careless of the past and future...reflecting the present brightly as a mirror does sunshine," can distract him from these activities (105). Instead of pursuing a possible relationship with Clara, he "buries himself" in the "tomb" of antiquarian books, longing not for marriage but to explore Etruscan ruins (106).

Bathurst's uncle asks the widow how the young man could hope to pursue a "manly career" when he spends his time "rummaging and groping about the dusty old underground ruins of Italy" (106). In her analysis of the story, Brigitte Bailey describes Bathurst's enthusiasm for Italy and its ruins as "a narcissistic

¹² Mrs. Bathurst's comment about her husband here is suggestive; it is possible that he, too, was an antiquarian. He has literally been lost to the tomb, while his son becomes figuratively lost in "tombs" of books and in the ruins of Italy.

passion that prohibits the development of his heterosexual, reproductive, commercial self" (224). In the context of travel literature, Bailey sees "An Incident at Rome" as a warning about the need for self-discipline among elite male tourists in Italy who risk succumbing to delusional sensibilities and losing reason and identity in this dangerously feminized place (224). In part this loss of self-awareness is due to his monomaniacal focus upon objects within the landscape; this prevents him from having a wider perspective of the landscape and his place in it. In Bailey's words, he moves from the position of "the surveyor of the scene to a figure in the landscape" (224). A Romantic figure with dark, tangled hair that falls into his face, Bathurst soon literally becomes lost in Italy—"an innocent madman, who passes his time wandering about [the] ruins, digging and groping" ("An Incident" 107).¹³

After a prolonged search for her son aided by Lady C. (and also allegedly aided by a British Romantic poet, either Wordsworth or Southey), the widow Bathurst enters a deep depression. Lady C. notices that the widow is, like her son, obsessed with antiquities and "on the verge of insanity" with anxiety over her missing child: "The only mode of drawing [her] from her sorrowful maternal anxieties was to plunge her into some obscure, unintelligible ruin in Rome" (106). While at "*la Scuola di ciceroni*" in Tusculum, this obsession manifests itself in

¹³ Murray Bathurst's hair not only signifies his Byronic and feminized sensibilities, but also the "tunnel vision" of the antiquarian—it prevents him from having the peripheral vision necessary to orient himself within the contexts of the present time and place, only allowing him to look downward upon the artifacts and ruins beneath his nose. This is particularly ironic because, as Bailey points out, it seems that Sedgwick has named her character after John Murray of London, the publisher of tourist guides (Damon-Bach and Clements 225, n. 2).

Mrs. Bathurst's physical appearance and demeanor:

Mrs. Bathurst's antiquarian enthusiasm began to kindle, her eye dilated, and her pale cheek glowed. In a happy oblivion, for the moment, of her personal anxieties, she left Lady C. seated on the broken fragment of a column almost overgrown by weeds and grass, and followed her talking guide, to look at the reticulated walls of a row of houses, at a disinterred Roman pavement, and among a mass of ruins at the *gradus* of an amphitheatre (107).

Sedgwick describes the widow's obsession with antiquities in terms of a disease that she shares with her antiquarian son. Her detailed enumeration of the artifacts that Mrs. Bathurst sees suggests that these are all she *can* see.

Certainly when her son, who is presumably the most important object of her search, appears nearby, she does not even notice his entrance. One symptom of antiquarian pursuits for both mother and son is its impact on their ability to literally see what is going on in the present. Bathurst is tellingly unable to "see" Clara, who reflects the present "like a mirror" (105). In Mrs. Bathurst's tunnel vision only the ruins of Tusculum are visible; the rest of the world recedes into the background, her son included.

It is at this point in Sedgwick's text that the language of excavation comes into play. As Mrs. Bathurst stares enraptured at the ruins, her missing son "emerge[s] from a tangled thicket" to stare at a stone on the ground; only Lady C. observes his entrance (107). She notes that he is busy with a nearby stone: "after scraping away the plaster and rubbish that adhered to the stone, had found what he sought, an inscription, defaced, and so far obliterated that no mortal could make it out, but this in no sort abated his joy—it was an inscription made by hands that had mouldered for centuries. Whether it now or ever signified any

thing he cared not" (107). In his state of oblivion, Bathurst feeds off of signs of obliteration. His desire for a connection to the past through the vehicle of the artifact is thwarted by his inability to contextualize that artifact within a signifying narrative or to re-value it according to the aesthetic standards of class and taste in the present.

The behavior of Mrs. Bathurst and her son in this scene signals the dangers of excavation as an activity that changes the nature of one's awareness of the world. It is a seductive practice that positions the antiquarian "outside of time," disconnecting its practitioners from reality. Sedgwick figures the reality of the present as the system of personal relationships, social and economic ties, and mores that are constructed on appropriate knowledge of past traditions and practices. One of these practices is the Grand Tour, which for Bathurst becomes a tour of the trivial and miniscule.¹⁴ His excavations do not yield anything important or new that will benefit the world.¹⁵ The antiquary's obsession is

¹⁴ Stephen Dyson describes the aims of the Grand Tourist in terms of the traditional expectations of the Tour: "While a variety of countries were visited, the focus was on Italy, especially Rome. The elite youth were expected to visit famous architectural monuments, galleries, and archaeological sites, have their portraits painted in a Roman setting by an artist like Pompeo Batoni, and collect antiquities" (5).

¹⁵ Sedgwick's critique of Bathurst as a kind of "Grand Tourist" speaks to the nature of the Tour itself, upon which travelers tended to replicate the experiences of those gone before them rather than to forge new ones. For example, as Jules David Prown has pointed out, many guidebooks to Rome and its antiquities emphasized the acquisition of knowledge rather than creative interpretation (97). Kay Dian Kris acknowledges scholarship on Grand Tour literature, noting essays that have registered "the way in which the fears, pleasures, and anxieties that accompany various types of tourist encounters with strange new bodies, places, and things are mediated through written and visual texts" (88). His efforts to deviate from standard Grand Tour interpretations and create his own, which

described only in terms of *things*, not in the creation of a meaningful narrative to contextualize those things.¹⁶ For Sedgwick, sympathy, charity, and relationships are what put people into context with each other and create rational perspectives; they sustain the citizenry who form the mercantile and political networks that support and strengthen nations. These connections cannot coexist with antiquarian obsession and cause the antiquary to fall out of the relationships that should sustain him. The moment the son recognizes his mother and his intimate relationship to another human, the spell is broken and Bathurst begins the process of "healing" and regaining his reason. However, he also takes measures to prevent a relapse into his former condition: "He had the good sense to avoid all books relating to his disastrous passion, and every thing associated with it" (108).

"An Incident at Rome" ends with Bathurst's marriage to Clara and a future of "health and cheerfulness" (108). Mother and son have learned restraint and to temper their passion for excavation and artifacts. To facilitate their newfound health, they must leave Rome. The Italian landscape, particularly the "changeless," "monumental," and "suggestive" Roman campagna, seems calculated to encourage antiquarian passions rather than to cool them. Bathurst

seem intelligible only to him, may also account for how Bathurst "goes off the map" in "An Incident at Rome."

¹⁶ In their study of the connection between monuments and memory, Nelson and Olin insist that meaningful monuments can only exist as such because they are contextualized within "intricate relations": "To be vital, the monument must exist within an actual, present-oriented network of relationships. Unlike a lifeless art object suspended on the white walls of a museum, the monument does not privilege the past at the expense of the present. Rather it engages both to make claims for and against the future" (6).

says as much when he describes his eagerness to leave the country following his recovery; while immersed in his antiquarian pursuits, the thought of leaving Italy made him feel like “a lover tearing himself from the object of his passion. His feet seemed to grow to the rich dust of Italy” (108). Those with unrestrained antiquarian imaginations are endangered by Italy’s suggestive, monumental landscape. It is a trap rather than a treasure, where one risks degenerating into a wandering madman (or Romantic poet) in search of the emptiness of “blank stones” beneath the “high sepulchral grass” of the land’s surface (104). As Sedgwick suggests, “good sense” cannot develop in the antiquarian mind, which blindly thrives on suggestion and fancy. An antiquarian mother who exposes her son to a passion for artifacts and ruins at a young age, as Mrs. Bathurst did when she brought Murray to Stonehenge as a young boy, risks losing him to this passion.

II. Antiquarianism and the Spinster Story

Not all the threads that lead to the conflation of women with antiquities and antiquarianism were so negative or cautionary, however. In the frame story of “An Incident at Rome,” for example, the two genteel women travelers are able to negotiate the ruinous landscape without becoming enslaved by antiquarian passion. The tradition of women’s literature that debated the social and domestic roles of unmarried women provides further insight into why spinsterhood became associated with antiquarian discourse, especially in its emphasis on the

spinster's role in collecting and preserving public and private memory. Stories that feature spinsters often turn them into the preservers and narrators of public memory in an oral tradition. While this role is often private and tutelary in nature and emphasizes the spinster's role as guardian, it also takes on the air of an informal public role or identity within the community. The unmarried woman's impact is typically focused in a particular home or community and often concerns a specific family, village, or town. For example, in many of the pieces recovered in Susan Koppelman's *Old Maids* (1984),¹⁷ which includes stories, essays, and poems that span the century (from Sedgwick's 1834 "Old Maids" up to Rose Terry Cooke's 1891 "How Celia Changed Her Mind"), the unmarried woman performs this role of memory collector, often in conjunction with some personal artifact or heirloom that she has obtained during a critical moment in her life.

In his study of Emerson's oral and textual shaping of Concord, Joseph Schöpp makes a suggestive connection between collective memory and artifacts. Quoting Emerson at length, he writes, "Remembrance binds together what is dismembered, makes whole what would otherwise lie around in fragments. It 'gives continuity and dignity to human life. It holds us to our family, to our friends. Hereby a home is possible'" (43). Memory is here the force of narrative that connects the fragments of past, present, and future and enables domestic relationships as well as relationships between citizens within a nation. In stories

¹⁷ Koppelman contextualizes these spinster stories as part of "the great debate referred to as The Woman Question" from the 1830s through the turn of the century (2). She explains that the stories confront and reject negative stereotypes of the old maid and defend the unmarried life as an acceptable choice for some women (3).

that focus on spinsters, collective memory, which Nelson and Olin have described as “the mingling of the public and the private” (3), is also fragmentary in nature. It is formed out of “collected memory” in the charge of the unmarried woman. Her supposed position “outside” of time and society makes the old maid especially suitable for this role.

In their oral narratives the spinsters in these stories serve as the keys that fit fragments of memory and experience into a whole history—typically a personal history of romance meant to inform a public (female) audience about the trials and triumphs of romantic love and marriage. Invariably, the interest in these narratives is focused on the tale of romance that lies hidden beneath the spinster’s gentle exterior. In this sense, the unwinding narrative also performs an act of excavation as it reveals the spinster’s hidden past, often bringing an object that represents this past to light and displaying it within the text. This is often a dramatic moment of revelation in which a handkerchief, dried flowers, or other item is brought forth from a hidden place and presented to an internal auditor or directly to the reader.

Susan Pindar’s “Aunt Mable’s Love Story” (1848) follows this formula as the title character relates her life story, which focuses on her betrayal by the man she loves and her subsequent, self-sacrificing choice to eschew married life in order to care for her ill mother. Aunt Mable, “so staid, so grave, and kindly to all,” tells her tale to her young niece, Kate, and promises at the outset that her story will be out of the ordinary: “I may be, as you think, an exception; at least I am not going to trouble you with antiquated love passages, that, like old faded pictures,

require a good deal of varnishing to be at all attractive" (Koppelman 53).¹⁸ She offers to tell Kate, who is "heartily sick" of popular love stories (53), a "real heart-story of actual life" (54). Aunt Mable's remark about "antiquated love passages" contrasts with the image of the "real heart-story"; in this sentiment she appears to reject the negative association between old maid and antiquities, instead insisting on the currency and relevance of her life experiences. Her coded denial of the spinster-antiquity connection serves two separate rhetorical purposes: it insists upon the old maid's authority on the topic of love, an authority denied her in the negative stereotype, and it recasts her life from a series of "antiquated...pictures" into a fresh and interesting narrative.

The link between a spinster's memories and mementoes found its way into other "old maid stories" over the years. In Alice Cary's "An Old Maid's Story" (1859), the narrator, Abbie Morrison, tells her story of unconsummated love.¹⁹ In this case, an object from the past—the embroidered handkerchief of the man she is secretly in love with—carries the memory of her love for a kind clergyman named Wardwell, who had given it to her while both were watching through the night over the body of a dead child. Abbie keeps her "treasure," as she calls it, locked in a drawer, and although she has kept it secret for years, she unearths it in the end and displays it to the internal auditor of the narrative. The handkerchief serves as a symbol of love and as a memorial of the lover. It also comes to stand for the possibility of imagining the "old maid," Abbie, as a whole person rather

¹⁸ Originally published in *Graham's Magazine*, vol. 33, 1848.

¹⁹ Originally published in Cary's *Pictures of Country Life*, 1859.

than the incomplete and impoverished figure popularized by negative stereotypes of the spinster. Cary immediately moves from the image of the secret handkerchief to a description of Abbie's ignorant neighbors, who do not suspect the richness of her inner life (116).

Rebecca Harding Davis's "An Ignoble Martyr" (1890) also tells a story of unconsummated love from an old maid's perspective, although Davis uses a third-person narrator and situates her spinster, Priscilla Pettit, on a heavily mortgaged family farm in a struggling rural New England community. Davis emphasizes Priscilla's life of tedious labor and her self-sacrificing love for her family, especially her mother, in the midst of her bare, hard existence. Sharon Harris aligns the story thematically with Davis's other late-century writings, which she claims were increasingly focused on the lack of fulfillment in women's lives. Harris notes that, "In...fictionalized form, and in a later outspoken essay on New England's abandoned spinsters,²⁰ Davis was concerned with the psychological damage suffered by women who were deprived of healthy relationships and satisfying careers" (243). However, "An Ignoble Martyr" can also be placed in the larger century-long debate over the possibilities of the single life for American women.

The story opens with the death of Priscilla's father, Aaron, who has been obsessed with the family's debt for his entire life. His daughter watches as his coffin is lowered into "the wasted triangle" of the family graveyard (Koppelman

²⁰ Harris is referring here to Davis's 1895 essay "The Grey Cabins of New England."

176).²¹ Although the mourners return to the house to sit with the family, no collation is served—to do so would fly in the face of local custom, which considered the sharing of food “a wicked waste” (177). The Pettit house is sparsely furnished; the only decoration, a display of silver coffin plates on the parlor wall, memorializes the family’s dead. The plates are also reminders of the ancestral mortgage that continues to keep the Pettits in poverty, and seem to ensure that the Pettit children will suffer the same fate as Aaron: to die penniless after a hard life.

Priscilla soon has the opportunity to marry a wealthy South Carolinian, Mr. Rameaux, who brings her a token of orange blossoms, but chooses to stay single for her mother’s sake. Davis picks up on many of the conventions of earlier old maid stories in her depiction of the self-sacrificing woman: Priscilla keeps the flowers as a reminder of her possible future life with Rameaux in heaven, and develops an independent spirit and personality in spite of her poverty and unmarried status. However, Davis deviates from the pattern in which the spinster’s contentment is assured in the future. After her mother’s death, Priscilla “tried to bring into her life some of the things of which [her brother] Bowles had told her of his home in Lamonte” (186). These small changes—setting her table with a clean white cloth, making jokes, planting roses, reading novels, visiting neighbors—seem a parody of the fuller life she might have led in South Carolina. Meditating on the orange blossoms that she keeps stored in a box, Priscilla wonders if she and her lost Rameaux “will know each other in heaven” (188).

²¹ Originally published in *Harper’s Magazine*, vol 80, March 1890. Reprinted in *Silhouettes of American Life*, Charles Scribner’s Sons, New York, 1892.

Davis has the final word, however: "it may be as well, perhaps, that in this too she will be disappointed" (188).

Davis's realism is reflected here and in other instances of her iconoclastic treatment of mementoes and other carefully preserved objects in "An Ignoble Martyr." Jas Elsner claims that acts of iconoclasm are also acts of memorialization. "Memory," he argues, "not only enables the transmission of images but is itself enabled by such transmission and—moreover—the making (and altering and destroying) of art is itself a mode of memory" (209). While Davis does not actively deface or destroy objects in the story, she questions their absolute meaning, casting light on their ambiguous status. The narrative that Priscilla crafts around the orange blossoms, for example, is a romantic fiction; while it has never materially changed her life or her marital status, this fiction has allowed her to live in hope and dream of the future in terms of a (likely) impossible relationship. Bowles later reveals, though not to Priscilla, that Rameaux was a drunk and very probably would not have been a fulfilling marriage partner for his sister. The question remains whether her romantic inventions, signified in her preservation of the fading flowers, has helped or hindered her. While the hidden orange blossoms bring Priscilla's lost love to the surface, the prominently displayed coffin plates evoke what is hidden underground. As a kind of *memento mori*, the silver coffin plates link domestic space with the coffins interred nearby; they bridge the past and future. Though they are the focal point of the family's parlor, they refer the viewer to what lies

hidden in the landscape outside the home,²² and thus point to absence—the absence of money and of family—rather than what is present. They are an ironic expenditure on the dead in a starving family.

Priscilla is at her strongest when she constructs a new narrative around herself as a single woman and thus reinvents her identity within the context of her “sacrifice” of married life: “She had struck her note in life, and it was not a mean one. She now looked out on the world with authoritative, understanding eyes; even her step became firm and decided” (Koppelman 187). For Davis, the blossoms represent a weakness in this construction; they symbolize romantic ideals that do not serve the stronger woman Priscilla has become. They stand for her hope of a reunion in heaven with Rameaux, whom her brother Bowels knows as a drinker of “too much bad whiskey” (188), but whom Priscilla believes to be a

²² While Davis did travel to Europe in 1895, I have not found any direct evidence of an interest in classical artifacts and excavation as Sedgwick had. However, she writes in her autobiography, *Bits of Gossip* (1904), in a chapter titled “Boston in the Sixties”, “I happened to confess a liking for old graveyards and the strange bits of human history to be found or guessed at in them. The result was that [Oliver Wendell Holmes] became my cicerone the next day at Mount Auburn. It was an odd bit of luck to fall to a young woman from the hills that she would have the Autocrat, to whom the whole country was paying homage, all to herself for a whole summer morning. He took me to none of the costly monuments, nor graves of famous folk, but wandered here and there among the trees, his hands clasped behind him, stopping now and then at a green mound, while he told me curious fragments of the life which was ended below. He mentioned no names—they would have meant nothing to me if he had—but he wrested the secret meaning out of each life, pouncing on it, holding it up with a certain racy enjoyment in his astuteness.” Davis admires Holmes’s desire to learn the sometimes “strange” histories of the unknown dead and his familiarity with local graveyards and cemeteries. She is captivated by the idea of monuments to unknown, humble people, a theme that certainly comes through in “An Ignoble Martyr.” She is also intrigued by the thought that relationships and stories exist beneath the surfaces of the cemetery that can be brought to light and reconstructed through narrative (Lasseter and Harris 46).

romantic hero. The fragile, romanticized, perfumed blossoms contrast strongly with the collection of silver coffin plates, which do not encourage speculation about the next life.

Davis seems to believe that certain fictions are necessary, that even in 1890 the single woman felt she needed to sustain some kind of "hope" even if content with her independent life. However, "An Ignoble Martyr" also suggests that a fragile object like the dried flower and the old memory it represents has the power to prevent a woman from taking actions that will truly better her position in society and her quality of life. Like Sedgwick's "An Incident at Rome," Davis's story seems a commentary on the dangers to personal development that arise when the past is given too much power over the present.

These short stories demonstrate that antiquities and artifacts came to be part of the spinster's process of self-invention as much as they contained personal and collective memory. Although Sedgwick wrote during the antebellum period and Davis toward the turn of the century, both writers saw a kind of danger inherent in romanticizing or sentimentalizing memory, and both considered the potential risk posed by artifacts that might undercut the vitality of the present. Both writers create characters that "worship" various artifacts and, as a result, lose creative control and agency. This was a "public" concern in the early part of the century, and increasingly became a "private" one; the antebellum Sedgwick saw obsession with antiquities as a threat to a woman's maternal and domestic duties to family and nation, while Davis was more concerned with how,

in her focus on objects like the blossoms, Priscilla may have limited her possibilities for personal fulfillment.

As much as artifacts came to define domestic space and the self—particularly the many mementos “hidden away” in locked drawers and boxes—Sedgwick and Davis both argue that the independent, creative self is never absolutely constituted by the artifact or even by a collection of artifacts. Bill Brown articulates this difficulty in *A Sense of Things* (2003); he writes that nineteenth-century fiction “demonstrates that the human investment in the physical object world, and the mutual constitution of human subject and inanimate object, can hardly be reduced to those relations” (5). Sedgwick and Davis certainly seemed to understand the danger of such a reduction, and the power that artifacts could exert over identity and one’s environment. Even if one is successful in subordinating artifacts to an identity that is more than its constitutive fragments, there remains a tension between the desire to “step outside of history” to represent artifacts while simultaneously recognizing oneself as part of the resulting narrative. However, the cultural work of the artifact went beyond the subject-object symbiosis mentioned by Brown. Writers throughout the century also understood the artifacts as representing a web of relationships that linked an object’s creator, owners, and viewers in a network that stretched across time and space. This focus on artifacts as the nexus of human relationships is the focus of Section III.

III. Artifacts as a Connection to the Past in Antebellum Literature

In imaginative descriptions of an artifact's original context writers could reconstruct an intimate, personal portrait of the past. In *Godey's Lady's Book*, for example, Sarah Hale's article "Ancient Toilet of a Roman Lady" (1857) helped readers imagine Roman fashion and domestic interiors in close detail:

The objects found within are of still higher interest, and seem to place us au jour of the habits and costume of a Roman lady, perhaps of the age of the Antonines. We see her en deshabelle. The small-tooth comb is on her table, rather worn, it must be confessed, and we think a trifle of her pin-money might have been well expended in purchasing another; by its side is a plain gold ring. Below the comb is a small bone vessel, in which was deposited the vermilion with which the Roman beauty tinged her cheeks; and near it are two gold brooches, elegantly worked in filigree, exquisitely finished...we have set down all the details in our illustration, and nothing is wanting to complete the reality of a scene which this interesting relic of antiquity has brought before our minds with such life but the presence of the lady herself. Alas! where is she? The work of carpenter and goldsmith has survived her. Nothing more remains for us than to speak of this precious object in connection with the history of antiquities (35).

Here, in a kind of prosopopeia, the artifacts—the comb, the ring, and other jewelry and toiletries—"resurrect" and embody the unknown Roman lady. Her past domestic life is pieced together through objects fashioned by carpenters and goldsmiths, works of male craftsmen that "[survive] her." As the narrative touches one by one upon these articles on her imaginary dressing table, we are reminded of Irving's "groping antiquary." The view of the lady "en deshabelle" especially evokes this tradition of antiquarian voyeurism. There is an undeniable tension between the article's sense of propriety and the questionable appropriateness of gazing at the partially undressed figure. This tension is further complicated by Hale's rhetorical question, "Alas! where is she?" which simultaneously vacates

the space occupied by the conjured Roman lady while it also, perhaps paradoxically, emphasizes her imaginative presence. The “precious object” then stands in for the lady by filling this space; the “history of antiquities” provides the temporal and material thread linking the lady/artifact with the reader/antiquary.²³

By emphasizing the imagined social and domestic contexts of the artifacts, Hale links the Roman lady’s domestic and social spheres and the social networks of nineteenth-century readers. The artifacts have the power to create a direct connection to the past, which Hale expresses in terms of women’s social relations. The intersection between past and present in an intimate environment places the emphasis on connection rather than the subject/object power dynamic that is characteristic of voyeurism. Hale does not stand “outside of history” here; she relaxes in history’s drawing room, gossiping in a friendly way.

Hale’s domestication of these artifacts is a popular outgrowth of nineteenth-century classicism. Defined as “a concern with the ancient Mediterranean that is put into the service of modern needs,” classicism informed the lives of women as it defined taste in portraiture, paintings, clothing, and interior decoration (Winterer 1-2). This concern was partially formulated through discoveries made during archaeological excavations, particularly in its domestic expression. In *The Mirror of Antiquity* (2007) Caroline Winterer maps out the ways that classicism affected women’s lives from the eighteenth century up to

²³ The anachronistic use of the term “pin-money” also bridges these gaps. By suggesting that the items being viewed were bought with the Roman lady’s allowance, Hale makes both the objects and their context more familiar to middle-class women readers who relied on such funds to purchase their own seemingly trivial personal items.

the early twentieth century. Of archaeology's influence, she writes, "Designers of neoclassical sofas drew some of their inspiration from *klinai*, couches found in ancient Greece and Rome, which became better known as archaeological digs, such as those at Herculaneum and Pompeii, uncovered the daily lives of the ancients" (126). As catalogues and reports of newly discovered artifacts reached general audiences, often by filtering through the popular press, they indirectly shaped upper-class (and, increasingly, middle-class) households.

Hale succeeds in taking an archaeological report and repositioning it both literally (within the *Lady's Book*) and figuratively in the American parlor. She accomplishes this shift in part through her conversational style. For example, when she remarks that "The small-tooth comb is on her table, rather worn, it must be confessed, and we think a trifle of her pin-money might have been well expended in purchasing another," she establishes a sense of personal relationship between reader and Roman. Hale's tone of fond criticism suggests she might be commenting on the possessions of a friend or relative rather than a long-dead stranger. She also merges past and present by applying contemporary novelistic conventions to her descriptions; the Roman lady becomes the heroine at the center of an unwritten, unrecovered romance: "A lady so attired might well have dreamt of making an impression in society, and probably created great havoc in the hearts of the Roman beaux. Would she not like to look at herself before she engaged in her *ludus belli*, and anticipate her conquests?" Expressed in terms of nineteenth-century upper-class social networks, the romance of the Roman lady applies contemporary mores to a classical world constituted of

artifacts like the comb and the *narthekur*. It suggests imaginative intimacies and sympathetic connections, particularly regarding the workings of the marriage market, across a great expanse of time. It also reveals the appeal of the “stories” surrounding artifacts, and the desire to “recover” them and achieve the kind of intimacy with the ancient world that histories cannot offer. Hale’s effort to re-domesticate these artifacts—to construct a narrative around them that establishes a sense of intimacy with the “Roman lady” of antiquity—became a stock response of women travelers to ancient sites around the world.

Pompeii in particular became a place where women could imagine these intimate associations, in part because excavations uncovered evidence of ancient domestic life and because of what the remains revealed about this life. When Celia Thaxter toured the Pompeii excavations in 1880, she described the excitement of the scene in a letter:

Friday we spent the whole day in Pompeii, that is, it took us the whole day to drive there through Portici and Restina, and go through the only half-unburied city and back at six in evening. It was breathlessly interesting; excavations still going on; something new revealed every moment. We watched them digging. Oh for *time* to tell! Saturday we went to Baiae, through Posilippo and Pozzuoli. No end of Roman ruins and Greek traces, the vast remains of an ancient city all along the coast (*Letters of Celia Thaxter*, 114).

While Thaxter’s description of her “whirlwind” tour of Pompeii is a bit tongue-in-cheek, it is also quite revealing. The excavations, which began in 1738, had become a centerpiece of the tourist experience at Pompeii, as Thaxter’s report suggests. As one of the “legions of new tourists” from the middle class visiting Pompeii (Dyson 51), the author responds to the site-in-process; she visualizes the landscape as a changing rather than a static place. Archaeological

excavations revealed the hidden past of the landscape, its sense of mystery, and clues to both the transformation of humanity as well as its constants.

Emphasis on physical contact with artifacts and sites as a way to forge a meaningful and personal link with the past is common in literature of the period. Artifacts provide the material connection to the past that stabilizes the shifting landscape, and often become the “building blocks” of novelistic and personal narratives. This is illustrated in Thaxter’s response when, touring a museum at Lyons, she views artifacts that are, as in Hale’s article, extensions of their former owners:

oh, the slender finger-rings of gold! I can’t tell you how they touch me, thinking of the hands that have slipped out of them ages ago!—how they were clasped in friendship, when hand met hand, those little rings, how many daily acts of life they shared. I am thinking of the women’s rings especially; their name is legion:²⁴ those that were found in Pompeii made me hold my breath. Oh, that wonderful Pompeii! (*Letters*, 120)

This image of the rings evokes a cyclical return or connection to the past. It signifies relationship, intimacy, and friendship, as does the image of hands clasped in friendship. Thaxter’s letter captures the sense of awe at the mass destruction of Pompeii that was proper for visitors; however, it also expresses wonder at the “many daily acts of life” that made up the past. Thaxter’s preoccupation with the sense of touch in this passage is significant in part because Pompeii contained not only objects like rings, but also preserved casts of human bodies. Her reverent meditation on the rings lingers on the daily lives of women and, in its intimate images of touch and close relationships, generates as

²⁴ The phrase “their name is legion” here refers to the rings.

much excitement and romantic interest as the volcanic eruption that extinguished those lives.

IV. "Found Texts" and "Textual Artifacts" in Postbellum Literature

In a number of postbellum texts, the fascination with making a direct and personal connection to the past emerged in images of fragments, ruins, and "found texts"—mysterious manuscripts that are unearthed, revealed, or discovered within a narrative. Using the image of the found text, the postbellum writers Rebecca Harding Davis and Constance Fenimore Woolson present us with texts as metonymic "artifacts" that reify their authors or subject matter. Antiquarian activities within Davis's "A Faded Leaf of History" and Woolson's "Miss Grief" suggest the original idea of the antiquarian as one who deals mostly with incunabula (Trigger 55-56). Both of these short pieces also relate antiquarianism to problems of memory and women's (self) representation, particularly as they describe the intersection of public history and memorialization with private memory. They raise the issues of the value of common women's contributions to history, and, particularly in Woolson's story, the aesthetic value of women's artistic productions as artistic "monuments." Finally, both Davis and Woolson use the image of the found text to demonstrate how public memory may be shaped by private lives and personal stories—an evolution of the interest in human relationships inherent in artifacts during the antebellum period.

Conflicts in the representation of public memory in the decades after the Civil War have been well documented by scholars. Historian William Blair, for example, has described the politicization of acts of commemoration and monumentalization of the Civil War, and the ways that public space became contested ideological property: "The use of public space," he writes, "would define citizenship" in the late nineteenth century and beyond (x). As Elizabethada Wright has argued, Woolson's short story "Rodman the Keeper" (1876) reveals her concern with the shaping of public memory in the 1870s (29). Wright has described scholars' concerns with "lapses of and great anxiety about memory during the period following the Civil War": "Issues of slavery, the right to revolt, national unity, and regional pride all intertwine as various ideologies compete to control what is remembered about this national event and—perhaps more importantly—to determine what is publicly forgotten" (29).

The textual artifact manifests both as public text and as intimate personal object; the artifacts detailed in Hale's article or Thaxter's descriptions of Pompeii's ruins both illustrate how intimacy and public display coincide in these objects. The antiquarian artifact becomes the locus for these authors' concerns over their place in a changed world and a changing literary marketplace. It reveals the ways in which the "private" world of "domestic" memory is also at stake during this period. Like Hale and Thaxter, Davis and Woolson emphasize the sense of touch and the "feel" of their artifacts. Their found texts are housed in tomb-like spaces—cramped and claustrophobic interiors. However, both of these interiors—the Philadelphia Public Library and a drawer in a popular author's

desk—are also liminal spaces, bridging the worlds of public access and production with personal memory. They are the spaces where public memory is compounded from private testimonies, and in both stories represent spaces where private memory can be “resurrected” for public consumption.

Rebecca Harding Davis published the tale “A Faded Leaf of History” in the *Atlantic Monthly* magazine in January of 1873. She begins her piece with a familiar image from antiquarian tradition—the discovery of a strange antique text that is reeking of history:

One quiet, snowy afternoon this winter, I found in a dark corner of one of the oldest libraries in the country a curious pamphlet. It fell into my hands like a bit of old age and darkness itself. The pages were coffee-colored and worn thin and ragged at the edges, like rotting leaves in the fall; they had grown clammy to the touch, too, from the grasp of so many dead years (*A Rebecca Harding Davis Reader*, 362).²⁵

Davis’s narrator describes her discovery of this mysterious pamphlet as though she has excavated it from the dark depths of the old library. Her narrator, like her much-admired Oliver Wendell Holmes, is an explorer of unknown and little-traveled territory in the form of obscure human histories that she excavates from the Philadelphia Public Library. The narrator’s interest in the pamphlet reflects Davis’s admitted interest in the hidden histories of the anonymous dead. She is particularly curious about the inscription “John” found on the pamphlet in the handwriting of a young boy. Although “for nearly two hundred years his bones had been crumbled into lime and his flesh gone back into grass and roots,” his trace has been preserved within the textual artifact: “Yet here he was, a boy still; here was the old pamphlet and the scrawl in yellowing ink, with the smell about it

²⁵ Originally published in the *Atlantic Monthly* (January 1873: 44-53).

still" (362). Davis's descriptions foreground the materiality of the text and its contents. She describes how "the story of a baby" within the pamphlet is "like a live seed in the hand of a mummy" (362), emphasizing the text's status as artifact over its presumed status as "history," or even as "narrative."

Though it manifests "old age and darkness," the pamphlet sheds light on a story that is apparently all but forgotten: the seventeenth-century captivity narrative of John Dickinson and his family and entourage. However, as Jean Pfaelzer has noted, captivity narratives experienced a resurgence of popularity in the decades after the Civil War, and Dickinson's narrative in particular enjoyed a great deal of popularity ("Nature, Nurture, and Nationalism," 113).²⁶ Sharon Harris describes the short story as "[a blend of] the earlier historical romance tradition begun by Catharine Maria Sedgwick and continued by Nathaniel Hawthorne with a documentary realism similar to that employed by John Greenleaf Whittier in *Margaret Smith's Journal*" (168). In light of the narrative's popularity, the question of why Davis would position her narrator as an antiquarian²⁷ discovering a hidden history remains. I would suggest that she does this to put the burden of historical interpretation on her narrator, who, while she may not "discover" the text, is re-discovering and re-interpreting it to an audience familiar with it. As I will show, she takes the narrative from the context of the

²⁶ Pfaelzer here presents Davis's interpretation of Dickinson's narrative as an example of an "anti-captivity narrative" that "repudiates the activities which prompt it...[interrogating] the captivity narrative's very act of claiming historicity" (124).

²⁷ To borrow from Pfaelzer, Davis assumes that "women reside both inside and outside public history" ("Nature," 124)—a description that seems to capture succinctly the position (and dilemma) of the antiquarian.

tomb-like library and re-situates it, as Hale does with the Roman lady's possessions, in the white middle-class parlor. She does this in part by deconstructing the narrative as a "whole" and revealing it to be made up of individual fragments of experience that can be pieced together to reveal new and different meanings.

Like any good antiquarian, Davis's narrator reconstructs a historical narrative through material remains and fragmentary evidence. In this case, she imagines the story from the perspective of Dickinson's wife, Mary, "a gentle, commonplace woman whose life had been spent on a quiet farm, whose highest ambition was to take care of her snug little house, and all of whose brighter thoughts or romance or passion began and ended in this staid Quaker and the baby that was a part of them both" (*Rebecca Harding Davis Reader*, 367). Like Sarah Hale and Celia Thaxter, Davis seeks in this story to "reanimate" the past, which in part means to excavate the tomb-like narrative and, in the process, reopen it to new possibilities for interpretation. This does not mean that she is rewriting history; rather she is demonstrating how the "facts of history unaltered" can supply multiple narrative possibilities when the original context and perspective are shifted. Over the course of the story she extracts Mary's baby from the sarcophagus-like captivity narrative and allows him to "live on" in a narrative thread that is refocused on him and his mother. She "redeems" him from a historical narrative that has held him in captivity over the centuries.

This idea is a bit different from Pfaelzer's argument that Davis is creating a "palimpsest" by layering her own story over Dickinson's in a parody of the

captivity narrative. Davis's references to antiquarian culture provide an alternative model for interpreting "A Faded Leaf of History" as a stripping away of history's layers. By opening the tomb of history, the narrator raids its contents and repositions them in a new context. In this sense, she becomes the textual artifact's curator as well as antiquarian interpreter, and her essay a "cabinet" or museum-like space of display within the larger context of the *Atlantic*. As part of this "public" mission to exhibit the artifact, the narrator seeks the "human interest" in the captivity narrative's characters—the baby, the boy, and the aged man—that will revive the story, particularly for consumption in a sentimentalized domestic realm. After picturing "the multitude of comfortable happy homes" that house "sweet-tempered, gracious women...with their children close about their knees," she reveals her plan for the narrative's contents:

I thought I would like to bring this little live baby back to the others, with its strange, pathetic story, out of the buried years where it has been hidden with dead people so long, and give it a place and home among us all again. I only promise that I have left the facts of history unaltered, even in the names; and that I believe them to be, in every particular, true (363).

For Davis, the "facts of history" can lead to different conclusions through repositioning and a changed perspective and interpretation. The collective "multitude" of mothers and children are not only heirs to Mary's history, but also potential consumers of that history in the proper context.

Davis's imaginative excavation of the baby's life from "the buried years" and its installation in the modern home suggest the late nineteenth-century interest in diorama displays and life groups, which were attempts by museums to reanimate the past for modern museum-goers by positioning specimens in

contextual and artistically appealing displays. Her relocation of the white baby of the past in the middle-class home of the present suggests a twist on the ethnographic museum and its dynamics of race and power: here it is primarily the white family and white domestic environment posed and presented for the audience, rather than an aboriginal tableau. The white family as spectacle is emphasized in scenes where the native people rush out to gaze upon the baby and mother, or when the baby is passed about among the native women, who admire and nurse him: a reversal of the ethnographic impulse to position native bodies and culture as "spectacles." In an archaeological or anthropological reading of Davis's essay this reversal can be viewed as a subtle critique of a late-nineteenth-century museum culture that, according to Tony Bennett, "treated [indigenous populations] *as if they were in a museum already*" (72).²⁸

Pfaelzer's argument that Davis reduces history to the image of the white baby, thereby signifying the disinheritance of the Native peoples, is convincing ("Nature," 123); and I would not limit the meaning of Davis's essay to a critique of racism in museum culture. However, I would suggest that the baby-as-artifact and Davis's archaeological and anthropological allusions force readers to acknowledge that captivity narratives, like ancient ruins and other artifacts, are fragments of America's historical past rather than representations of an historical whole. As Daniel J. Sherman notes in his introduction to *Museums and Difference* (2008), "As public institutions assigned both to safeguard and to define culture, museums have always been sites for the negotiation of difference"

²⁸ Italics Bennett's.

(2). It becomes more difficult to view Davis's text as an allegory for the extinction of Native culture after acknowledging the antiquarian context that she uses to frame her tale. Instead, the focus is placed on fragmentary artifacts—the baby, and the pamphlet itself—that can be pieced together in an alternative reading of the past that acknowledges Native culture as “preservationist,” as akin to white culture in ways that remain rhetorically hidden in mainstream history, and as ultimately betrayed by hypocritical and bigoted white “Christian” colonists. Like Sherman's museums, which represent and negotiate the exchange between self and other (2), Davis's essay eschews a narrative of colonial conflict and instead focuses on interpersonal negotiation between the white colonists and the Indian “other.” By the end of her retelling of the Dickinsons' story, the narrator proclaims that the baby in the narrative will remain a baby:

No doubt, if I chose to search among the old musty records, I could find the history of his son. But I do not choose; I will not believe that he ever grew to be a man, or died. He will always be to us simply a baby; a live, laughing baby, sent by his Master to the desolate places of the earth with the old message of Divine love and universal brotherhood to his children (373).

The narrator's refusal to acknowledge the baby's growth and death translates to a refusal to abandon this narrative of negotiation for the accepted mainstream history of America: white cultural and territorial triumph and Indian extinction. Reading “A Faded Leaf of History” in terms of contemporary archaeological ideas opens up possibilities for renegotiating the place of the captivity narrative in the construction of public memory. Davis's emphasis on the role of the author/antiquary in interpreting historical texts suggests that multiple unknown narratives are locked within such artifacts—that they contain multiple histories.

However, along with its implications of the narrator's role as antiquarian interpreter, Davis's essay links the role of the author to that of the historical preservationist. The narrator's "preservation" of Dickinson's baby and installation of him in the middle-class parlor can be read within the contemporary context of the Colonial Revival. Broadly defined by Alan Axelrod as "encompassing virtually any variety of artifactual interaction with visions of colonial America" (3), the Colonial Revival expressed the fascination with and patriotic appeal of America's colonial past in the late nineteenth century, particularly in domestic interiors and exteriors: through architecture, interior décor and design, and antique collection and display. Davis may have been familiar with the "living histories" of the "New England" kitchens, popular exhibits and restaurants that recreated the colonial hearth at fairs, including a "Pennsylvania Kitchen" at Philadelphia's Great Central Sanitary Fair (1864) (175-76). Celia Betsky claims that American literature of the Colonial Revival emphasizes "old-fashioned interiors" as ways of "entering history, of bringing the country into the city and grafting an idealized past, a bucolic colonial way of life, onto an alienating and impersonal urban present" (243). Betsky describes the recreation of the domestic interior as an act of excavation: "Frequently describing themselves as digging through such attics or as braving the homes of poor folk where old objects had long been lying neglected...Americans dusted off the facts and artifacts of their history and overlaid them with a new coat of fantasy" (254). In "A Faded Leaf of History," Davis similarly excavates the past for a fragment of "living history," which she

longs to preserve in the context of the “domestic museum” of the middle-class home.

As the Colonial Revival emerged in the late 1860s and '70s, America's colonial and Revolutionary heritage was increasingly idealized and valorized. Davis's representation of the colonial white middle-class household's complex relationship with Native American families calls into question the accepted historical narratives of conquest that the Colonial Revival based itself upon. As a “reinvention” of the past, the essay points out the invented aspects of mainstream history, making it possible to interrogate a historical narrative that had otherwise been naturalized as “the truth.” Both Harris and Pfaelzer have noted that Davis was an outspoken supporter of Native American rights, and openly critiques their treatment at the hands of Dickinson and his cohort (Harris 169). In “A Faded Leaf of History,” her “antiquarian tunnel-vision”—her focus on and enlargement of the “trivial” detail of the baby—allows her to view history in terms of its intimate details rather than as an exclusionary narrative. In her description of the whites' forced march through Indian territory, she focuses on the physicality of the baby to the exclusion of the narrative's “grim realities”:

“Dickinson's narrative, when I finished it, left behind it a fresh, sweet cheerfulness, as if one had been actually touching the living baby with its fair little body and milky breath....” (*Davis Reader*, 371). Davis reveals her own role in the preservation and self-conscious changes in Dickinson's narrative in her conclusion, when she refuses to believe that the baby grows up or dies (373).

Her text emphasizes the artifact as not only a symbol of universal brotherhood, but reifies it as "simply a baby," which

knew nothing of the judgments or mercy of God, and who could neither pray nor sing, only had learned in these desperate straits to grow strong and happy in the touch of sun and wind, and to hold out its arms to friend or foe, slave or savage, sure of a welcome, and so came closer to God than any of them all (373).

By the end of "A Faded Leaf of History," the narrator reaches the limits of sentimental interpretation; unwilling to envision the death or even adulthood of the baby, she refuses to participate in or acknowledge history's movement toward "oblivion" and toward Native extinction. The essay ends with this image of the eternal baby who unites "friend [and] foe."

Like Davis, Constance Fenimore Woolson also makes use of the tropes of the "found text" and the textual artifact in the short story "Miss Grief," which, like "A Faded Leaf of History," is a framed narrative. The title character, in the words of Paul Crumbley, "is an aging spinster whose actual life is so clouded by culturally imposed stereotypes about spinster authors that the conventional male narrator appears incapable of viewing her as a distinct individual" (86). While it captures the problem of representation in "Miss Grief," this description also seems to mirror unjust interpretations of Woolson's own work. As many scholars have pointed out, the author's reputation suffered from a twentieth-century characterization by Henry James's biographer, Leon Edel, who described her as a desperate character who clung to James but was unable to compete with the mastery of contemporary male writers. In Anne E. Boyd's words, Edel depicted her as "a love-starved spinster pursuing the reluctant James all over Europe"

(192). However, feminists like Boyd have reclaimed Woolson for literary scholarship, emphasizing not only her popularity and ability to support herself as a writer, but also the high quality and interest of her work.

Described as “one of [Woolson’s] most obscure stories” (210), “Miss Grief” recounts the acquaintance between a self-proclaimed “conceited fool” who is a well-known and successful writer living in Rome and an eccentric playwright whom he dubs “Miss Grief.” Miss Grief, whose real name is Aaronna Moncrief, brings her unpublished manuscripts to the narrator: a “literary man” who tells the story from an unreliable first-person perspective. At first he repeatedly rejects her advances as the behavior of an “eccentric and unconventional” person: “qualities extremely tiresome in a woman no longer young or attractive, and without money to gild them over” (Brehm and Dean 202).²⁹ However, after he reads the manuscript of her drama “Armor,” he recognizes her genius and, simultaneously, “the dark spots, which were numerous and disfiguring,” in her work; these he is “anxious to have...removed” (208).³⁰ He offers to try to help her get her work published if they can amend these problems. Miss Grief, however, refuses to see what the narrator considers her work’s drawbacks. By the end of the story, he has failed to get her drama published in part because Miss Grief has refused to “correct” its “flaws.” He visits her and finds her dying. Although we do not know

²⁹ References are to this edition, which has reproduced the text as it originally appeared in *Lippincott’s Magazine* [25 May (1880): 574-85.] Note: in other editions, the name “Ethelind” has been changed to “Isabel.”

³⁰ The narrator’s single-minded desire to have the “imperfections” stripped away from Aaronna’s drama suggests the influence of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s short story “The Birth-Mark” (1843).

much about Miss Grief's personal history, there are references to the "vampire-like" male literary world that has drained her life and spirit, although her genius remains. After describing how she was buried along with her unpublished poems and stories—her "poor dead children"—the narrator returns to the present and gestures toward the manuscript of "Armor," which he has kept buried in a drawer: "not as a *memento mori* exactly, but rather as a memento of my own good-fortune, for which I should continually give thanks" (217). The fate of "Armor" is to be destroyed, unread by the world, at the narrator's death.

This image of the "discovered" drama, which the narrator is unable to "recover" and ultimately decides to "re-cover," provides the focal point for an archaeological reading of Woolson's story. Her description of the drama encodes it as "artifact" as much as text: "It was in the form of a little volume, and clearly written: on the cover was the word 'Armor' in German text and underneath a pen-and-ink sketch of a helmet, breastplate and shield" (207). The Gothic font and the illustration of objects from material history—the helmet, breastplate, and shield—help establish a synecdochic connection between text and artifact. The fact that Woolson's story takes place in Rome³¹ is also significant; this location evokes a long tradition of artifact collection, commodification, and expropriation, as much as it does the world of expatriate American artists, writers, and wealthy elite.³² The setting links the market for artifacts with a particular literary audience.

³¹ According to Prown, the first Americans arrived in Rome in 1760, and it subsequently became "the primary destination, the center for the study of both antiquities and old masters" (90).

³² In his discussion of the meaning of Roman ruins to American tourists and

It also connects the narrator's "discovery" of Aaronna's genius to the appropriation and exposition of ancient artifacts throughout the city. By extension the setting of Rome also raises the issue of the value of art in two separate realms: its worth as entertainment and commodity in the patriarchal publishing world, and its value as a work of "genius" outside of this market. It seems as though Woolson does not believe or guarantee that there is room for genius in the popular marketplace; "rarities" like Miss Grief and her work are not displayed for public consumption but reserved for the narrator's own "private collection."

Woolson merges the image of the spinster artist and her art in a way that turns them both into "artifacts" that are not to be displayed but are reburied and eventually consigned to oblivion. The Old Testament origins of the name "Aaronna" suggest that Miss Grief has links to distant antiquity; in Cheryl Torsney's words, the name causes "subtle shifting between temporal and spatial dimensions" (79). However, the nature of her past is obscured both by her reserved manner and by the narrator's reluctance to make inquiries about her history. As Torsney puts it, she is "a veiled woman with a shadowy past" (78). Aaronna's lack of historical context leads to problems of misinterpretation. For

writers, William L. Vance marks a change in the meaning of the ancient sites for Americans by the postbellum period, especially for the realist writer William Dean Howells: "From Thomas Jefferson and John Adams down through Howells's contemporaries Henry James and Henry Adams, ancient Rome—with the Forum as its literal and symbolic center—was for Americans a place of unrivaled cultural significance. The heroes of the Roman Republic—Cincinnatus, Cicero, Cato the Younger—were American heroes because they were champions of liberty, and liberty was the meaning of America. But in the century following Howells's first visit, his deafness to the 'vocal glory' of Roman ruins and his irreverent attitude toward Rome's history became increasingly typical...ancient Rome became at best a setting for costume pageantry and didactic Christian melodrama in novels and films" (2).

example, the narrator mistakes Aaronna for an artifact peddler even before he meets her, believing that she wants to sell him antiquities of questionable origin and value:³³

I made up my mind that she had something to sell—a bit of carving or some intaglio supposed to be antique. It was known that I had a fancy for oddities. I said to myself, “She has read or heard of my ‘Old Gold’ story or else ‘The Buried God,’ and she thinks me an idealizing ignoramus upon whom she can impose. Her sepulchral name is at least not Italian: probably she is a sharp country woman [sic] of mine, turning by means of aesthetic lies an honest penny when she can” (Brehm and Dean 202-03).

As the narrator’s first act of misinterpretation, this passage describes a confusion of contexts: the blur between artist, art, and artifact. The word “oddities,” for example, could be ascribed to Aaronna as well as her potential wares. The narrator’s dilemma raises the question of aesthetic value, of the problem of authenticity in a market in which many counterfeit “artifacts” or “aesthetic lies” were being circulated to ignorant buyers. It also reveals that the author’s “fancy for oddities” extends to his own literary imagination: the market enjoys and demands tales like “Old Gold” and “The Buried God.” Though we do not know much about these stories beyond their titles, we can infer that they deal with

³³ Dyson remarks that a market for forged artifacts was doing a booming trade by the late nineteenth century: “The [Tanagra] figurines also appealed to artists attempting to reproduce with archaeological accuracy the world of classical antiquity. Jean-Leon Gerome’s 1893 painting *Atelier of Tanagra* shows a shop in Tanagra with a young woman decorating the molded figurines. And their relative abundance and relatively modest selling prices made the figurines accessible to the growing Hellenophile middle class of Europe and America—so much so that the finds of genuine objects could not satisfy the market, and by 1876 forgeries as well as heavily restored pieces began to appear. Soon these flooded the market, often tricking the experts and regularly deceiving the gullible. Some were detected by the standard techniques of connoisseurship, but most could only definitively be identified as fakes after the advent of scientific dating techniques like thermoluminescence” (119).

antiquities and perhaps with buried treasure—a theme that seems to match the narrator’s “discovery” of Aaronna’s literary “treasures.” We can also infer, from the narrator’s position and popularity, and from the many contemporary articles, illustrated catalogues, stories, and novels shaped by classical history, that there was a considerable market for writings on the topic of antiquities. Later, when the narrator misinterprets Aaronna’s “wares” again, it is as “old lace, something that belonged to Tullia or Lucrezia Borgia” (203). He cannot visualize her outside of the power dynamics of the relationship of seller and buyer/commodity: “I still felt sure, besides, that the box contained something that I was expected to buy” (205). These passages stress the commodity value that the narrator places on Aaronna’s unseen offering. His supposition that she is engaging in typical market exchange, however, is quickly confounded again.

Woolson’s interest in antiquities is notable in her travel writing, such as “Cairo in 1890.”³⁴ In Egypt, she obtained several artifacts, which, in biographer Lyndall Gordon’s description, were “shamelessly” displayed:

On every available surface were the spoils of her travels, including a piece of alabaster which she had picked up in the Temple of the Sphinx and an Arabian tile with a shameless label: ‘stolen in April 1890 by C.F. Woolson, from the wall of the Mandarah (or reception room) of the ruined Palace of the Sheik el Moofti, at Cairo, Egypt. Date between A.D. 1200 and A.D. 1300 (261).

Gordon describes these and other objects that Woolson surrounds herself with at her house in Venice as part of her attempt to make a “home” for herself there (261). Her inclusion of the “shameless label” mimics museum-style displays that

³⁴ “Cairo in 1890” was first published in *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* [Oct/Nov (1891): 651-74, 828-55].

notified visitors of the history of an artifact's acquisition and origins. Woolson's collection may parody museum displays, but as souvenirs from her travels they help her to define herself as much as the place she calls home: they provide a map of the various social and geographical contexts of her life. Her tongue-in-cheek humor regarding the "stolen" items and her extensive experience as a travel writer suggest that Woolson understood the problematic nature of the antiquities market, and the relationship of the tourist to local artifacts, which, like her tile and alabaster, are often anonymous works of art.

I would argue that Woolson's experience with such "anonymous" antiquities informs the market relationships in "Miss Grief." Several scholars have commented on how "Miss Grief" reflects women writers' relationship to a male-dominated and controlled literary market. Torsney describes Woolson's voice in "Miss Grief" as "one full of resolve and power in the face of a still hopeless position vis-à-vis the patriarchal structure of society" (72). Crumbley focuses on Aaronna's hope of gaining access to literary "circulation" through a "powerful" man, the narrator. He proposes that she offers her drama to him within the context of the "gift exchange," a system of circulation reflecting values separate from a literary market that emphasizes literature's value as commodity (93). Crumbley's argument is persuasive and gets at the problem of the value of art and "genius" in a market limited by particular expectations of both the male-run publishing establishment and its audience. However, the narrator's appropriation and ultimate concealment of Aaronna's manuscript, as well as his deception about the drama's future performance, hints that there is something underhanded

about this exchange. While the narrator tries to rationalize his lie and his plans to destroy the manuscript as acts of kindness, they are at best acts of paternalism, at worst a form of arrogance—results of his failure to edit Aaronna's work into a form that will be accepted by the marketplace.

Like newly unearthed artifacts, Aaronna and her text need to be recontextualized and reinterpreted in order to have value in the literary and social markets. Woolson chooses articles with specifically feminine associations to describe Aaronna's other manuscripts;³⁵ her writing "was like a case of jeweler's wares set before you, with each ring unfinished, each bracelet too large or too small for its purpose, each breastpin without its fastening, each necklace purposely broken" (Brehm and Dean 212). Each of these artifacts has value, but not use-value or market value. These descriptions reveal that the narrator sees his role as giving her work a purpose as well as context in the market. Without his help as "interpreter," her writing appears as mere gibberish to readers. For example, when the narrator shows some of Aaronna's poetry to his beloved Ethelind, Woolson stresses the poems' illegibility (or, perhaps, Ethelind's relative illiteracy):

Once during this period I showed two of the short poems to Ethelind, withholding of course the writer's name. 'They were written by a woman,' I explained.

'Her mind must have been disordered poor thing!' Ethelind said in her

³⁵ One of these pieces, a prose story, features a plot that has overtones mirroring the relationship between Aaronna and the narrator: "The story was that of a profligate and commonplace man forced by two of his friends, in order not to break the heart of a dying girl who loves him, to live up to a high imaginary idea of himself which her pure but mistaken mind has formed...Her long, slow decline and happy death, and his own inward ennui and profound weariness of the role he has to play, made the vivid points of the story" (Brehm and Dean 212).

gentle way when she returned them—'at least, judging by these. They are hopelessly mixed and vague.'

Now, they were not vague so much as vast. But I knew that I could not make Ethelind comprehend it, and (so complex a creature is man) I do not know that I wanted her to comprehend it (215).

Ethelind is unable to understand Aaronna's writing, in part, because she has been educated within the "violet bed" of the patriarchal social order; Aaronna, by contrast, is "vast" in thought and supersedes these boundaries. But it is when the narrator reads "Armor" that he finds himself in the strange position of reader and antiquary: he understands the work's great genius, but struggles to reinterpret or translate the nature of that genius to a larger, unsympathetic audience. In fact, the story becomes resolved in the destruction of both the work and the artist, because as both artist and woman Aaronna defies patriarchal interpretation and assimilation.

After Aaronna's death, the narrator's references to her and her manuscript take on the tinge of the antiquary's "abnormal" relationship with his artifacts, verging more on obsession than friendship. He keeps her manuscript hidden in his drawer: "not even Ethelind is to see it. For women will misunderstand each other; and, dear and precious to me as my sweet wife is, I could not bear that she or anyone should cast so much as a thought of scorn upon the memory of the writer, upon my poor dead, 'unavailable,' unaccepted 'Miss Grief'" (218). The narrator claims that he is reluctant to expose Aaronna's manuscript to his wife's gaze because of his wife's potentially jealous reaction; however, he is also concealing his comparative failure and lack of genius in the face of Aaronna's "greater power" (218). In "Miss Grief," death represents both a kind of autonomy

for the single woman and simultaneously ensures the "purity" of her art, which will be kept safe from "literary men" who would debase it. The reversal at the story's conclusion is the self-exposure of the narrator as a "counterfeit" while the authentic genius, Aaronna, is consigned to oblivion. Aaronna's triumph, however, lies in the "purity" of her unpublished manuscript, which has not been debased by editors and publishers in an effort to make it more palatable to a general readership. As such, it stands as a monument to her genius, if not her memory.

V. Conclusion

Unmarried women characters in antebellum American literature became associated with the traditionally masculine activity of antiquarianism. Informed by the eighteenth-century characterization of the eccentric antiquarian gentleman, the figure of the spinster evokes antiquity and signals the intrusion of the past into the space of the present. Artifacts, ruins, and other remnants of antiquity also traverse the boundary between past and present. In Sophie Thomas's analysis of ruins in Romantic literature, she remarks upon the sense of uncertainty that the timelessness of fragments engenders in those who encounter them. She writes, "ruins float between the past and present (the same way fragments are suspended between the part and the idea of the whole), but belong fully to neither" (181). Like the artifact, the status of the old maid is indeterminate in time and space. She often retains a liminal position within the household and in many cases is presented as a kind of outsider in society. The unmarried woman was

also represented as a living relic of the past. Because a woman's future was commonly associated with her marriage prospects, an unmarried woman in this context had no future; the prospects and progress represented by marriage had passed her by. It thus became commonplace for writers to conflate old maids with the artifacts that shape the domestic spaces they inhabit, and to link these women and objects as rarities that embody history. By the 1830s, a clear equation had been made between old maids and artifacts in the popular imagination.

The women writers I have examined in this chapter wrote with an awareness of this tradition and made use of it, as well as the developing field of archaeology, for different purposes. The specialized language of archaeology, along with its emphasis on excavation and the study of fragments, enabled a frame of reference to the past that centered on found objects as the keys to interpretation and to the creation of multiple historical narratives. For the writers I have profiled here, however, such narratives always point back to the present, much as artifacts themselves are seen as remnants of the past that are present in both time and space. This link between the act of imaginative creation and the persistence of the created object across time fascinated these writers. By the latter half of the century, the idea of human genius—and, for writers like Davis and Woolson, of women's genius in particular—became embodied in objects and shaped within the domestic spaces that provided context for those objects: an ancient or modern text, a ring, a shelf of antique heirlooms.

The link between spinsters and antiquities persisted through the end of the century, and women authors appropriated it for their own purposes; instead of necessarily creating spinster/antiquarian characters, women authors attributed characteristics of the antiquarian to themselves. They did this by borrowing language from antiquarian writings or from the developing sciences of archaeology, anthropology, and geology, and by using tropes made popular by authors like Sir Walter Scott. And while male writers certainly made use of antiquarianism and archaeology in their writing, they did so within a different rhetorical situation. The greatest benefit of the antiquarian model of authorship to women authors was the way that it allowed them to debate what it meant to have "access" to spheres that had been traditionally closed off to them. In the 1820s, for example, it became a point of access to the debate over political and social issues like territorial expansion and Native American policies. By the end of the century, the nature of women's genius and art was increasingly called into question by male critics who seemed intent on closing off the world of "high art" to women. In response, women writers used the figure of the spinster/antiquarian to explore the gendered boundaries of the world of art and the literary marketplace.

However, because the figure of the spinster/antiquarian had originally emerged in a critique of what was perceived as disordered sexuality, especially that of single women, a sense of ambivalence toward antiquarianism remained. In "An Incident at Rome," Catharine Sedgwick uses the language and images of antiquarianism to instruct readers in a woman's proper relationship to antiquities

but dissociates herself from antiquarianism at the same time. Her frame story distances the first-person narrator, a ladylike American able to appreciate the picturesque Italian countryside while maintaining a proper aesthetic and personal distance from it, from a tale in which obsessive antiquarianism undermines and virtually destroys a mother-son relationship. "Old Maids" demonstrates Sedgwick's investment in positive models of the single life for women; her condemnation of the mother/antiquary in "An Incident at Rome" distinguishes appropriate maternal behavior (and by extension appropriate feminine behavior) from the negative stereotypes of antiquarianism that had become conflated with negative stereotypes of single women. Sedgwick might be marked as an early-century writer who was grappling with these stereotypes and who was wary of the seductive "dangers" of antiquarianism.

Just after mid-century, Sarah Hale co-opts the voice of the archaeologist/antiquarian in "Ancient Toilet of a Roman Lady" with a conscious effort at couching her antiquarian role within the language of society news. She reveals that the information about the Roman Lady's possessions came to her second-hand from the excavations of an anonymous antiquary in the service of "His Royal Highness the Count of Syracuse"; appropriating the language of the excavation report, Hale emphasizes the second-hand nature of her information, partly through mention of her original source, and partly through the language of genteel society that she uses to frame the artifacts. By the 1870s, Rebecca Harding Davis is more willing to immerse herself in antiquarian experience; she turns her short essay "A Faded Leaf of History" into a complete sensory

encounter, stressing first-hand contact with the textual artifact. Her narrator comments that the captivity narrative “fell into my hands like a bit of old age and darkness itself,” and emphasizes the clammy, dead feel of the mummy-like manuscript. Her adventure into the Philadelphia Public Library is quite close to tomb raiding compared to Hale’s delicate perusal of an excavation catalog.

Woolson takes excavation a step further than Davis as a metaphor for the nature of genius in a woman writer. In “Miss Grief,” excavation is necessary to uncover the genius of an otherwise unknown artist. In this short story the narrator mistakes the spinster/woman writer at the center of the story for a peddler of “oddities” and “antique intaglios” who tells “aesthetic lies.” Capitalizing on the popular idea of archaeology as the excavation of ancient treasures, Woolson’s tale shows that the genius of the woman artist, Aaronna Moncrief, is the true treasure that, even if it is “discovered,” cannot survive on display within the context of the patriarchal literary market. This market only appreciates the true “aesthetic lies” and hollow intaglios such as the (assumedly) more mediocre works of the narrator: “Old Gold” and “The Buried God.” “Miss Grief” and her works must be re-consigned to the oblivion of the grave, the narrator’s secret drawer, and the narrator’s mortal memory.

As Naomi Sofer has argued of women writers in postbellum period, “participating in the conversation about producing an ‘America of art’ signaled a fundamental shift in self-conception: from ‘bread and butter’ writer to artist working on a ‘great book,’ unwilling to disclaim either ‘ambition’ or ‘fame’ as a motivating force” (1). Antiquities, which are simultaneously categorized as “art”

and "history," and with their longstanding association with "rarified women," became a useful image in the debate over the nature of literary art and the woman artist by the latter half of the century. The antiquarian's power resides in the interpretive imagination, which is in part how postbellum writers in particular defined artistic genius.³⁶ Thus the development of the idea of the woman artist in late nineteenth-century literature can be traced in part through the evolution of the image of the woman antiquarian, rising out of a tradition in which women and antiquities were linked by negative stereotypes.³⁷

Using various conventions of antiquarian discourse, Hale, Sedgwick, Thaxter, Woolson, and Davis explore this connection and introduce the question of the nature of human, and women's, genius. Each uses the language and imagery of antiquarianism to position herself as one who is able to assemble fragmentary artifacts into a meaningful narrative. Their power rests in their ability

³⁶ William Dean Howells articulates the need for some mystery in one's experience of ancient ruins. In his travel essay "An Effort to be Honest with Antiquity," where he describes being shown about the Roman ruins by an "amiable woman archaeologist," Howells explains the importance of the act of interpretation to the imagination as much as the sight of the ruins themselves. (Project Gutenberg <<http://infomotions.com/etexts/gutenberg/dirs/etext05/whrom10.htm>>)

³⁷ In her study of late nineteenth-century German women's autobiographical writings that feature "excavations" of their writing desks, Annegret Pelz observes that the authors consciously took on the roles of antiquarian and artist: "At one and the same time, the female authors in question claimed both positions—that of the artist and of the antiquary. In the role of the former they presented texts, published them and sought proofs for the beauty of their own works. In contrast, as antiquaries, they collected, explained, ordered and investigated their works by systematically surveying and reassembling the texts deposited on their desks. In this way they erected a 'didactic monument' to their own art and created a physically rendered model of their authorial activities, based solely on the factuality of the existing texts and of the place where these activities occurred (143-44).

to provide imaginative contexts for artifacts like rings, ruins, and texts. Thus they present the writer's role as that of an interpreter who has the ability not only to construct stories, essays, or poems around anonymous artifacts, but also to reinterpret existing narratives. Though they have the power of persistent material existence, artifacts are essentially unstable or malleable productions whose meaning can be shaped by the taste, imagination, intellect, or historical knowledge of the writer. These writers take up artifacts as symbols of human achievement and triumphs of human productions over time. Each reveals a relationship between place, memory, and time that stresses the creative process, the re-creation of the context of found objects or fragments above authoritative historical narratives. All drew upon archaeological language to respond to larger political or social pressures in society, and to the anxieties generated by these pressures. Using archaeological imagery, they explore women's proper relationship to the domestic world and the artistic and literary marketplace.

CHAPTER II

ANTIQUARIANISM AND THE REMOVAL DEBATE OF THE 1820s:
SARAH JOSEPHA HALE'S "THE GENIUS OF OBLIVION" AND CATHARINE
MARIA SEGWICK'S *HOPE LESLIE*

Many years ago, the ancestors of our people lived in the Northwest. In time, their populations became so large that it was difficult to exist there. The prophets of the Tribe announced that a land of fertile soil and abundant game lay in the southeast and that the people could live there in peace and prosperity forever. Under the leadership of Chahta, our people set forth. At the end of each day's journey, a sacred pole was planted erect in front of the camp. The next morning the pole would be found to be leaning one way or another. In that direction, the tribesmen were to travel for that day. For months, our people followed the sacred staff. One day, when the Tribe stopped on the west side of a creek, Chahta planted the pole. Heavy rain began to fall. The next day, the staff which had burrowed itself deeper in the ground, stood straight and tall for all to see. Chahta proclaimed that the long sought land of Nanih Waiya had been found. Here we would build our homes and a mound as the sacred burial spot for our ancestors (Mould 116).

A version of the Choctaw creation myth, this story demonstrates the importance of Nanih Waiya, a platform mound in Mississippi, to the Choctaw people ("Nanih Waiya Mound and Village"). The mound is raised around a staff buried in the earth, rooting the people and their culture in the place. The Muskogee, too, have a traditional origin tale that centers on a "great hill" known as "Nunne Chaha" from which they emerged at the time of creation (Taylor 26). In an analysis of the symbolic value of ancient mounds of the southeast, Vernon James Knight, Jr.

writes that the Muskogee term for the mounds, "*ekvn-like*," can be translated as "earth placed," "earth sitting," or "earth dwelling" (422).¹ Each of these terms emphasizes the importance of the concept of place for the Muskogee people; ideas of homeland and sacred space are inseparable from the tribe's identity.² By the 1820s and 1830s, however, both cultural identity and sacred space came under increasing threat as the U.S. government committed to a policy of Indian Removal as the answer to economic and social pressures in the southeast. New stories were written about Native land as it was subsumed into white territory.

In Chapter I, I demonstrated how and why women adapted antiquarianism and archaeology in their writing, arguing that the paradigm of antiquarian authorship evolved through the nineteenth century as part of the discourse on women's authorial and artistic identity. I mentioned in this chapter that, in the eighteenth century, antiquarians were seen as nationalistic figures who used material remains to create nationalistic narratives of the nation's origins. Here I will expand on this idea and explore how a similar nationalistic function operated in women's writing in the nineteenth century. I will focus more narrowly on the rhetorical uses of antiquarianism and archaeology in the depiction of "white" and

¹ Italic's Knight's.

² Mounds were also important to the Cherokee, the "most civilized" tribe of the southeast: "The construction of flat-top mounds, hierarchical political systems called chiefdoms, and an elaborate religious life characterized Mississippian societies. Although Cherokees no longer built mounds when Europeans arrived, their villages often included these structures, their religious beliefs had roots in Mississippian culture, and their extensive fields connected them to the Mississippian past" (Perdue and Green 9).

“native” landscapes, spaces, and places in popular literature by and for women during the 1820s. The two writers I include in this chapter—Sarah Josepha Hale (1788-1879) and Catharine Maria Sedgwick (1789-1867)—use antiquarianism to respond to contemporary debates over Native American policy.

In the early decades of the century, antiquarianism was still primarily associated with two major, ongoing nationalist projects of recovery: the establishment of a record for the continent’s unknown prehistory that could rival the ancient civilizations of the Old World, and of evidence that would ideologically bolster the United States government’s efforts to appropriate Native American lands. As historian Steven Conn has argued, American archaeology “began with investigations in American Indian sites” (9). Conn continues:

The turn toward archaeology represented two important shifts in how American Indians were studied. The first was a new reliance on objects as the place where knowledge inhered...Related to this was the conviction that objects constituted a permanent record of Native American history, while language disappeared with the speakers, and that by the middle of the nineteenth century, those speakers did indeed seem doomed to disappear (10).

Hale and Sedgwick wrote texts in the 1820s that reflect the shifts that Conn describes. Both authors were interested in the idea that artifacts contained knowledge about the past, and in the power of narratives to unlock this knowledge. They use the antiquarian model of authorship for different purposes, however: Hale to reinforce narratives that reinforced Anglo-American claims to the land, and Sedgwick to question the rhetoric behind such narratives.

Significantly, Hale and Sedgwick present themselves as “antiquarians” who recover and interpret Native American and colonial artifacts. They use

antiquarian and archaeological imagery and language in response to the Indian Removal debate—an issue that, as Mary Hershberger has pointed out, “received more attention in the nation’s periodicals than did issues of tariffs and the Bank of the United States” (17). According to Hershberger, women mobilized to protest Removal toward the end of the 1820s by circulating anti-removal pamphlets (25). The most influential of these protestors, Catharine Beecher and Lydia Huntley Sigourney, created a petition challenging Jackson’s policy in 1829; they “flooded Congress with antiremoval petitions, making a bold claim for women’s place in national political discourse” (Hershberger 15). The debate over Indian Removal was one of the first instances where women demanded a voice and ways to participate politically on a problem of national importance in a public forum, helping to pave the way for their involvement in issues such as the abolition movement and women’s rights (25).

Hale engages with the debate in the years leading up to Beecher and Sigourney’s petition drive, although she is not a protestor. In “The Genius of Oblivion” (1823), which portrays Native Americans as savage destroyers of a former great civilization, the “creation narrative” of the mythical mound builders is revealed to the poem’s Anglo-American hero in a prophetic vision on top of a ruined mound. Through his prophetic gaze, a “white” past is written over the landscapes of the past and projected for the nation’s future. Sedgwick’s novel, *Hope Leslie* (1827), gives a more complex response to the issue. In the novel, competing white and Native American visions of the landscape clash and are transformed in Sedgwick’s descriptions of monumental places. In this novel,

objects “contain” knowledge, but the landscapes that contain the objects are strikingly unstable. For Sedgwick, the process of imaginatively appropriating Native lands is far from the relatively simple and transparent process that Hale presents in her poem. Both writers were responding to contemporary land disputes between whites and Natives, using different rhetorical strategies to stake imaginative cultural claims on landscapes of the past. Hale turns prehistoric mounds into monuments to the nation’s white, genteel domestic virtues, subsuming the landscape and its antiquities into a national narrative that excludes Natives completely. Sedgwick’s monuments expose the uneasy coexistence between the Native practice of space and place and white desire and ideology.³

I. Mound Builders and Antebellum Literature

The debate over Native lands in the 1820s and 30s coincided with the debate over the identity of the Moundbuilders, a mythical, “civilized” prehistoric people who, according to one theory, were destroyed by the “savage” ancestors of contemporary Native Americans. However, during the early Republican period, the mounds were viewed as remnants of Native American society. It was

³ The ancient places presented in Hale’s and Sedgwick’s texts are as much a reflection of the authors’ personal concerns as they are of the contemporary political climate; the ruined mounds in Hale’s poem, for example, reflect her struggles as a widow. Sedgwick’s novel contains a captivity narrative, which arguably reflects her interest in the captivity of Eunice Williams, a distant relative, and the investment of her novel in family history. Sedgwick’s distant cousin, Eunice Williams, was captured by Iroquois in 1703; described as a “legendary” figure, she is considered the model for Faith Leslie (Foster 78-80).

understood that, while their meanings might be unclear to white scientists, farmers, and settlers, existing Indian tribes maintained stories and traditions concerning the mounds. Thomas Jefferson's famous description of his excavation of an Indian mound in Query XI of his *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1784) is considered by some to be the "first" incident of American archaeology and led to wide interest in the ancient structures (Conn 118). Jefferson begins his discussion of the mounds by remarking, "I know of no such thing existing as an Indian monument: for I would not honour with that name arrow points, stone hatchets, stone pipes, and half shapen images" (Peden 97). Here he lists artifacts that were often unearthed by the farmer's plough; humble items that he considers unworthy of "honour" or much interest. He classifies the mounds as examples "Of [Indian] labour on a large scale," and summarizes the contemporary debate that focuses more on their purpose than their origins:

That they were the repositories of the dead, has been obvious to all: but on what particular occasion constructed, was matter of doubt. Some have thought they covered the bones of those who have fallen in battles fought on the spot of interment. Some ascribed them to the custom, said to prevail among the Indians, of collecting, at certain periods, the bones of all their dead, wheresoever deposited at the time of death. Others again supposed them the general sepulchers for towns conjectured to have been on or near these grounds...(97-98).

Jefferson's brief summary reveals that while the mounds were a "problem" or mystery to be solved since Euro-American settlement spread west of the Appalachian Mountains in the late eighteenth century (Conn 159), there was little question that they were Native American in origin. Writing prior to the Louisiana Purchase (1803) and the subsequent pressure to expand the western frontier, he seems relatively open-minded concerning the presence of contemporary Indians

on the ancient landscape he is examining. His description renders them visible rather than “disappeared,” particularly in his mention of “a tradition, said to be handed down from the Aboriginal Indians, that, when they settled in a town, the first person who died was placed erect and earth put about him, so as to cover and support him...” (Peden 98). With the inclusion of this version of the story, Jefferson draws Native tradition into the antiquarian debate surrounding the sites, making available an alternative meaning of non-Western origin to explain the mounds. The extent to which Jefferson credited the Native tradition is questionable; however, by positioning it after the Euro-American debate, he designates this bit of oral history as a viable context for the site he examines.

The exploration of and debate over the mounds and mound builders continued to expand into the nineteenth century in direct proportion to the pressure that was being placed on Native tribes to push further west. In 1812, the American Antiquarian Society (AAS) was founded to explore and preserve North American antiquities (*Transactions and Collections*, 18). In its act of incorporation, the leaders of the AAS cite the importance of “the collection and preservation of the Antiquities of our country, and of curious and valuable productions in Art and Nature” to “enlarge the sphere of human knowledge, aid the progress of science, to perpetuate the history of moral and political events, and to improve and interest posterity” (20). By the 1820s,⁴ the mounds came to be popularly (although not exclusively) viewed as monuments to the destroyed

⁴ By 1820, Caleb Atwater had begun the first systematic examination of the mounds and the first volume of the *Journal of the American Antiquarian Society* (AAS) was published to make public his and others' findings.

Moundbuilder race, in spite of evidence that suggested otherwise. They were transformed from Indian burial sites into romantic ruins in scientific texts and popular literature of the early decades of the nineteenth century. This shift in rhetoric surrounding the mounds took place alongside changes in U.S. government policy toward Native Americans, especially concerning their land rights: what Amy Sturgis has described as the shift from assimilation to removal (5-6). As Stephen Conn notes, "The invention of the Mound Builders enabled American both to have a 'new world' that was not burdened with the baggage of a familiar, well recorded past, and to use the landscape as a blank canvas upon which they could paint the historical scenes that most suited them" (135).⁵ In her poem "The Genius of Oblivion," Sarah Hale imagines the landscape not only as a blank canvas on which to rewrite the past but as a prophetic instrument that gives a glimpse of the nation's future. In her treatment of prehistoric America, the antiquarian becomes a prophet and visionary as well as an interpreter of the past. She places the weight of archaeological discovery and theory behind the underlying claim of the poem: that Natives have no true "roots" in the landscape, in part because they have left behind no monuments of note. Such a claim made it easier to overwrite contemporary Native claims to and presence on the land with an imaginary preexisting "white" claim that dates to the prehistoric monuments. In "The Genius of Oblivion," Native removal is rewritten as white restoration to ancestral lands.

⁵ Conn also notes that an alternate theory arguing that Native Americans were the "degenerate" descendents of a lost civilization also justified Native eviction and extinction (132).

Public debate in the antebellum period over the origins of the mound builders was spurred on in part because the mounds were threatened by farmers' plows and the pressures of Euro-American sprawl, which continues today as the land is plowed under for highways and other development (*Myths and the Moundbuilders*). The greater cause for argument, however, was the bearing the mounds had on the current situation of Native Americans in the western territories. Writers who depicted modern Indians as the savage destroyers of a highly civilized ancient civilization could justify removal of Native "usurpers." According to historian Bruce Trigger, "The archaeological record was widely interpreted as further evidence of the menace posed by the Indians, who were thereby revealed as destroyers of civilization when given the opportunity" (160). In an early essay on mound builders and American literature, Curtis Dahl comments that a "considerable series" of literary works sprang up around the archaeological debate over this ancient civilization (178). However, there seem to be fewer literary works on the topic than Dahl's comment suggests. While informational articles for lay readers on the mound builders appeared in newspapers and magazines, and a number of best-selling reports were produced on the topic by explorers, archaeologists, and antiquarians, with a few notable exceptions it seems that the literary world overlooked these ancient sites.⁶

⁶ Historian Bruce Trigger describes the impact of mound builder literature on the public imagination: "Books, such as Josiah Priest's *American Antiquities and Discoveries in the West* (1833), expounding the idea that the Moundbuilders were a lost race of civilized people, quickly became best-sellers. So great was the attraction of these narratives that, even after the American physician and anatomist Samuel Morton (1799-1851) had failed to discover any significant differences between the skulls of Moundbuilders and those of recently deceased

However, literary works that did engage with the topic tended to emphasize the tragic end of mound builder civilization and treated the mounds with reverence. William Cullen Bryant, whose poetry was an important source for Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie*, produced some of the most popular pieces on this topic. Published almost a decade after "The Genius of Oblivion" and two years after the Indian Removal Act of 1830, Bryant's poem "The Prairies" (1832) is one of the most prominent antebellum literary works that addresses mound builders. As he scans "the Gardens of the Desert" in "The Prairies," Bryant's speaker imagines the earth he rides over as a grave on which he is trespassing:

I think of those
 Upon whose rest he tramples. Are they here—
 The dead of other days?—and did the dust
 Of these fair solitudes once stir with life
 And burn with passion? Let the mighty mounds
 That overlook the rivers, or that rise
 In the dim forest crowded with old oaks,
 Answer. A race, that long has passed away,
 Built them... (Kane 36).

Bryant theorizes that it was "the red man," "the roaming hunter tribes" that destroyed mound builder civilization, and in voicing this belief echoed a theory that was prevalent into the second half of the nineteenth century. As Dahl has pointed out, "most of the serious archaeologists (and all the crack-brained theorists) concurred with Bryant in thinking that the Mound-Builders were not Indians at all but men of a different and now extinct race" (181-82). Bryant sees the destruction of the mound builders' society in the same light as he sees the passing of "the red man": as part of the cycle of history and the rise and fall of

Indians, he divided his American race into Toltec and Barbarous families on purely cultural grounds" (160).

empires:

Thus change the forms of being. Thus arise
 Races of living things, glorious in strength,
 And perish, as the quickening breath of God
 Fills them, or is withdrawn. The red man too—
 Has left the blooming wilds he ranged so long... (Kane 37).

Just as the mound builders once teemed on the prairies, so will white civilization triumph—if, as Bryant intimates, only for a time. The “domestic hum” of the colonizing bees in line 115 interrupts his musing and heralds this new age of civilization in the west. While Bryant’s poem turns near the end toward intimations of a bountiful future, his final line, “And I am in the wilderness alone,” brings the poem sharply into the present and leaves it with an ambiguous ending. The moment marks the end of his meditations and the clearing of a landscape crowded with past and future inhabitants. The catastrophe of antiquity and the “advancing multitude” of the future vanish, and the silence is not a little foreboding. The poem’s final line is a momentary pause in the face of a relentlessly looming future.

Bryant’s progressive yet cyclical view of history is echoed in the allegorical paintings of Thomas Cole in the 1830s, particularly in his series *The Course of Empire* (1834-1836); in this series, Cole depicts the stages of empire from its beginnings in the “Savage” state to its fall in “Desolation.” Angela Miller has described Cole’s work as a critique of materialism in American culture and politics (24). As Miller and others have noted, Old Testament “catastrophic” literature and images published from the 1830s up to the Civil War were a cultural expression of concern about the direction of the nation (35). The

supposed destruction of the mound builder civilization by the ancestors of modern Indians arose at this time as another “catastrophic” event. However, its difference from Classical or Old Testament stories of disaster lay in the fact that the slaughter supposedly took place on American soil. After the Civil War, archaeologists made comparisons between the horrific battles between North and South and the destruction of the mound builders thousands of years before. In his report on “Fort Ancient” in 1890, Warren Moorehead juxtaposes the two epic wars: “Imagine the battle fields of the South 500 years hence—how many evidences of the huge struggles would then exist? If comparatively few bones of those who fell should alone remain at so distant a period, who would be so foolish as to conclude that only a few men were killed?” (117) The mounds’ presence transforms the western wilderness into a region with a military and cultural past, which writers like Bryant and Hale attempted to shape into a historical narrative. The ruins do not preserve a particular “memory,” but they do memorialize the fact of past existence. As Hale expresses it in her poem,

 Their sole memorial this—we may
 (The epitome of marble) say,
 They lived—for here their works arose;
 They died—for here their bones repose (33-34)

Andrew Szegedy-Maszak points out that ancient landscapes were seen in the nineteenth century as “a direct connection with the past” (14). The landscape provides both Bryant and Hale with a material connection between past, present, and future. As a link between human and natural history, landscape history imposes contemporary historical theories, such as the stadialist model of

civilization, on the natural world.⁷

It is the poet's role to translate this landscape history into art, and Bryant does this in part through his "archaeological vision" of the prairies. He is concerned not only with the beautiful surface features of the land but with assigning meaning to the natural and man-made objects that lie beneath it, drawing them into a romantic narrative of the progress of Euro-American civilization. Thus he reads the prairies not merely for their value in the present, but for the purpose they must have served in the past as pasture and garden: functions they will provide again for the incoming white settlers (Kane 36). The landscape in "The Prairies" retains the "historical record" of the mound builders but leaves out the important details of the fall of Native American civilization in the East; the natives have not been driven out, but "have left." The decision appears to have been theirs, and there is no mention of white-native conflict. Most of the important game animals, such as the beaver and bison, have also left the region. Their absence provides clues to the human territorial conflict; for example, the beaver have retreated to "waters whose blue surface ne'er gave back / The white man's face" (37). While Bryant naturalizes the ascendancy of white civilization, these lines suggest that racial conflict underlies this supposedly "natural" process.

⁷ George Dekker summarizes the stadialist model: "According to these philosophical historians [Adam Ferguson, William Robertson, Dugald Stewart], there were four main stages of society resulting from those four basic modes of subsistence: (1) a 'savage' stage based on hunting and fishing; (2) a 'barbarian' stage based on herding; (3) a stage considered 'civilized' and based mainly on agriculture; (4) a stage based on commerce and manufacturing which was sometimes considered over-civilized" (75).

The poem's speaker can see mounds, platforms, and walls on the surface of the land. Deprived of a written historical record, he turns to the archaeological record and reads the scene of the mound builders' destruction into these traces in lines 70-72:

The wild beleaguers broke, and, one by one,
The strongholds of the plain were forced, and heaped
With corpses... (37).

Through this imaginative invention, Bryant explains the origins of the mounds using a widely accepted albeit invented historical narrative. The poet's record of landscape history in "The Prairies" attributes prehistoric antiquity to the western lands, thus monumentalizing the entire western landscape, not just the mounds, in his poem. In this way he claims the region as the cultural and intellectual inheritance of the rising white civilization, shutting out any claims by Native Americans to this territory.

Like Bryant, Sarah Hale was interested in writing about the destruction of mound builder civilization and set out to create an epic concerning the rise and fall of their society. Using and documenting a number of archaeological sources, Hale wrote "The Genius of Oblivion," an epic poem that imagines the origins of the mound builders. Her poem takes up many of the same issues as Bryant's, including the representation of the frontier as an archaeological landscape containing antiquities and ruins: traces of America's "classical" roots. However, as I will discuss in the following section, her poetic treatment of the mound builders has as much to do with her self-representation as it does with issues of national identity and history.

II. Sarah Josepha Hale and "The Genius of Oblivion"

Sarah Josepha Hale, the editor of *Godey's Lady's Book* from 1828-1877, is perhaps best known for her editorship of that magazine as well as her writings on domestic life and the proper maintenance of the home. Most of Hale's career was dedicated to writing for and educating women (Okker 56). Works like *Poems for Our Children* (1830) and *Manners, or, Happy Homes and Good Society All the Year Round* (1867) spoke directly to issues of the middle-class home, such as child rearing and entertaining. However, "The Genius of Oblivion" (1823), the title poem and centerpiece of her first published collection of poetry, dealt with the mound builders, a topic that seems to fall well outside the domestic sphere. While *The Genius of Oblivion* brought Hale enough financial success to leave her millinery business and devote her attentions to writing, it was not until the publication of *Northwood* (1827) that she began to gain in popularity and public status as a writer. In critical studies of Hale's early writings, *Northwood* often overshadows *The Genius of Oblivion*, which remains one of the most understudied of Hale's works. Much of the imagery and language in the title poem, a heavily footnoted epic of 1239 lines divided into two cantos, is rather conventional: it is improbable that it will ever be considered a "great" poem. However, it is one of the earliest texts by an American woman that is directly concerned with American archaeology, and the only woman-authored literary text of the antebellum period that deals with the question of the ancient mounds' origins.

Hale made it possible for herself to participate in antiquarian and archaeological discourses that were not traditionally associated with the normative femininity she came to espouse throughout her later career in part because of the way she directs her opening address to her implied male audience in submissive, feminine terms. Nicole Tonkovich has documented an interesting tension in Hale's writing between her intended female audience and an imagined "male" reader. In an analysis of Hale's rhetoric in an autobiographical piece in *Woman's Record* (1853), Tonkovich remarks, "In the process of addressing this masculine readership, Hale demonstrates respect for and mastery of its discursive forms. The autobiographical passage, ostensibly addressed to women, affects the reminiscent tone of conversation. Hale's other writings follow this same general agenda" (34). Tonkovich argues that, because Hale felt she owed her education to her husband and brother, and because "her career as a writer was the literal result of her husband's hom(m)o-social relationships" (53), she saw all of her written productions, including *Godey's Ladies' Book*, as part of a larger network of "hom(m)o-social exchange" (54).

In 1823, Sarah Hale published *The Genius of Oblivion, and Other Original Poems* through one such network; the book was made possible through the financial support of David Hale's Masonic brethren. As a newly widowed mother of five, Hale presented herself at the time not as a rising author but as a woman doing what was necessary to support her family. The book was her first publication and appeals were made in New Hampshire newspapers to purchase it to support her and her children. An article published in a number of New

Hampshire newspapers calls "The Genius" a "good" poem, and appeals "especially" to "all benevolent females, who regard the honor and the dignity of their sex, and like angels of mercy, take pleasure in ministering to the relief of the widow and the fatherless" ("The Genius of Oblivion," 3). However, in her "Dedicatory Poem," Hale primarily pleads with a young male audience to come to her family's aid, while praying that men who may have disliked her husband will not hold past grievances against her orphans:

And may those generous Youths, who boast a mind
Learning may grace, but nature hath refin'd,
Who felt a widow's woe, a woman's claim,
And gave, from sympathy, a patron name,
Feel the proud throb that conscious merit knows (vi)

Hale's addresses to women in this preface appeal more for their sympathy than for direct aid. By signing the poem "by a Lady of New Hampshire," she underlines the propriety of her actions. In Tonkovitch's words, this attribution "does not so much obscure her authorship as emphasize the image of womanly reticence appropriate to a new and impoverished but still socially prominent widow" (53). Ironically for a woman who would later come to celebrate the idea of separate gendered spheres, Hale's early success rested not only on her public appeal for charity, but also on the appeal of the mound builders to the public. Publication of the poem became an opportunity for Hale to showcase her wide and educated reading on the topic, and to reveal her personal connection to the "tragedy" of this ancient civilization. In her dedicatory appeal Hale cautions those who reject her offering that their decision might help bring the family to ruin and "crush them in the dust, a sacrifice" (vii). Thus the topic of the poem gestures toward Hale's

personal straits: her family is a delicate “civilization” whose fate is at the mercy of public saints and savages. This juxtaposition seems to allow Hale to carefully maintain a “feminine” voice while addressing a debate that, in part, centered on important questions of American land policy and identity in the nineteenth century.

Additionally, while the history of the mound builders was a topic of interest for men and women, Hale’s appeal to her male audience in the dedicatory poem reinforces her position of humility in relation to her subject as well as her patrons. While this is a common gesture in prefatory poems and dedications, it takes on a special meaning when a woman poet references herself in relation to a subject that is generally thought beyond the scope of women writers—that lies outside the “histories” that women became masters of in the nineteenth century. For here Hale is relying not on the authority of male-authored classical histories, but on her own antiquarian authority: on her imagination and theories of the past, and on her archaeological view of the landscape. For the most part, the study of the ancient civilization of the mound builders was the province of male authors, scientists, and explorers, who were often supported by organizations such as the American Philosophical Society and American Antiquarian Society. By the 1830s, archaeological texts like Josiah Priest’s *American Antiquities and Discoveries in the West* (1833) were immensely popular and widely read (Trigger 160). However, the subject does not seem quite appropriate for a bereaved woman and mother like Hale. While she introduces herself to her readers with proper “womanly reticence,” she also inserted herself in a male-dominated field, not only

as an artist who turned to the idea of the mound builders for inspiration, but also as a voice—albeit a “footnoted” one—in the debate itself.

Published three years after Caleb Atwater’s groundbreaking 1820 article “Description of the Antiquities Discovered in the State of Ohio and other Western States,” “The Genius of Oblivion” imaginatively traces the landscape of a young man’s westward journey and culminates with a fantastical vision upon one of the great Ohio mounds. The main character, Ormond, a romantic young hero of “Grecian” features, has great sensibility and imagination. His thoughts and spirit are constantly engaged by the land around him, and he yearns to explore the rivers, mountains, and prairies of the west. Hale begins his quest for these new views with a “call” to Ormond—“Columbia’s Pride”—to explore his own country rather than tour the ruins of the Old World:

Come trace your vast inheritance;
 Thence is your strength, your glory thence --
 A wall no engine shakes, no foe
 Its passes, or its guards may know.
 And let the "ancient cities" tread
 The mould'ring rubbish of their dead --
 --
 The broken column, ruined wall,
 At once their pride and shame recall --
 Ours the fresh joy existence knows,
 When youth and health all rapture glows;
 With Ormond follow nature free,
 And feel the worth of Liberty (15).

Hale’s critique of Old World monuments in these stanzas rests both on the notion, older than the nation itself, that American shores offer a respite from European corruption, and on the idea that the mounds contain productions of an elite past civilization rather than humble Indian artifacts. The beauty and

grandeur of America's natural monuments is to be treasured when compared with the "rubbish" and shame of the past evoked by European and Old World ruins.

In her critique of Old World antiquity, Hale also participates in a debate that began in the early republican period over the worth of a landscape with no apparent traces of ancient civilizations—traces that were readily visible in the ruined castles, temples, and roadways of Britain and Europe. Gordon Sayre describes this problem in terms of the issues it posed for the republic's leaders, and who found the mounds a perfect "blank slate" of history and antiquity on which American history could be rewritten: "This opportunity for speculation arose from the indeterminacy of the mounds, for it was possible to view them as at once architectural and natural, as the work of human cultures or of Nature, as ruins of a distant past or signs of an immanent future" (226). Michael Roth has pointed out that the interpretation of a ruin depends a great deal on how it became a ruin, whether through natural causes, war, or other reasons (11-13). As prehistoric ruins whose origins have not survived in collective memory, the mounds are open to interpretation where Old World ruins often have extensive written and oral traditions that explain their histories. Sayre remarks, "The American cultural elite was sensitive to accusations that the continent lacked any of the classical history on which Europeans founded their common culture, and the mounds appeared as sudden evidence of such an antiquity" (226). The central question of this debate asked whether a land without roots in antiquity could hope to support a great future civilization. As Bryant demonstrates in "The Prairies," the discovery of the ancient mounds seemed to offer at least the material

evidence of a landscape history demanded by the American imagination, even though, in its tale of annihilation, this "history" had its own associated anxieties.

Concerns that America might not measure up to Europe are also traditionally expressed in favorable comparisons of the American landscape with the European, particularly in writing emerging from the neoclassical and Romantic traditions of the eighteenth century. In "The Genius of Oblivion," Hale alludes to mythological and real places in Italy and Greece that evoke the Muses and higher thought as well as the beauties of nature and transplants the aesthetic pleasures of the Grecian landscape to the American west:

For here were scenes and sweets might vie
 With Tusculum, or Italy --
 And fountains as Castalian clear;
 And silver streams meandering near;
 And grots Egeria's self might haunt;
 And groves that but a goddess want;
 And Muses ne'er, on Attic ground,
 A holier home or temple found
 Than Liberty would guarantee --
 A Tempe fruitful, fair, and free! (32)

These particular allusions reveal Hale's romantic vision of the landscape as, above all, a dwelling place—whether of creatures, ideas, or ideals like liberty. Hale's references are appropriate not only because of the statement they make about America's being a natural home for the poetic muse but also because they fit into a sacred landscape of domesticity where the poetic imagination may find a truly "holy home." The landscape nurtures the imagination while the poet, as Hale demonstrates here, imaginatively reproduces the landscape in her poetry. With the domestic infrastructure of nature in place, the classicized American landscape is ready to receive and house philosophers, poets, and dreamers like

Ormond. If we look at him as the American imagination personified, then the ruins of Greece, Rome, or Egypt are not what will properly stimulate him—not “the broken column, ruined wall.” The “pride and shame” inherent in the traditions surrounding Old World structures corrupt their integrity as sources of inspiration.

The romantically classicized landscape in the poem also blurs the boundaries between natural history and human history, and between nature and the built environment. While the American landscape may lack ruined temples, its character as “dwelling place” and Hale’s classical topography point to nature itself as a temple. Certainly, Wordsworth and other British Romantic poets wrote of their experiences of nature alongside picturesque ruins, as in Wordsworth’s “Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abby” (1798). But in the romantic worldview, ruins themselves are often depicted as much a part of nature as of art. Roth has described the importance of the natural component of ruins in how they are interpreted, particularly in the nineteenth century:

Ruins...not only signal mortality, they point at a deep belonging to the natural world, a world that is less our inevitable tomb than our eternal home. This is certainly a powerful theme in nineteenth-century romanticism. The poet walking among the ruins does not feel the terror of the sublime but instead is swept along by nature’s capacity to integrate different stages of human development into a balanced whole. Nature is not perceived as devouring the works of men and women so much as welcoming them back (5).

In his discussion of the nature of ruins, Roth describes a hybrid landscape where the line between nature and art is difficult to draw. Similarly, the civilized regions of America in Hale’s poem are hybrid landscapes, or places in which the natural contains and is a part of the artificial. Her descriptions of this landscape include a view of a pastoral valley with homes, farms, and industry: “Where art and nature,

hand in hand, / Their treasures or their toil display" (20). For Hale, the places where Americans tread are important sources of inspiration for the ideals of the republic, especially the idea of liberty and the capacity to imagine future greatness; the pastoral landscape is presented here as the ideal fulfillment of the promises of American civilization. However, in her description of what Leo Marx has referred to as the "middle landscape" (226), industry, agriculture, and nature coexist in a balance that ignores the tolls that industry and settlement took on the landscape. In Marx's words, sentimental descriptions like this "enabled the nation to continue defining its purpose as the pursuit of rural happiness while devoting itself to productivity, wealth, and power. It remained for our serious writers to discover the meaning inherent in the contradiction" (226). In "The Genius of Oblivion," the ancient mounds are drawn into Hale's optimistic, idealistic presentation of the pastoral landscape. They are linked in her imagination to the ancient city of Tyre, from which exiles brought a harmonious domesticity to the New World. In her preferred version of mound builder theory, the ancestors of contemporary Native Americans destroyed this early civilization. Hale's poem re-appropriates a landscape that had been left to ruin. Instead of a place populated by Native Americans, she presents a succession of sites that are visually consumed by the young adventurer Ormond, who in turn imaginatively restores the frontier and its ruins to their potential as the site of a great civilization.

As Ormond travels through the Allegheny Mountains, he has a fateful meeting with a hunter who describes the ancient mounds to him. Dividing the rivers that flow into the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean, the Alleghenys

mark an important “departure” in the hero’s journey—from pleasant woodlands to harsh mountainous places, and from innocence to experience. The mountains evoke the terror of the sublime, as in this passage describing Ormond’s perilous climb:

And o'er the Alleghany's steep
 His rugged course prepared to keep. --
 And wary was his footing held,
 Slowly, yet oft to pause compelled,
 Where scattered fragments, tempest riven,
 And from the rock's huge masses driven,
 Lay heap'd, and choked the broken path,
 Yawned some horrid gulph beneath
 There stubborn guilt must shrink to see
 One step might reach Eternity! (18)

While the features of this landscape communicate gothic and sublime terror, especially in the threat of a deadly fall into the horrible chasm, they also emphasize the geological processes of the earth: the antiquity of the land itself. This is especially revealed in the words “scattered,” “riven,” “driven,” “choked,” and “yawned.” Each of these verbs evokes agency and authority in the subject—the mountains themselves—as well as geological changes over time. The scene is also suggestive of the contemporary discussions among geologists concerning the processes that shaped the earth. Before Charles Lyell published his *Principles of Geology* in 1830, Georges Cuvier and others espoused the predominant view that large-scale geological changes were caused by sudden “catastrophic” events (Lyell x).⁸ Hale’s language indicates that, like the

⁸ As Martin J.S. Rudwick points out in his introduction to the 1990 facsimile of *Principles of Geology*, Lyell’s work popularized an alternative theory: he “argued forcefully that ‘modern causes,’ *acting at their present intensities*, were entirely adequate to explain the evidence of the past” (x).

landscapes marked with ruined mounds, this place has seen catastrophic change. The "scattered fragments" suggest a period of violent titanic changes in the earth that capture the sublime imagination. However, as the observable production of geological forces the landscape becomes much more than a scene inspiring terror: it also stimulates Ormond's imagination and the intellect. As he walks through the mountains, Ormond assigns symbolic meaning to each physical feature that he encounters, from the clouds above and the mountain peaks to the strata of the earth. His knowledge of geology augments his appreciation of the landscape; he not only admires the beauty and larger ideas inspired by the mountain but also understands it in a quantitative, scientific way. This empirical understanding does not compromise his appreciation of the landscape as something to view, although it seems to disarm the worst of the terror that the view inspires.

Ormond's knowledge of geology, combined with his ability to appreciate the American pastoral landscape as a combination of nature and human art, is the foundation for his interests in ancient human artifacts.⁹ When the experienced hunter describes the ancient mounds lying further to the west, his sensitive imagination is immediately aroused:

But nothing, with romantic zest,
 Created such deep interest,
 As when the Western wilds they draw,
 Describe those ancient Forts they saw,
 And those huge Mounds where, buried, lie

⁹ Geology, antiquarianism, and archaeology remained closely connected and often blurred together in the popular imagination throughout the nineteenth century. Melville, for example, introduces "an antiquarian of a geologist" in "The Encantadas" (1854) (Berthoff 105).

Secrets of dark antiquity.... (24).

Wilderness and civilization intersect here in the “mystery” of the mounds—in the void beyond the historical record—as well as in the mounds’ physical appearance. Archaeologists exploring the ancient sites often described the grass, trees, and brush growing over them; except for their geometrical precision and shape, the mounds could blend into the landscape as well as other hills. Additionally, as earthworks, the mounds have a geological as well as a human history. Throughout the nineteenth century, archaeologists relied on the geological data in the mounds to date them and to better understand their construction, and to help solve the puzzling “mystery” of their origins. Hale’s part in this interpretive effort is twofold; her role as a poet is to make the mounds “speak” through the vehicle of literature. She writes that the “secrets of dark antiquity” lie buried,

So deep that fancy checks her flight,
 Consigning to Oblivion’s night
 Those wonders of the olden dead,
 That speak, beneath our silent tread,
 Of nations perished—Kingdoms fled! (24-25).

Ormond ultimately sets out to dispel “Oblivion’s night” and unearth the mysteries of the prehistoric landscape. Hale goes on in the poem to literally parade these buried secrets across the stage of history, personifying Oblivion as the narrator of the sequence of events that led to the mounds’ construction.

As built structures within the wilderness, the mounds also mirror another process of transition: that of the settlement and expansion of the western frontiers. Just as ruins signify the transition from culture to nature that occurs

across the span of thousands of years, Euro-American westward settlement, particularly leading up to the 1830 Indian Removal Act, signifies the cyclical return to civilization from a transitory "savage state." However, in spite of the seeming "naturalness" of this cycle and of writers' attempts to bring the mounds into a larger American narrative, the earthworks unsettle the narrative process. The lack of written history or tradition surrounding the mounds paradoxically places them "outside of" the cycle of history that they are meant to be a part of, and speculation must take the place of knowledge.

In her antiquarian role, Hale seeks to interpret these sites and unearth their hidden narrative according to her imaginative response—a narrative that she constructs alongside careful consultation with various archaeological sources on the ruins. Her footnotes transform the poem into part of the antiquarian debate over the identity of the mound builders, blurring the boundaries of genre in the piece. Hale saw her footnotes as important to the interpretation of and general interest in her subject. While a number of written descriptions of the mounds antedate her poem, at least one of her sources for the original military use of the mounds was Atwater's 1820 article, which is considered the first major systematic archaeological contribution to the study of the mounds in the nineteenth century (Conn 15). Several of Hale's footnotes are word-for-word quotations from Atwater, as in this description of the mounds:

There are two forts, one being an exact circle, the other an exact square. The former is surrounded by two walls, with a deep ditch between them; the latter is encompassed by one wall, without any ditch. The circle is 69 feet in diameter, measuring from outside to outside of the outer wall; the square is exactly 55 rods, measuring the same way. The walls of the circular fort were, at least, 20 feet in height, measuring from the bottom of the ditch,

before the town of Circleville was built (68).

Though Hale does not attribute the quote to Atwater, her selection of a passage with such precise measurements and descriptions offsets the fanciful “viewless opera” that she goes on to create in her poem. In her notes, Hale carefully provides rationales for her flights of fancy. The notes root the poem in “fact” in spite of its fantastic scenes, and provide a foundation for Hale’s imaginative narrative. They locate the poem within literature that included cutting-edge research on mound builder culture.

In spite of increasingly sophisticated investigations, however, the ancient ruins and their contents could never be made to “speak” their histories conclusively. By 1890, Warren Moorehead would declare that the mound known as “Fort Ancient” would never be completely understood by scientists, who had failed to supply a conclusive narrative of the landscape’s history through scientific methods. He narrates his frustration in an eloquent scene posed above a skull, both *memento mori* and a reminder of the limitations of archaeology, before finally concluding, “Fort Ancient will never tell us; and we must confess that this fortification is a *great, unsolved mystery* (118).”¹⁰

In 1823, however, the mound builders’ origins were open to wide speculation and interpretation. Dahl lists some of the possibilities: “[Josiah] Priest, after reviewing the evidence for their being antediluvians, Polynesians, Phoenicians, Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, Israelites, Scandinavians, Welsh, Scots, and Chinese, comes to the conclusion that at least they were white” (182).

¹⁰ Italics Moorehead’s.

Moorehead himself seems to have believed that the mound builders' modern descendents had degenerated from the state of their illustrious forebears, especially when he prods among their bones: "The shape of the skull would indicate, it seemed to us, mental power above the average Indian" (117).

Theories of the mound builders' origins could be used to project particular values onto contemporary American society; however, by end of the century it was widely recognized that the mounds were the product of modern Native Americans' ancestors.

Native Americans are conspicuously absent from Hale's western landscape. In fact, the wilderness that Ormond travels through holds no traces of modern Indians, whereas the strongholds of the mound builders provide a "living" link with the "first Americans"—in this case, fugitives from the ancient city of Tyre. In a footnote Hale remarks, "They could not be savages, according to our idea of the term. May we not rather imagine them to be exiles from some powerful eastern nation, or city, that flourished at an early period of the world?" (72) The theory of the mound builders' destruction at the hands of "savages" was almost universally accepted through mid-century (Conn 135). Hale had planned to write another poem that would focus on the destruction of the mound builders by Indian tribes, never completing the project (Dahl 185-86). However, through the Native Americans' absence, "The Genius of Oblivion" weighs in on the important issue of Native territory in the 1820s. By making the Euro-American Ormond the "heir" of this land, the poet indirectly answers the question of Natives' territorial rights that was eventually legislated in the Indian Removal Act of 1830. Unlike

the “usurping” Indian savages who were thought to have destroyed mound builder civilization, Ormond—as a fellow “civilized” man—is the rightful heir to the land. Hale situates Ormond as the heir not only of the land, but of the heritage and traditions of those who built the ruins that he explores.

With his Orpheus-like ability to “compose” landscapes through his pastoral song and eye, Ormond becomes the key to organizing these landscapes of antiquity into an agreeable interpretive framework. At the mounds he comes into his own as interpreter and prophet. In “The Genius of Oblivion,” excavation becomes an imaginative rather than a physical process. As “the seat of imagination,” the mounds become the dramatic stage where Hale sets the action of Canto II, and the landscape the “dramatic scenery” for the drama of history. Amidst a violent storm, the figure of the Genius of Oblivion appears beneath a lightening-arched proscenium. He is like a black hole personified, representing all loss and decay that affects human accomplishments, positions, and persons over time. He is the singer of the “viewless opera,” and recounts the many past civilizations that have eventually succumbed to oblivion:

Millions, countless millions, lie
 Quenched in our eternity!
 Assyria, Persia, Grecia, Rome,
 Moulder 'neath our blackened dome—
 Ashes scattered—altars crushed,
 Are our incense—offrings wished—
 And beneath our temple hid
 Is the towering pyramid (41).

From these images of decayed ancient places, the Genius chooses to showcase the destruction of Tyre in his opera. Hale saw Tyre as a reasonable origin for mound builder civilization: “In the selection of Tyrians for my adventurers, I was

guided, merely by the circumstance of their superiority in maritime knowledge, connected with their power, wealth, and enterprising industry" (72). The Genius describes the glories of the ancient city, which Ormond can "see" from the mound.

In her descriptions of a Tyrian sea battle, the poet makes use of her historical knowledge. However, she also chooses to present us with a fictional narrative of family survival: of America as a proper "dwelling place" for an elite civilization and as the recipient of an honorable, ancient domesticity. Central to Oblivion's opera is the romance of Avron and Cora, followed by their wedding banquet. Avron later safeguards his bride from adultery and possible rape at the hands of the tyrant, and they flee across the Atlantic to American shores. In her vision of America as the new home of the young couple, Hale allows us to view it as a land first populated by the nucleus of family life: a bride and bridegroom. The poem, with its focus on the marriage ceremony and sacredness of the creation of a new family unit as the ultimate source of mound-building culture, make the mounds a site of memory for the institution of this marriage as well as the passing of human life. They are reminders of the domestic foundations of the nation, even in prehistory. "The Genius of Oblivion" imparts a personal story of marriage and domestic partnership to the ancient American landscape, which in most writings is notable for its military might and eventual destruction at the hands of Native Americans. For Hale, the mounds were monuments that honored something else: the salvation of the sanctity of marriage, the true "founding institution" of the first American civilization. Hale's use of the mounds to

monumentalize not only "Columbia's first inhabitants" but also the institution of marriage and domesticity in the New World reveals as much about Hale's personal situation in 1823 as it does about the state of the nation's past, present, or future. The story of Avron and Cora and the domestic interpretation of the ancient mounds is in many ways an appropriate story for the widowed poet to tell.

Although the poem never gained a large national audience, "The Genius of Oblivion" presents an argument for white "re"-appropriation of western lands—an argument that Hale would make again in her short story "An Adventure at the West" (1837), which appeared in *Godey's Lady's Book* during her editorship. Sedgwick offers a more nuanced examination of the relationship of white settlers to native lands in her popular novel *Hope Leslie* (1827), published only three years before the Indian Removal Act (1830).¹¹ The decade leading up to the act saw increasing encroachment onto Native lands, especially in parts of Georgia and the Southeast (Perdue and Green 45).¹² It also saw changes in attitudes toward Native Americans as a race capable of being civilized and assimilated to one that had to be removed from the land in order to enlarge the territory of the white nation (43-44). Removal was not an exclusive concern of the southeastern states; it became a national issue. The Removal Act

¹¹ The most famous incident of Indian Removal, known as the "Trail of Tears," took place when the Cherokee Nation was forced from Georgian lands in 1838-39 (Sturgis xiii).

¹² Tribes who were still extant in the southeast after 1814 and were slated for removal included Choctaws, Chickasaws, Cherokees, Creeks, and Seminoles (Perdue and Green 45).

followed a series of debates and judicial decisions in Washington and was disputed within contemporary periodicals throughout the 1820s. The debate over removal was fueled by both economic and ideological changes. As the price of cotton swiftly increased in the first two decades of the nineteenth century, the demand in states like Georgia for Native lands to grow the valuable crop did the same.¹³ Pressure on Native lands was compounded by an increasing need by the dominant Euro-American population to define American national and cultural identity against that of its British and European counterparts, and to establish and increase racial as well as territorial borders. In what Purdue and Green have described as "the emergence of romantic nationalism" in the early nineteenth century, the American landscape crystallized as "a white man's country" (44). Problematically, Native American tribes of the Southeast (and throughout the continent) had already "inscribed their identity on the landscape" (10), most dramatically in the form of ancient flat-top mounds (9). "Indian" country would need to be appropriated within the discourse of the dominant white culture, a project that was especially suitable for writers.

Because the written word was considered a hallmark of a more highly developed society, it was the perfect medium for the imaginative appropriation of the landscape that accompanied physical seizure of Native lands, and for the simultaneous creation of a literary culture that could rival those across the

¹³ According to Donna L. Akers, "The price of cotton on the world market had doubled from 1814 to 1816, old cotton lands were exhausted, and plantation owners needed new land on which to deploy their slaves and expand cotton production. Recent immigrants and American citizens without land sought farmland to support themselves and their families" (22).

Atlantic. As Lucy Maddox has observed, the removal debate trickled into various written materials, from children's school readers to literary magazines (31). The latter, she points out, "began to publish more and more sentimental eulogies for the vanishing Indian" (31). While the romanticization of Natives, especially in the figure of the Native warrior or chief, was common in European writing of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries,¹⁴ Maddox argues that the figure of the romantic Indian became an essential element of antebellum American fiction aiming to differentiate itself from European literature (37). Maddox includes Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie* in her discussion of early nineteenth-century writers who explored native/white encounters in the colonial period, participating in the creation of a national literary culture.

III. Catharine Maria Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie*

In a letter to her beloved childhood friend Everell Fletcher, Hope Leslie describes a journey to the top of a mountain on the colonial Massachusetts frontier. It can only be reached by an Indian footpath with the conduct of an Indian guide, and upon reaching the top, Hope is struck by the beauty of the forest views; she wonders, "have they been seen and enjoyed only by those

¹⁴ In *Aristocratic Encounters*, Harry Liebersohn documents the shift from neoclassical to romantic depictions of Indians in European texts. He argues that, initially, "dressing up Indians in classical descriptions was a way to endow them with republican virtues" (Liebersohn 4). By the 1830s, he notes that "elite visitors" from Europe had come to associate Jacksonian removal policies with the class destruction wrought by the "Terror" in post-revolution France "as part of the cost of progress" (3-4).

savages, who have their summer home in them?" (Kelley 100) While she muses on the hidden mysteries of the forests, her companions, Elizur Holioko and William Fletcher, strike up a conversation about the landscape below:

'The Romans, you know, brother Fletcher, had their Cenotapha, empty sepulchers, in honour of those who died in their country's cause, and mouldered on a distant soil. Why may we not have ours? And surmise that the spirits of those who have died for liberty and religion, have come before us to this wilderness, and taken possession in the name of the Lord?' We lingered for an hour or two on the mountain. Mr. Holioko and your father were noting the sites for future villages, already marked out for them by clusters of Indian huts. The instinct of the children of the forest guides them to these rich intervals, which the sun and the river prepare and almost till for them. While the gentlemen were thus engaged, I observed that the highest rock of the mountain was crowned with a pyramidal pile of stones, and about them were strewn relicts of Indian sacrifices (100).

While Hope's initial view of the landscape is filled with nature's "myriad of little spirits" (99), and she concludes that anyone who does not see this "must have a torpid imagination, and a cold heart," Holioko envisions the landscape as an "empty sepulcher"—notable not for the relics it contains, but because it is a symbolic empty space, evoking settlement history and ready to be filled by the new settlers (100). While it is still physically present in the scene, the Indian village fades beneath the vision of the white settlement that will be constructed on its remains. When Hope points out the artifacts in the landscape that speak of the Natives' presence on the land—"Indian relicts" and a "pyramidal pile of stones"—Holioko dismisses these as forms of "worship to an unknown God" (100-01). He insists that these traces be overwritten through "consecration" of the landscape to the Christian God, and Hope suggests they rename the place "Mount Holioko" (101). Hope's joke reveals the extent to which the landscape is a

projection of Holioko's desires, just as it was a mirror of her own fancies about fairies and spirits.

This scene is key to understanding the rhetoric of the archaeological landscape in Sedgwick's historical romance. Through Hope's eyes she presents a report from the front lines of the frontier: an ideologically embattled place that is being claimed by both Native Americans and white settlers. For the Native Americans in the novel, the countryside is shaped by the processes of their society: the village is placed in a favorable part of the landscape, the trails that lead to it have been worn down by generations of travelers, and the peak of the mountain is crowned by a Native monument: the altar and "relicts," a word that describes the remnants of sacrifice while also suggesting something that persists in spite of a kind of universal diminishment of its kind. Native lifeways have shaped the surface of the land over time, including a limited and specific access to the place by way of winding footpaths. Euro-American characters like Holioko who have come to scout the land for future settlement cannot relate to the place through this type of lived experience. Instead, Holioko replaces the material evidence of the living with a symbolic empty space to evoke the memory of the dead, embedding a particular version of the frontier struggle and a particular idea of "liberty and religion" in the landscape.

Through these opposed images, this scene gets at one of the central problems of the text: sympathy for Native Americans clashes with their simultaneous vanishing and banishment from the landscape. The spaces of *Hope Leslie* are organized around particular artifacts that determine the

relationships between the urban center and the frontier, as well as relations between Euro- and Native Americans. The artifacts in the novel's landscapes link the characters to the practice of space, to issues of surveillance and power, and to Sedgwick's creation of a "disciplinary landscape" in *Hope Leslie*. For the rest of this chapter, I will discuss how the tensions between "appropriated" and "dominated" space, between "lived space" and "disciplinary space," arise in the monuments and relics of *Hope Leslie*'s landscapes. Sedgwick uses artifacts and relics to create an archaeological landscape in which fragmented Native bodies and traces of Native lifeways persist alongside living Native characters like Magawisca and her family. In addition to the vision of Mount Holyoke in the beginning of this section, I will consider two other major scenes: Magawisca's sacrifice and the meeting of Hope and Magawisca in the Boston graveyard. I will include a discussion of the importance of Sedgwick's epigraphs to her monumentalized landscapes and to her "antiquarian" identity, examining how they represent a tradition in antebellum American literature and how Sedgwick refracts the contemporary crisis of Indian Removal policies through these fragments.

As a novel written in the 1820s that dramatizes white/Native relations, *Hope Leslie* seems to be a response to Indian Removal. In addition to Maddox, a number of critics have placed *Hope Leslie* in the context of the removal debate in discussions that connect antebellum writers' use of the colonial past to the Indian debates of the 1820s and '30s. Most critics agree that on the subject of Indian Removal policies *Hope Leslie* is at best dismissive and at worst complicit. Philip

Gould's 1994 article "Catharine Sedgwick's 'Recital' of the Pequot War" constructs what Maureen Tuthill would later label a "traditional" reading of *Hope Leslie*: the novel is a "revisionary history" that "critiques...Puritan sources" (641-42).¹⁵ Gould writes that Sedgwick, through her narrative structure, "effectively emancipates readerly sympathy for the Pequots consumed by flames, and hence recovers the humanitarian pathos at the core of domestic virtue which Puritan histories—and their early national descendents—successfully suppress" (646). However, Gould comes upon the problem that later critics would flag as evidence of Sedgwick's indifference to or complicity in the contemporary plight of Native Americans: the "removal" of Magawisca at the novel's end.

In her 1998 article "My Sister! My Sister!": The Rhetoric of Catharine Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie*," Judith Fetterley argues that "we might fault [Sedgwick] for participating in the 'cult of the Vanishing American,' that 'elegaic mode' so common to the literature of the period" (509). Fetterley points out that although "Sedgwick acknowledges...the actual motive behind the removal of Native Americans (the desire for their land), and though she herself may well have protested the Indian Removal Act of 1830, she does not choose to use her text as an opportunity to challenge American complacency and complicity in removal" (509). More recently, Maureen Tuthill argues that *Hope Leslie* "condones the

¹⁵ These sources, according to Gould, included John Winthrop's *The History of New England* (1630-49, compiled in 1825 and 1826), and William Hubbard's *The Present State of New-England, Being A Narrative of the Troubles with the Indians in New England* (1677). For Tuthill's characterization of the scholarship see page ninety-five of "Land and the Narrative Site in Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie*."

Indian removal policies of pre-Jacksonian America when the Pequot princess Magawisca departs at the novel's close...she must go for Sedgwick's vision of the young nation to be fulfilled" (95). Rather than implicating colonial politics in the appropriation of Native lands and the destruction of Native tribes, Sedgwick's novel "exonerates" the Puritans "from two centuries of pent-up guilt over confiscation of Indian lands" (95). For Tuthill, *Hope Leslie* endorses Euro-American land ownership and "a sense of moral entitlement to that land" (96). Her re-examination of Sedgwick's novel reframes the debate on *Hope Leslie*, citing the novel as an example of how nation-building literature imaginatively appropriated Native land while federal and state governments simultaneously pursued Native spaces.

The main difficulty that critics have faced in trying to locate *Hope Leslie* in the nineteenth-century debate over Native American land rights is that the novel creates sympathy for the embattled Native Americans even as it seems to capitulate to the idea that their removal is inevitable. Instead of reading Sedgwick's novel to determine the extent to which it is pro- or anti-Removal, I would propose that it is more useful to consider how the novel exposes the problematic process of "erasing" one cultural history from the landscape and replacing it with another. Sedgwick was more interested in dramatizing the process of appropriation rather than presenting its unchallenged product. *Hope Leslie* does not leave readers with an unequivocal "white, Euro-American" place, as Tuthill suggests, but with an unresolved, multivocal landscape that retains traces of Native American culture in the form of artifacts, relics, and monuments.

Unlike “The Genius of Oblivion,” where the process of appropriation is transparent and presented like a prophetic fulfillment—a return to the nation’s original civilization—*Hope Leslie* exposes the process and lays open not only the workings of imperialism but also the role of the novelist in constructing narratives of territorial appropriation.

It is significant that Sedgwick prefaces *Hope Leslie*, a tale of the relationships and adventures of the Fletcher family and their friends that takes place primarily on the Massachusetts frontier and in colonial Boston, with a consideration of how her historical romance might be received by her “antiquarian reader[s]”: “The antiquarian reader will perceive that some liberties have been taken with the received accounts of Sir Philip (or Sir Christopher) Gardiner; and a slight variation has been allowed in the chronology of the Pequot war” (Kelley 5).¹⁶ Sedgwick’s direct address to the “antiquarian reader” ostensibly distances the work of the historical novelist from the antiquary’s concern with historical accuracy. However, as I discussed in chapter one, Sir Walter Scott had set a precedent for the incorporation of antiquarian discourse in the historical novel, and, though at times he pokes fun at antiquarian practice, he ties it to the formation of the mythologies, histories, and legends that constitute the discourse of landscape nationalism. Ina Ferris’s meditation on Scott’s use of the “antiquarian theme” in *The Antiquarian* (1816), which she claims “serves to demystify historical reason,” is worth considering here (277). Ferris determines

¹⁶ Gould analyzes Sedgwick’s chronological liberties, arguing that she uses an alternative timeline to unlock “the humanitarian pathos” of the Pequot massacre and enable readers to feel sympathy for the Natives’ suffering (646).

that the practice of history-writing

was always...mystified: seen as an obscure form of elite masculine power tied to incomprehensible languages and rites. To place it in comic relation to female gossips and credulous antiquarian amateurs is hence less to expose it as constructed than to bring it into the zone of everyday procedures: a re-naturalizing, one might say, that is at the same time a stripping away (277-78).

If considered in light of Ferris's reading of antiquarian discourse as a kind of feminine deconstruction of the traditionally male-gendered language of the historian, Sedgwick's preface and use of antiquarian imagery can be viewed as a basis for her challenge to patriarchal historiography.¹⁷

In her Preface, Sedgwick cautions one kind of antiquarian—the reader looking for absolute historical accuracy—and suggests that a different approach to antiquarian research can generate an alternative story: in this case, one that privileges feeling, sympathy, and domestic relationships over a strict timeline of events. Her authority over the historical material rests in her ability to use it to evoke, as Gould and others have noted, real feeling and sympathy within her readers. Additionally, her depiction of the colonial landscape authorizes her narrative and characters as historical subjects, for if they never existed in a proper “timeline,” they are configured in a particular place. Continuity of place, in this case the area of colonial New England known as the Massachusetts Bay Colony, as much as continuity of events, gives the old and new texts the sheen of historical authenticity. In Lucy Peltz and Martin Myrone's description,

¹⁷ Such a reading of Sedgwick's antiquarianism validates Gould, Fetterley, Mark G. Vasquez, and others who argue that Sedgwick challenged patriarchal historiography—in Vasquez's words, “Such a participatory, critical, mediatory, reformative role is the role of the female novelist” (180).

antiquarian discourse is concerned with the dialectic between “the status of historical truth and the nature of aesthetic quality” (5). Sedgwick engages with the tension between these two facets of antiquarianism in her Preface.

Perhaps taking her cue from Scott, who was a popular novelist in America during the antebellum period, Sedgwick describes herself as one who has thoroughly conducted “a patient investigation of all the materials that could be obtained” regarding the early history of the Massachusetts colony (Kelley 5). Patience, and not any kind of specialized knowledge, is all that is required to interpret them. Sedgwick also uses terms that emphasize newness, brightness, and a kind of eternalness to describe the antiquated primary texts that she has studied, evoking the aesthetic and a kind of spiritual appeal of the old books. They contain “the clear, copious, and authentic...accounts [of] our ancestors,” created within “the illuminated spots, clear and bright lights, set on the borders of a dark and turbulent wilderness” (5). These are not decaying fragments of the past but divine, incorruptible relics; their persistence through time suggests that New England, particularly “illuminated” Massachusetts, still serves as a kind of forward-thinking “moral lighthouse” or privileged intellectual site within the nation. Sedgwick describes her effort at continuity with these primary documents as simply “to exclude every thing decidedly inconsistent with [colonial times]” from her own text (6). However, regarding the Native American characters and particularly Magawisca, she privileges “the possible” over “the actual” in an act of antiquarian revision not unlike Rebecca Harding Davis’s treatment of Dickinson’s captivity narrative in “A Faded Leaf of History” (1873) later in the century. As

though to drive home the point that hers was an artistic and imaginative rather than an historical (re)vision of the colonial past, Sedgwick warns that the novel is not offered “as an historical narrative”; rather, it “was to illustrate [...] the character of the [colonial] times” (5). Sedgwick’s emphasis on demonstrating “the character” of this period is a proposal to evoke the features, nature, and spirit of the colonial world for her readers, rather than presenting them with a strict historical timeline. The license Sedgwick allows herself through this antiquarian approach enables her to construct landscapes that contain more than one possible “historical narrative” simultaneously. Native and white competition for the land is never quite resolved in the novel, even though Sedgwick presents us with a “happy ending” in which Hope and Everell marry and Magawisca and her people are “removed” from the scene.

In part, the landscapes’ hybridity is due to the persistence of Native traces that cannot always be so neatly co-opted into the “authoritative” Euro-American narrative imposed on the landscape. The persistence of these traces in the landscape at times makes it difficult for the disciplinary strategies of Sedgwick’s white characters to succeed completely.¹⁸ Responding to Foucault’s spatially dependent structures of power, Michel de Certeau brings what he terms “spatial

¹⁸ Both Michel Foucault and Michel de Certeau shed light on the nature of how power and discipline operate spatially, and how this operation affects the construction of public and private memory. In his Introduction to *The Foucault Reader*, editor Paul Rabinow summarizes how space is of key importance to Michel Foucault’s concept of discipline in *Discipline and Punish*: “Discipline proceeds from an organization of individuals in space, and it requires a specific enclosure of space. Once established, this grid permits the sure distribution of the individuals who are to be discipline and supervised” (17). For Foucault, the practice of space is tied to both liberty and “any exercise of power,” whether on the part of the individual or an institution (252).

practices” to bear on the “apparatuses that produce a disciplinary space,” suggesting that all such spaces contain cracks where this space can be reappropriated by those subject to the powers-that-be (96). “Disciplinary spaces” are riddled with “tricky,” unpredictable, and “stubborn” pathways—the “everyday practices” and “lived space” that produce a “disquiet” and resistance within space that is shaped by power structures (96). The dramatic scene of Magawisca’s sacrifice is a good example of how “lived space” can be transformed into “disciplinary space.” There is a shift in meaning behind the Indians’ “sacrifice rock,” a central landmark for the Natives’ village and the site of their important religious and political ceremonies. It becomes associated with a new story, and subsequently emerges as a sign of the Euro-American civilizing vision of the landscape. However, Magawisca’s severed arm, which “slips through the cracks” of the story and disappears over the precipice, is a disquieting relic that remains beneath the surface of this new story.

As Mononotto prepares to execute Everell on the rock, Magawisca interposes and receives the blow, which amputates her arm: “The lopped quivering member dropped over the precipice. Mononotto staggered and fell senseless, and all the savages, uttering horrible yells, rushed toward the fatal spot” (Kelley 93). The arm falls out of sight and the focus of the scene centers on the emotional farewell between Everell and the Pocahontas-like Indian maiden. However, in spite of its disappearance into a kind of “oblivion,” the severed arm remains as a trace that Magawisca has left upon the landscape, marking that place indelibly. A quote from Roth’s discussion of ruins is helpful here; he writes,

"When we frame an object as a ruin, we reclaim that object *from* its fall into decay and oblivion and often *for* some kind of cultural attention and care that, in a sense, elevates its value" (1). Magawisca's maimed body is, in this sense, a "ruin." The absence of her arm serves to recall not only the lost member, but also the traumatic event that caused her physical ruin. If we tend to interpret a ruin according to the events that brought about its ruined state, then the Indian maiden-as-ruin is a reminder of what Roth would call the "pastness" (8) of her society. She is also a sign of the transforming narrative framework and changing interpretations of the Native landscape. Part artifact and part living being, simultaneously a part of the place's history and physical landscape and part of its present social and political landscape, Magawisca's body is a metaphor for the situation of the Natives, who are simultaneously presented as relics "preserved" in the landscape and as living persons.¹⁹

For the native community, Magawisca's arm is also a kind of anti-monument, a term which Charles Merewether describes in light of what it is not:

[it] is not an object with which people can identify, it is not a commemorative form that fills in a gaping hole produced by the events of history. Instead, a negative monument makes a place for the ruins that remain; it allows them to become an anguished site of cultural patrimony, a site that keeps alive a sense of something at the threshold between the impossibility of remembering and the necessity of forgetting (Roth et al 33).

¹⁹ In Chapter 3 I will discuss Susan Fenimore Cooper's nature journal *Rural Hours*, in which she frequently describes the Indians as a people who once inhabited Cooperstown but have "vanished," leaving behind only artifacts like arrowheads and other antiquities; however, at other points in the text she comments upon the Native Americans who live in the area.

The events surrounding Magawisca's maiming transform the Housatonicks from a place associated with Native tradition and religion to one most notable for what it says about white-Indian relations. What was once the symbolic heart of the community, unreachable except for secret, winding Native footpaths, has become a borderland: both in the sense that it now marks a site of traumatic collective memory as Merewether describes above and in the idea that it now shares and preserves the continuity of narrative history between white and Native communities. Sedgwick presents Magawisca's sacrifice as a tragedy that the Pequods bring upon themselves; in this sense, the Indian maiden's maiming is a kind of punishment for the community's desire for revenge. However, it is also a "holy" moment where the community glimpses the nobility of her sacrifice: "To all it seemed that his deliverance had been achieved by miraculous aid. All—the dullest and coldest, paid involuntary homage to the heroic girl, as if she were a superior being, guided and upheld by supernatural power" (Kelley 93). Thus it marks a kind of ideological shift; a "higher form" of worship takes place at a spot once reserved for brutal sacrifice.

The conversion of this sacrifice rock from a place of heathen ritual to Christ-like sacrifice recalls Holioko's vision of consecrating the wilderness: where, standing on the mountaintop, he envisions the "New Jerusalem," like John Winthrop's "city upon a hill,"²⁰ materializing before him. The division of Magawisca's body marks a fragmentation of meaning in a place that Sedgwick describes as the Indians' "holy of holies" (91), part of the Indians' "Jerusalem"

²⁰ The image of the "city on a hill" can be found in Winthrop's 1630 sermon, "A Model of Christian Charity."

(86). To compare this place with Jerusalem is to compare it with perhaps the most monumentalized city in human history, a place important to three of the world's major religions. The image of the sacrifice-rock is one that conjures everything frightening about "savages" to the white reader's imagination.

Magawisca's transforming sacrifice begins to break down the place's former identity, beginning the process of consecration of place into a "New Jerusalem" that white leaders like Holioko desire. This and other scenes in *Hope Leslie* reveal how two ways of being in place and of practicing spatial parameters coexist within the novel's landscapes. One pushes toward conquest while the other resists this movement across the landscape, across space and time.

Through much of the novel these ways of being in place exist in tension with one another, but at times they intersect in particular monuments, artifacts, sites, and landscapes.

While scholars have concluded that the novel's "cultural work" is essentially hegemonic, I would return to the problem of Magawisca and the idea that the novel's archaeological landscape is in essence a multivocal site, a grid of narrative possibilities in which it is difficult to privilege one possible narrative and be completely successful in suppressing the rest. A case in point is sacrifice-rock's dual status as anti-monument and monument, as an artifact that reveals a moment of social rupture and trauma while simultaneously proposing a new narrative to overwrite the old. The graveyard, where Magawisca's and Hope's mothers are buried, is a similarly multivocal site. Hope meets with Magawisca by night in this gothic, romantic setting, where she learns that her sister Faith has

married Magawisca's brother Oneco. Faith no longer speaks English, nor does she want to return to the white community. Approaching the meeting site and expecting to see her sister, Hope instead sees Magawisca praying over her mother's grave:

Hope paused with a mingled feeling of disappointment and awe—disappointment that her sister was not there—and awe inspired by the solemnity of the scene before her—the spirit-stirring figure of Magawisca—the duty she was performing—the flickering light—the monumental stones—and the dark shadows that swept over them, as the breeze bowed the tall pines (Kelley 187).

In this solemn scene, the conversation and thoughts of the two women turn to questions of blood relationships: Hope learns that Faith's father-in-law Mononotto cherishes her "as if his own blood ran in her veins," while Magawisca demands to know whether Hope fears her "blood will be corrupted by mingling with this stream?" (188) Hope feels revulsion at the idea of her sister's marriage and refuses to believe that Faith cannot be recovered from her Indian life, yet feels drawn to Magawisca. The power of the Indian maiden's appeal to Hope arises in part from the place where they meet. The graveyard reveals a physical and spiritual connection between the two women; in Magawisca's words, "here is my mother's grave; think ye not that the Great Spirit looks down on these sacred spots, where the good and the peaceful rest, with an equal eye, think ye not their children are His children, whether they are gathered in yonder temple where your people worship, or bow to Him beneath the green boughs of the forest?" (189). After Magawisca departs, Hope remains and muses on the implications of their mothers' connection in this sacred ground: "'Mysteriously,' she said, as her eye

followed the noble figure of Magawisca, till it was lost in the surrounding darkness, 'mysteriously have our destinies been interwoven. Our mothers brought from a far distance to rest together here—their children connected in indissoluble bonds!' (192)

Graveyards contain a collection of stories, histories, and lives, which are not necessarily related to each other or to the same period of time. Therefore, while a graveyard may represent a particular meaning to a community as a place, the individual monuments within that place may shift or displace the larger meaning entirely. As monuments, the mothers' graves commemorate the lives of two women. Both mark a place of importance to the women's daughters. But while they represent the past, the graves in *Hope Leslie* also delineate the present connection between Hope and Magawisca while suggesting that their futures are also intertwined, their "destinies interwoven." A number of scholars have observed that monumental sites are assigned meaning according to the prevailing political and social needs of the time, and that these needs and the corresponding meaning assigned to the landscape often change over time.²¹ But no single overarching meaning or collective memory encapsulates this graveyard, which contains the remains of whites and a Native woman; instead, it is a "multilocal" landscape, containing different meanings and presenting a

²¹ See, for example, Winfried Herget's "Staging Memory at Plymouth Rock: George Pierce Baker's *The Pilgrim Spirit* (1921)." The imposition of politically expedient meanings on monumental landscapes became particularly important in the political climate after the Civil War, as discussed in Lynn Murray's "A Newly Discovered Country': The Post-Bellum South and the Picturesque Ruin" and in Michael Roth's *Irresistible Decay*.

different relationship to place for Hope and Magawisca.²²

Although Sedgwick stresses the similarity between the women's filial devotion, and Magawisca argues that the Great Spirit looks upon Native and white graves "with an equal eye," the sense of the uncanny that Hope experiences at the scene arises in part from witnessing Magawisca perform Native religious observances over her mother's grave. What is "thrilling" about Magawisca's faith for Hope is not only the level of her devotion to the Great Spirit, but the sense that her attraction to this faith is a dangerous deviation, particularly in this consecrated place. As ground sacred to the Puritans, it reinforces institutional religious belief and practice according to Anglo-American traditions. Magawisca's mother, though she cannot be seen, is an uncanny and foreign element beneath the surface of this place, performing a role similar to that of Magawisca's arm in the wilderness. Thus, while the graves unite the women in many ways, and while they physically stand on the same ground, the graveyard in *Hope Leslie* has no overarching representative meaning. Like sacrifice rock, which was assigned a meaning that was later transformed by the evolving narrative of the two races, and Mount Holyoke, an ideologically embattled landscape whose physical features and imagined ones coexist on one site, the graveyard in *Hope Leslie* represents a multilocal, multivocal site of discipline and

²² For a discussion of multilocal landscapes in archaeology see Rebecca Yamin and Karen Bescherer Metheny's Preface to *Landscape Archaeology* (1996). Here they define "multilocal" as "the idea that 'place'—the meaning of a landscape—is socially constructed at many levels by many individuals and groups: 'a single physical landscape can be multilocal in the sense that it shapes and expresses polysemic meanings of place for different users. Multilocality conveys the idea that a single place may be experienced quite differently [by different people]'" (xvi-xvii)

resistance, where blood mingles in the soil peaceably. It is a significant site in a novel that has at its heart the problem of conflict between whites and Native Americans over land ownership and spatial control.

IV. Conclusion

Unlike the storied ruins of the Old World, particularly Italy and Greece, the ancient mounds of the American landscape held bones but no history. In the antebellum period, their meaning had not been circumscribed by written historical accounts and literary tradition, but was unsettled and unsettling—a skeletal past which antiquarians from Thomas Jefferson on have tried to flesh out with theories and the weight of (often conflicting) evidence. As such, these places became placeholders to be overwritten by a modern civilization. “The Genius of Oblivion,” with its self-conscious performance of the unknown past as a “viewless opera,” leaves little space for an alternative story of the mounds’ history. The past might be “viewless” or invisible, but it is a powerful influence on how Hale imagines the present landscape in her poem. In “The Genius of Oblivion,” the only significant trace that Native Americans have left on the landscape are the ruined fragments of the noble mound-building civilization they destroyed—a civilization which Hale aligns with nineteenth-century values of domesticity. Contemporary society is thus the heir to both the land and the values upon which its original settlers founded their civilization.

Sedgwick, meanwhile, offers a more complex and critical view of the process of imaginative appropriation. Instead of questioning the extent to which *Hope Leslie* is pro- or anti-Removal, I have repositioned it as a novel that tests the limits of “knowledge” inherent in artifacts—and the ability of Euro-American civilization to wield that knowledge absolutely. An antiquarian reading of *Hope Leslie* reveals how Sedgwick’s multi-vocal/multi-local landscapes resist complete appropriation by Euro-American civilization. The sense of the land as “dwelling place” for her Native American characters persists even as the landscape is transformed by white domesticity—the marriage plot of Hope and Everell. Through this reading, *Hope Leslie* regains ground as a novel sympathetic to Native Americans, and certainly as a text that questions the processes by which power operates.

CHAPTER III

THEORIZING THE "NEW COUNTRY": ARCHAEOLOGICAL LANDSCAPES IN SUSAN FENIMORE COOPER'S *RURAL HOURS* AND "A DISSOLVING VIEW"

"We see with our own eyes fresh proofs that we are in a new country..."
 —Susan Fenimore Cooper, *Rural Hours*

In her 1850 nature journal *Rural Hours*, Susan Fenimore Cooper reflects on changes that have occurred in the land around Cooperstown, New York, since the earliest days of European exploration in the region:

At length, nearly three long centuries after the Genoese had crossed the ocean, the white man came to plant a home on this spot, and it was then the great change began; the axe and the saw, the forge and the wheel, were busy from dawn to dusk, cows and swine fed in thickets whence the wild beasts had fled, while the ox and the horse drew away in chains the fallen trunks of the forest. The tenants of the wilderness shrunk deeper within its bounds with every changing moon; the wild creatures fled away within the receding shades of the forest, and the red man followed on their track; his day of power was gone, his hour of pitiless revenge had passed, and the last echoes of the war-whoop were dying away forever among these hills, when the pale-faces laid their hearth-stones by the lake shore. The red man, who for thousands of years had been lord of the land, no longer treads the soil; he exists here only in uncertain memories, and in forgotten graves (*Rural Hours*, 117).

In sweeping epic images, this passage tells the story of the "inevitable": a historical narrative of European colonization in the New World that describes "the great change" which was still taking place on the continent in the nineteenth century. Here Cooper is narrating not only the conquerors' version of American

colonial history, but also the aftereffects of Native American policies and territorial expansion in the 1830s and 1840s. The landscapes in Catharine Maria Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie* (1827), which was written during the years leading up to Indian Removal, reflect an unsettled atmosphere in which the fate of the southeastern tribes was still widely debated. Her landscapes contain multiple competing narratives and persistent traces of Native American culture; furthermore, more than one location may be present in a given place in the novel, especially those contested between whites and Natives. Cooper's landscapes are a product of the intervening years: a time of rapid territorial expansion and the expulsion of Native Americans further and further west. The Indians of Cooperstown only exist in "uncertain memories" and "forgotten graves."¹ In part through this conventional image of the "vanishing Indian," she describes a place that, while no longer a frontier wilderness, is still a "new country." The "spirit and activity of the people" have created what appears to be an "older...civilization" in a new place (139). Cooper presents Cooperstown as "new country" even though, as the boundaries of the nation were expanding further westward, it was becoming relatively "old" territory.

Rural Hours (1850) was written on the heels of great expansion and exploration. The Mexican-American War (1846-48), the discovery of gold in

¹ Cooper contradicts herself on this point, however. In one passage, she remarks upon the Indians who are left in the area: "There are already many parts of this country where an Indian is never seen. There are thousands and hundreds of thousands of the white population who have never laid eyes upon a red man. But this ground lies within the former bounds of the Six Nations, and a remnant of the great tribes of the Iroquois still linger about their old haunts, and occasionally cross our path" (108).

California and the resulting Gold Rush (1849), and increased settlement into the west along the Oregon Trail throughout the 1840s were among the expansionist activities in the decade leading up to Cooper's book. Here I argue that her references to this push westward in *Rural Hours* situate her text as a reaction to the process of territorial expansion and the impact it had on the East, even though it seems in line with Native expulsion and white settlement. Anxieties surface in the text about the destruction, loss, and violence that accompanied rapid industrialization and settlement, particularly in Cooper's descriptions of the destruction of old-growth forests. Perhaps even more troubling to the author was the economic and social impact of the demographic change brought about by westward expansion. In one passage, she discusses the effect of land speculation in the West on the food supply in Cooperstown:

The only approach to anything like scarcity known here since the full settlement of the county, occurred some ten years since; but it was owing to no failure of the crops, no ungenial season, no untimely frost. During the summer of 1838, wheat-flour became scarce in the country, and all that could be procured here was of a very indifferent quality—grown wheat, such as we had never eaten before. It was during the period of infatuation of Western speculation, when many farmers had left their fields untilled, while they followed the speculating horde westward. At that moment, many houses in the county were seen deserted; some closed, others actually falling to ruin, and whole farms were lying waste, while their owners were running madly after wealth in the wilds of Michigan and Wisconsin. The same state of things was general throughout the country, and, united to speculations in wheat, was the occasion of a temporary difficulty (245).

Westward expansion, especially in the form of speculation, could be "madness," a threat to the very infrastructure of society: in this case, the farmers who feed the population. The physical and social impact on those left behind in the East in 1838 was literally "ruin," "waste," and desertion. Although the passage I opened

with is written in strong, assured language, territorial expansion and its attendant demographic changes were a source of anxiety for Cooper. Balanced against her optimism is caution; at times she warns against the depredations committed against historically significant sites in a “new state of society...[a] utilitarian age” (181). The same energy and spirit that was conquering the west was, in her eyes, simultaneously overwriting the Eastern places that she saw as foundational to the American—and her own—identity.

Cooper responds to this threat in *Rural Hours* by chronicling the landscape history of Cooperstown, a community with roots in the colonial past and in her family history. Though the nation was in the process of rapidly expanding its borders, she chose to showcase the settlement and landscape history of this particular place, and to emphasize the ways that human settlements invest the landscape with meaning over time. In part, this is an act of preservation. Cooper sees expansion and modern development as “utilitarian” practices that resulted in the homogenization of the landscape.² She resists this sense of homogenization because she considers the preservation of colonial landscape history an important part of preserving the nation’s history. In *Rural Hours*, she envisions the roots of the “national landscape” in the Northeast, particularly in her hometown of Cooperstown—a place where her family history

² In the passage referenced here, Cooper deplores proposals to destroy colonial churchyards and replace them with “more agreeable” town squares (180). This is one of her many arguments about the way that “improvements” upon the landscape should be made; throughout her text, she laments the destruction of objects, old-growth trees, and buildings that link places to frontier history. Cooper connects the destruction of natural places with the destruction of cultural artifacts; she considers the history of a place to depend both on its natural features as well as man-made ones.

merges with national history. For example, in one passage she speaks with pride about the region's Revolutionary associations: "It is a pleasing reflection to those who live here, that while many important places in the country were never honored by his presence, Washington has trod the soil about our lake" (117).³ Cooper sees such narratives as dependent upon the preservation of the historical landscape; the "soil about our lake" is a reminder of the physical presence of Washington in that place. The "pleasing reflection" that such a place provokes is more than just a reverie; it is an affirmation of just how important this place is among the other "important places in the country." Cooper takes on the role of antiquarian as she documents the political and historical importance of Cooperstown. She combines landscape history, archaeology, and natural history to explain the historical and cultural significance of particular places. She teaches her readers how to recognize and piece together colonial artifacts and traces, articulating a sense of place that has shaped Cooperstown's collective memories of the past as well as its continuing importance to the nation's future.

I. Landscape History in *Rural Hours*

Most scholarship on Cooper, particularly that which examines *Rural Hours*,

³ Certain local plants are also reminders of the Revolutionary past. In one passage on thorns, Cooper writes: "There is a tradition that during the war of the Revolution the long spines of the thorn were occasionally used by the American women for pins, none of which were manufactured in the country; probably it was the cockspur variety, which bears the longest and most slender spines, and is now in flower. The peculiar condition of the colonies rendered privations of this kind a great additional evil of that memorable struggle" (74).

focuses on her descriptions of nature and its processes, and especially on her ideas of conservation and preservation. As Rochelle Johnson and Daniel Patterson write in their introduction to the journal, "Cooper...narrates the geologic and human history of her place. Through *Rural Hours*, Cooper seeks to convey the fullness of both human and non-human life in her region, to expose the links between human and nonhuman history, and to suggest a more sustainable approach to the environment" (ix). I propose to focus on the relationships between the histories that Johnson and Patterson mention here, with a particular focus on the connections between place and memory in Cooper's texts. I am especially interested in exploring what landscape archaeologists Rebecca Yamin and Karen Metheny have described as the problem of the "interplay of past and present" in the landscape (xv).

"Landscape archaeology" is not a term Cooper would have been familiar with; it emerged as a subspeciality in the field of archaeology in the late twentieth century. In their introduction to *Landscape Archaeology* (1996), Yamin and Metheny describe it as "reading the historical landscape as if it were a book, finding the plots and subplots that have been written on the land by both the conscious and unconscious acts of the people who lived there" (xiii). In *Rural Hours*, Cooper creates landscapes that are "historical" and "archaeological" in this sense: she depicts the land as a text that can be read by those who are knowledgeable about the history of the place. In her nature journal, living on the land translates into writing the land around her in terms of its archaeological and anthropological significance as well as its natural history. The *genius loci* in

Cooper's places depend upon nature, but also upon the material artifacts and social processes that shape her landscapes.

In a discussion of landscape mythology, environmental historian Nicholas Howe considers the stories shaped by landscapes as vital for the identity of a place and for the people who inhabit it: "For the human beings who live within them, landscapes also matter because of the stories that gather in them. Many of these stories are local. They ask questions that pertain to those who live in that landscape" (215). In his description of landscapes as "repositor[ies] of stories," Howe hints at one of the ways that landscape becomes a mnemonic aid for communal memory (216). Artifacts and ruins serve as "repositories" in Cooper's journal, reflecting the nineteenth-century idea that knowledge was "inherent" in objects (Conn 10); however, the physical orientation and spatial organization of these traces is crucial for the ways that Cooper interprets the landscape. She exerts a great deal of control over *how* one is to interpret these objects, seeking to unify them in a single overarching narrative rather than to allow that multiple narratives and voices compose the landscape, as Sedgwick does. Throughout her journal, Cooper carefully "places" historically significant fragments and traces in her landscape rather than "uncovering" them, situating them within the larger history of the nation as well as local lore. She uses archaeological knowledge to bolster her sense of authority over the placement, recovery, and interpretation of these fragments.

As Cooper writes in her 1852 essay, "A Dissolving View," "The hand of man generally improves a landscape" (Johnson and Patterson, 2002 6). This

statement, along with ideas on landscape and antiquities in the rest of the essay, is distilled from ideas that she explores in *Rural Hours*. Archaeological language and images emerge at particular moments in the text, helping to set up her complex vision of how the rural New York landscape has changed over time and how various generations and peoples have inhabited and left their traces upon the land. It is an essential element of her construction of place. "Place" as a category in Cooper's writing is established through perception, imagination, and practice, as well as through material artifacts and natural objects. These connections are evident in her treatment of ideas of inhabitation and habitat, which she explores in part through her archaeological knowledge and antiquarian observations.⁴

"Inhabitation" and "habitat" are important to the ways Cooper conceives her own "situatedness," which Anne Elizabeth Yentsch has described as a state that, "denote[s] the experiential relationships that exist between a person and his or her social/physical space" (xxvii). Tim Cresswell observes that, "places need to be understood as sites that are connected to others around the world in constantly evolving networks which are social, cultural, and natural/environmental. Places need to be understood through the paths that lead in and out" (43). Cooper was not directly involved in the agricultural practices that shaped the landscape around her; in fact, she often describes herself as being at odds with certain local farming practices, including the indiscriminate cutting of trees and what she considered as the wasting of natural resources. However, in

⁴ Nicholas Howe has pointed out that, "To inhabit a landscape is not simply to live in a topography; it is also to find a source of self-identification" (218).

spite of her apparent distance from the world of agricultural labor, she presents herself as one with extensive knowledge of the impact of this labor on the landscape. As a witness and an observer, she maintains physical closeness to the environment through a different kind of labor: studying, documenting, and later reproducing that environment in her writing.

Like the antiquarians who precede her, and like Thoreau who came after, Cooper experiences the landscape by physically moving through it, examining its artifacts, studying resources pertaining to it, and cultivating her own ideas and theories about it. Archaeology provides Cooper with a framework to explore her relationship to place as she follows "paths," literally and figuratively, that connect the landscape outside her front door with the wider world. In a description of May-apples, which, as she observes, are also found in Central Asia, she remarks, "One likes to trace these links, connecting lands and races, so far apart, reminding us, as they do, that the earth is the common home of all" (*Rural Hours* 56). Part of "tracing the links" for Cooper involves linking traces of human and natural processes that she discovers in her travels through the countryside. In this way she is able to connect fragments of the past with the modern-day landscape of Cooperstown and its surrounding environs. Past, present, and future coexist in traces that she interprets as a symbolic narrative upon the landscape.

Building on theories of memory introduced by Maurice Halbwachs in his 1925 *The Social Frameworks of Memory*, historian Silke Arnold-de Simine has discussed the relationship of traces to collective memory. She writes that traces

are "indications of something that has disappeared, but has nevertheless left its marks and therefore in some sense still prevails. These marks might be perceived as signs, pointing to something that would otherwise be overlooked and helping to trace what has vanished and its lasting influence on our present" (12). In *Excavating Victorians*, an analysis of "the literature of excavation" in Victorian fiction, Virginia Zimmerman argues that advances in geology caused Victorians to rethink their relationship to time and history, and that this paradigm shift emerges in works by Dickens, Tennyson, and others. In a discussion of the role of traces as signifiers of the past, she writes, "Simultaneously making the past legible and eroding temporal boundaries, the trace invites both empirical study and imaginative interpretation" (8). Referencing Paul Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative* and Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, Zimmerman enters an extensive discussion of how the idea of the archaeological trace appeared to forge a direct connection between Victorians and the ancient past: "The trace is not the past—this I do not dispute—but it is a material connection to the past, and while it shows erasure, it also preserves. Moreover, it becomes the foundation for the new historiography that aims to present the past through narrative" (9). In *Rural Hours*, Cooper reads and interprets signs, both natural and man-made, and re-inscribes the record of human and natural history upon the landscape. She draws upon the collective memory of her community in the process. This process of preservation, as much as that of decay, involves a certain amount of erasure. As Sophie Thomas writes, "Mock and reconstructed ruins in particular shed clear light on historical understanding as itself always

fragmentary: re-discovered and re-assembled in parts, something to be simultaneously done, undone, and redone" (178). Cooper's texts tend to elide this process of forgetting; she uses white frontier history as the organizing context for her narratives, exerting a great deal of control over which stories the Cooperstown landscape contains and how these narratives should be read.

While Cooper's writing on environmental preservation has been considered ahead of its time, her treatment of Native American artifacts is not. Rather than presenting a multivocal landscape in which artifacts and monuments are contested sites of meaning between whites and Indians, she accounts for traces of Native American society within the narrative context of white settlement and ignores any meaning outside of this context that they might hold for Native people. When she does mention the Native Americans who sometimes visit the community, she emphasizes their wild appearance and their otherness:

[they] strike us strangely, appearing as they do amidst a civilized white community with the characteristics of their wild race still clinging to them; and when it is remembered that the land over which they now wander as strangers, in the midst of an alien race, was so lately their own—the heritage of their fathers—it is impossible to behold them without a feeling of peculiar interest (108).

Like the fading traces that they have left behind, the remaining Indians in the region are "strange," and do not fit into the story of Cooperstown's present. Cooper responds to them not with "sympathy," exactly, but with "peculiar interest," suggesting that these "wild" Indians, like the traces of the Iroquois society, function as curiosities. Whereas James Fenimore Cooper presents readers with the "vanishing Indian," his daughter often presents them as

“vanished”—although, as the passage above indicates, there were Native Americans living near Cooperstown. She describes them as “curiosities” in order to make the point that, even if they are “here,” they are not understandable and do not play a role in modern society other than as “strange” reminders of their own loss.

In more than one instance Cooper preserves particular places and stories that are featured in her father’s writing. These passages may be read as Cooper’s attempt to preserve a version of landscape history that is significant to her own identity within the Cooper family as James Fenimore Cooper’s daughter. The communally shaped landscapes of Cooperstown and its surrounding environs become a very personal place for Susan Cooper. The fragments of her father’s writing preserved within her text become a monument to and monumentalization of both the place and the man. While Cooper does not overtly discuss her family’s long history in the region, she evokes this history through her descriptions of foundational moments in Cooperstown’s history, which are marked by different sites in the landscape.⁵ “Preservation” of local antiquities blurs with the preservation of her own status: her self-narrative of female white gentility as the daughter of one of America’s greatest writers to date, as the heir of a landscape that was literally and fictionally shaped by her forefathers, and as an aspiring author in her own right. This subtle merging of personal identity, antiquities, and place is an interesting development in the discourse of women

⁵ Cooper’s grandfather, Judge William Cooper, founded Cooperstown and was the first to explore and settle the wilderness (Johnson and Patterson, 2002 xvi).

antiquarians and authorship in nineteenth-century American writing.

The rest of this chapter will examine the evolution of Cooper's theories of landscape history in *Rural Hours* and will conclude with a discussion of "A Dissolving View." Archaeological readings of these texts reveal her vision of the growth of a small community and the progress of American civilization as they are embedded within material traces in the landscape. *Rural Hours* outlines Cooper's theory of a "new country," which depends to some extent upon a paradox: her simultaneous revelation and denial of antiquities in an ancient American landscape. In the gift-book essay "A Dissolving View," Cooper brings ideas on landscape history and archaeology sketched out in *Rural Hours* into greater focus, crafting her rhetoric of the "new country" around the simultaneous presence and absence of traces of antiquity upon the land.

Rural Hours is divided into four parts: Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter. Throughout each section Cooper observes the seemingly trivial details and minute changes in the natural world, whether on walks through the woods and fields or while watching from her window. As scholars like Duncan Faherty and Tina Gianquitto have pointed out,⁶ Cooper is interested in the ways that the American landscape, especially the region around Cooperstown, NY, is connected to other places around the globe; she demonstrates these connections through her references to natural history and to the "common ground" that the systematic study of antiquities offers: decay, transformation, and ruin shape places and the human record associated with them at home and

⁶ See Faherty, p. 122; Gianquitto, 184.

abroad.

Both *Rural Hours* and "A Dissolving View" combine natural history observations with archaeological information about the land, its antiquities, and its people. The results of this archaeological language are threefold: Cooper rhetorically connects rural New York with the rest of the nation, giving this region both an ancient past and a "new" history. As she narrates her excursions through the landscape, Cooper turns her texts into sites that reflect upon the nature of individual and communal memory. And finally, she presents her readers with places in flux; the community of Cooperstown in *Rural Hours* and "A Dissolving View" is continually changing yet retains traces of both the recent and prehistoric past. Rural New York is populated not only by the current human residents, flora, and fauna, but also by persistent material artifacts that are crucial to the preservation of public memory, local history, and communal and regional identity.

II. Cooper as Antiquarian

In the "Preface" to *Rural Hours*, Cooper fashions herself as a lady engaged in the pleasant amateur pastime of nature study. In her words, she is writing about "trifling observations on rustic matters" that "make no claim to scientific knowledge" (*Rural Hours* 3). However, because of Cooper's interest in studying material remains and artifacts in the landscape, I consider her to be among the women writers outlined in Chapter I who have taken on the authorial identity of "antiquarian." In a number of passages she employs the common

tropes of antiquarianism and cites her wide reading in archaeological studies. In one extended passage in "Summer," Cooper analyzes the local traditions and histories associated with the area's "few humble antiquities," which "consist of a noted rock, the ruins of a bridge, and the remains of a military work" (113).⁷ Acting as a "tour guide" of these local sites for the reader, she begins with the rock, "a smooth, rounded fragment" that is tied to traditions of how Native Americans used the land (113). It is significant that the Native Americans are associated with a feature that is not man-made. In one of the more overtly racist passages of *Rural Hours*, Cooper assigns the Indians no legible history and no ability to create a lasting monument of their own on the landscape: "There is nothing remarkable in the rock itself, though it is perhaps the largest of the few that show themselves above the surface of our lake; but this stone is said to have been a noted rallying-point with the Indians" (113):

From the Mohawk country, from the southern hunting-grounds on the banks of the Susquehannah, and from the Oneida region, they came through the wilderness to this common rendezvous at the gray rock, near the outlet of the lake. Such is the tradition; probably it is founded in truth, for it has prevailed here since the settlement of the country, and it is of a nature not likely to have been thought of by a white man, who, if given to inventing anything of the kind, would have attempted something more ambitious. Its very simplicity gives it weight, and it is quite consistent with the habits of the Indians, and their nice observation; for the rock, though unimportant, is yet the largest in sight, and its position near the outlet would make it a very natural waymark to them. Such as it is, this, moreover, is the only tradition, in a positive form, connected with the Indians preserved among us; with this single exception, the red man has left no mark here, on hill or dale, lake or stream (113-14).

Though there may be "nothing remarkable" about it, Cooper's rock is highly

⁷ In his "Introduction" to *The Pioneers* (1823)—the first of his *Leatherstocking Tales*—James Fenimore Cooper identifies these same sites and discusses their historical importance. (Beard 7-9).

symbolic. As a meeting place that is now defunct and partially submerged, it is a reminder that the land is now “empty” of Indians and their way of life. It is too “simple” to contain any lasting truth or meaning apart from its traditional use, which is quickly becoming forgotten. White men, who create both more notable monuments and more notable narratives, would never invent such an essentially “Indian” narrative tradition—it is too primitive for the more advanced white mind. Unable to “leave marks” on the landscape, Native Americans become embodied in artifacts that are explained through unwieldy “tradition” rather than true “history.”

Cooper’s depiction of the rock serves two purposes. First, it puts later white-constructed features, like the bridge and dam, into the perspective of history, while relegating Native Americans to a history-less past and erasing them from the picture of the present. Secondly, the tradition that Cooper preserves in *Rural Hours* is one that she reconstructs through antiquarian tradition and lore. It lies outside the collective memory of the white community of the present, though it has seen cross-cultural preservation as a vague legend among the people of Cooperstown. By further preserving this Native tradition in her text, Cooper makes an argument that Cooperstown’s landscape history originates with “true” narratives of white settlement rather than with Native tradition. This oral tradition has been replaced by “something more positive; from the dark ages we come to the dawn of history” (114). Cooper can date the modern landscape’s history to the beginning of her own family’s history on the land and represents herself accordingly not only as the bearer of history, but also

as the heir of living memory that has been handed down from the time of her grandfather, Judge William Cooper.

Cooper marks "true" history's beginnings in Cooperstown with the second antiquity, one that dates from her grandfather's time: a tree stump, signifying the "ruins of a bridge, the first made at this point by the white man" (114).⁸ Although the bridge was merely a pine log cut down across the river, and therefore seemingly a natural item just like the rock, Cooper differentiates the two natural artifacts, not by their uses, but by the methods of their creation. The Indians did not make the rock; it happened to be the most convenient landmark for their meetings. The tree-bridge, however, is an artifact resulting from an act of human creation. With a certain amount of tongue-in-cheek humor, Cooper compares it to other man-made bridges in Europe: "Among the mountain streams of the Old World are many high, narrow, arches of stone, built more than a thousand years since, still standing to-day in different stages of picturesque decay. Our ruins are more rude than those" (114). The history of this "bridge" reflects the simplicity and resourcefulness of the early settlers, and is therefore a mark of pride and a persistent reminder of the community's early history: the "stump...is still standing on the bank among the few ruins we have to boast of; it is fast mouldering away, but it has outlasted the lives of both the men who felled the tree—the younger of the two, the son, having died in advanced old age, a year or two since" (114).

⁸ According to art historian Angela Miller, tree stumps in paintings like Thomas Cole's *The Arcadian or Pastoral State* (1833-36) signified "the violent forces brought to bear in taming wilderness" (28).

This local "antiquity" is especially important for the community's identity in a "new country," as its origins lie within reach of living memory. Cooper's antiquarianism is less a project of speculation and invention than of preservation: keeping these memories alive after the father and son who created the bridge have passed away.

The third antiquity Cooper chooses to illustrate is "the military work," which "was on a greater scale, and connected with an expedition of some importance" (114). She tells the story of the ruins, "traces of [a] military dam" that "may still be seen, though every year they are becoming more indistinct" (115). The dam was originally constructed by American forces in 1779, Cooper recounts, to support the military's efforts to retaliate against the Natives of western New York who had massacred settlers at Wyoming and Cherry Valley (114-15). She points out that while the lake became the soldiers' point of access to the Indians' territory, it also links Cooperstown to the nation through the common thread of history and geography:

This is the only incident which has connected our secluded lake with historical events, and it is believed that upon no other occasion have troops, on a warlike errand, passed through the valley. Probably in no other instance have so large a number of boats ever floated on our quiet lake, and we can scarcely suppose that a fleet of this warlike character will ever again, to the end of time, be collected here (115).

The remains of the dam continue on as traces of this connection. They are faint but persistent reminders of a dramatic moment in the region's military history and of the role local geography has played in this history.

In her descriptions of these antiquities, Cooper illustrates how communal memory can be facilitated by the traces that remain upon the

landscape, and how each trace signifies important connections that help define the community: its relationship to the (mostly) “vanished” Native Americans, to its own roots and heritage, and to the larger nation and an important political history. In Anne Elizabeth Yentsch’s words, “ruins are mnemonic; they call to mind past events and individuals long gone. They collapse the generations between ancestors or the original settlers of a town and reinsert these old folk into the ethnographic present” (Yamin and Metheny xxxvi). In *Rural Hours*, Cooper’s antiquities perform this mnemonic role, but they also are connected within the geographical space of the landscape. Each “antiquity” stands near the lake, a central feature of the area and one that brings together the seemingly disparate relics. The lake itself is a mnemonic feature of the landscape: it joins the everyday life of the community with the stories and events of its past. It is a constant in a land that has been transformed through a series of progressive stages of civilization.

III. Artifacts and the Transformation of the Landscape

Throughout the “Spring” section of *Rural Hours*, Cooper introduces the theme of transformation in the landscape and discusses how landscape changes have affected and been effected by human habitation. She describes how these changes emerge over time and creates a narrative around the material evidence of transformation in the archaeological record. Her discussion of the three

“antiquities” illustrates this type of narrative. As she documents transformations on and beneath the surface of the land and demonstrates how it has changed over time, Cooper creates an alternative way of reading the landscape separate from (though not mutually exclusive of) aesthetic appreciation and natural history. In an archaeological interpretation of the landscape, she turns the local past into an “object of science” (Nora 75)—complete with a method of study that can be learned and performed by her readers. This alternative response to the land can be used to interpret the relationship between the past and present landscape(s) and their inhabitants. This action serves another purpose: to connect the identity of the community with the landscape, reaffirming this identity in the face of the great social changes facing the nation at mid-century.

Cooper writes of the landscape as something that is constantly changing as the land’s natural features are affected by the seasons and the weather. New features are either revealed or hidden, depending on seasonal change. In March, “broad openings of brown earth are seen everywhere, in the fields and on the hill-sides” (*Rural Hours* 8). In April there are “great changes” in the lake, where “so far as the eye can reach, the blue waters are once more quite free” (20). Time and landscape work together in this process, so that the appearance of the place in the present depends a great deal on the seasonal cycle. In a study of Cooper’s treatment of time in *Rural Hours*, Jennifer Dawes has described three distinct ways that the author understands time: as a cycle, as linear progression, and, as Dawes argues, “a third view of time that [Cooper] calls a ‘farther progress’ by which humans can learn to prevent or mitigate harm to the environment” (154-

55). For Dawes, this “third view” is based on Cooper’s vision of landscape preservation for the future (155). I would add that *Rural Hours* also focuses on how traces that persist in the present-day landscape contribute to the formation of communal and individual memory—that Cooper explores ways of mapping the past onto the landscape, adding the dimension of memory and experience to time and place. Pierre Nora connects sites of memory (*lieux de mémoire*) with “a residual sense of community” (1); he writes, “Memory is rooted in the concrete: in space, gesture, image, and object” (3). Cooper uses the concrete in *Rural Hours* to bring to the surface the communal memories that make Cooperstown and its surrounding environs significant.

Throughout her nature journal, Cooper traces out a theory of the New York landscape as “new country” (92-93). Several key passages, she reveals a landscape structure that is based on an understanding of the land as simultaneously “new” and “ancient”: a settled frontier with certain features in a state of continual transformation while others seem to be unchanging. It is significant that Cooper intersperses passages on the landscape’s simultaneous newness and antiquity throughout the nature journal; it is a theme that she returns to in each section of the text. She acknowledges the ancient geological age of the land and its prehistory as factors that inform the present-day landscape; however, while elements of prehistoric New York persist in the modern landscape, she is careful to separate these from the modern “history” of the place. She uses artifacts dating from the earliest white settlement in the area, such as the tree-bridge and the dam, to separate the “new” landscape of Euro-

American settlement from the “prehistoric” Native American-inhabited one. To expand on Dawes’s argument, Cooper understood landscape transformation as taking place within timeless natural cycles as well as in terms of linear progression, and registers this in her descriptions of seasonal changes; however, she also reveals this concept of time in the strata of the landscape and in the material artifacts and ruins embedded within it.

Cooper theorizes how ruins and artifacts operate in the landscape in a number of passages in *Rural Hours*. Her understanding of ruins goes beyond man-made structures; the Indian meeting-rock and the settlers’ tree bridge, for example, are “ruins” in her landscape although they are comprised of natural objects. It is their connection to local memory and their importance to regional history that gives them the status of “antiquities” for Cooper; the ruins that appear in *Rural Hours* are natural or man-made objects that have been present during past events. Cooper saw herself dwelling in a land of eloquent witnesses, particularly embodied in the forests:

The forest lands of America preserve to the present hour something that is characteristic of their wild condition, undisturbed for ages. They abound in ruins of their own. Old trees, dead and dying, are left standing for years, until at length they are shivered and broken by the winds, or they crumble slowly away to a shapeless stump (128).

In this passage, the “ruinous” trees are living witnesses to the vanished primordial wilderness. The essence of their meaning is that they represent the decaying yet simultaneously preserved wildness in a country that was a wilderness frontier only a couple of generations before. Salvatore Settis sums up this effect of ruins succinctly:

Ruins signal simultaneously an absence and a presence; they show, they *are*, an intersection of the visible and the invisible. Fragmented, decayed structures, which no longer serve their original purpose, point to an absence—a lost, invisible whole. But their visible presence also points to durability, even if that which *is* is no longer what it once was (vii).

As a ruin, the forest signifies the passing of the wilderness while simultaneously preserving its legacy in the landscape. It stands in a place that is fragmented by the various layers of the past that lie upon the surface of the land.

While artifacts like the tree-bridge and military dam evoke particular memories and narratives concerning the human past, “natural ruins” like Cooper’s ancient trees tend to evoke sublime emotion and wonder at the land’s antiquity. In a passage about the power of a mountain view to represent the ancient past, she describes this response: “We behold upon the ancient mountains, with a feeling of awe, the record of earth’s stormy history. [...] This character of former action adds inconceivably to the grandeur of the mountains, connecting them as it does, with the mystery of the past” (153). Her understanding of the cultural work of ruins is shaped by the picturesque aesthetic, which employs ruins to create a melancholic stylistic effect. Sophie Thomas describes this effect as “a pleasurable illusion of an historical encounter—of an encounter *with* the historical as a leisure pursuit—while articulating the absence of history” (185). Just as the geologist can analyze rocks for clues about the past, one who gazes upon a mountain view can gain a glimpse of the ancient world. Such is not the case in flat country:

Upon a plain we are more apt to see the present only, the mental vision seems confined to the level uniformity about it, we need some ancient work of man, some dim old history, to lead the mind backward; and this is one reason why a monument always strikes us more forcibly upon a plain, or on level ground; in such a position it fills the mind more with itself and its own associations. But without a history, without a monument, there is that upon the face of the mountains which, from the earliest ages, has led man to hail them as the "everlasting hills" (*Rural Hours* 153).

Here and elsewhere in *Rural Hours* and "A Dissolving View," Cooper is fascinated with the perspective of a mountain view. In the passage above, she connects the power of monuments to their location and the relative position of the viewer in space, perspective, and time. Some of the landscapes in Cooper's texts, particularly those that physically and imaginatively elevate the "mental vision," give the viewer a vantage point over the landscape below that aids in its interpretation.

In one particular case, Cooper finds herself with no vantage point except several travel and archaeology books and her own imagination. In one of the most striking archaeological passages in *Rural Hours*, she mixes the study of natural and cultural history in an analysis of the origin of the willows of Babylon as they appear in Psalm 137 (31). Scholars have accounted for this seemingly digressive passage in light of Cooper's effort to reconcile science with biblical truth. For example, Michael Davey uses Cooper's discussion of the willows as an example of her self-conscious appeal to educated Protestant readers and writers at mid-century, and of her self-identity as a rational Protestant—in Davey's words, she is a "proponen[t] of historical-critical methods of biblical exegesis and orthodox American Protestant[ism]" (133). Davey points out that the Bible is an

historical document for Cooper as well as a spiritual text (138), and that archaeological discovery became an important underpinning of biblical scholarship by mid-century:

Archaeological digs in Palestine and other areas in the Middle East had a profound effect on biblical scholarship in the nineteenth century. Most serious scholars began the century doubting seriously whether an essentially nomadic tribe of primitive people could have reached a level of development by the time of Moses...sophisticated enough to have supported complex writing and/or complex religio-mythic thought. But discoveries throughout the century about Babylon and Mesopotamian culture confirmed that just the opposite was true" (140)

In describing Cooper's treatment of the willows, Davey writes, "Cooper shows she is an astute and informed reader, deeply interested in language, in history, and in what other writers have to teach her and *her* readers about the complex relation between sacred and profane history as well as between truth and its representation in language" (140-41). For Davey, Cooper's "digressions" from her nature journal signal moments where she loads her text with the moral instruction that her readers would have valued.

Tina Gianquitto also argues that the willow passage should be read within the context of contemporary biblical hermeneutics. In a discussion of Cooper's powers of observation she writes, "the willow passage records Cooper's process of discovery, which, as Gillian Beer notes, 'is a matter not only of reaching new conclusions but of redescribing what is know and taken for granted'" (175). Like Davey, Gianquitto describes the importance of the bible as a source of empirical evidence for Cooper, arguing that, "Cooper must establish the primacy of the Bible as the ultimate source for the nature observer in order for the scheme

governing the apprehension of natural objects in *Rural Hours* to work" (177). For Gianquitto, Cooper's inclusion of biblical exegesis in her nature journal signals her efforts to demonstrate that biblical revelation and scientific fact are not mutually exclusive—that the natural world may still be apprehended in light of God's Providence and plan, and may also be understood through its scientific processes.

For my purposes, the passage on Psalm 137 is significant because it reveals the intersection between Cooper's investment in landscape history, archaeology, and antiquarianism and natural history. The passage begins with Cooper drawing connections between shrub-like American willows with the European golden willow, comparing their growth and appearance. She remarks that "our winters are too severe" for the weeping willow, and that the climate, elevation, and habitat are generally unsuitable for this species. For Cooper, the weeping willow is a memory marker that is particularly linked in the public imagination with Psalm 137 and the image of the exiled Israelites:

When we read of those willows of Babylon, in whose shade the children of Israel sat down and wept, thousands of years ago, we naturally think of the weeping willow which we all know to be an Asiatic tree. But the other day, while reading an observation of a celebrated Eastern traveler, the idea suggested itself, that this common impression might possibly be erroneous (*Rural Hours* 31).

However, her interest in Babylon itself signals something different: it is a land that has been wiped clean of natural features, "stripped alike of its people, its buildings, and its vegetation, all of which made, in former times, its surpassing glory and its wealth" (31). In this bare landscape, neither plants nor memories

can take hold. In a study of Emerson's treatment of memory in his later essays, Joseph C. Schopp describes the philosopher's view of memory as the adhesive that binds together the "fragments" of "what is disremembered." Following archaeologists like Rich and travelers like Porter, Cooper gathers such "fragments" to reinstate the landscape's original flora in her readers' imaginations, and to re-shape cultural memory concerning this ancient place.

The jump from European golden willows and weeping willows to "those willows of Babylon" seems an abrupt digression in a text focused on Cooperstown and its surrounding fields and woodlands. Cooper's biblically and florally literate audience, however, would have easily followed the connection between the weeping willow—a tree associated with melancholia—and the forsaken Israelites, mourning their captivity. The conversation transforms from one about willows to one that focuses on a habitat that is too harsh for the trees—where to all appearances nothing can grow, save the gray ozier willow.

The "celebrated Eastern traveler" that Cooper is speaking of is Claudius James Rich, who is described in the January 1892 issue of *The Old and New Testament Student* as "an Englishman, and the East India Company's representative in Baghdad," and who excavated Assyrian and Babylonian ruins near Baghdad in the first decade of the nineteenth century (Harper 14-19). Rich was the leading authority on the ruins of Babylon until the turn of the century (Fagan 54). On his visit to the ancient ruined city, he explored and mapped the mounds, sketching the ruins and creating the earliest map of Babylon (51). Even as an armchair traveler, Cooper has an eye for detail in the landscape, and

Rich's descriptions of the ancient landscape clash with her knowledge of the tree's normal habitat: "The present desolation of the country about Babylon is well known; the whole region, once so fertile, appears now to be little better than a desert, stripped alike of its people, its buildings, and its vegetation, all of which made, in former times, its surpassing glory and its wealth" (*Rural Hours* 31).⁹ Clearly a weeping willow could not survive in the present-day environment, but Cooper looks to archaeological evidence to question whether it could have flourished in the past. Among the plants that are able to survive in the desert is a tree, "described by Mr. Rich, as an evergreen, like the *lignum-vitae*, is so old that the Arabs say it dates with the ruins on which it stands, and it is thought that it may very possibly be a descendent of one of the same species in the hanging gardens of Nebuchadnezzar, which are supposed to have occupied the same site" (31). This hint from Rich is an important moment in *Rural Hours*, for Cooper uses the archaeological method of figuring time on the landscape based on the age of the trees that grow there and of mapping landscape changes through tree changes.

Cooper's preoccupation with the natural history and archaeology of ancient Babylon may be read in terms of her interest in how monumental landscapes can shape public and private memory. The modern Babylonian landscape is "flat country" in the sense that it depends on various monuments—the ruinous mounds and artifacts protruding from the surface, and even the Bible—for its historical significance. The documents Cooper relies on

⁹ Cooper cites another famed Eastern explorer, the British painter and traveler Sir Robert Ker Porter.

for her vision of the distant landscape—the Bible and a number of archaeological and travel texts—allow her to view this landscape simultaneously as both a sacred and secular site. At issue in her discussion is the way that the willows of the ruined empire have come to be represented within the Western imagination. Though this seems like a trivial detail, and therefore a perfect antiquarian subject, identifying the correct species willow is vital because, for Cooper, the *genius loci* or “spirit of place” depends greatly upon its nature and natural history. Beyond shoring up faith in the Bible as a source of scientific truth, as Gianquitto and Davey have argued, Cooper’s insistence on the grey ozier willow is an attempt to restore authenticity to the Psalmist’s landscape in the imaginations of nineteenth-century readers.

Significantly, Psalm 137 is concerned at heart with questions of memory and forgetting, and with memorialization:

¹By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion [...] ⁴How shall we sing the LORD's song in a strange land? ⁵If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. ⁶If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy. ⁷Remember, O LORD, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof (*King James Bible*, Psalm 137:1, 4-7).

One underlying point of Cooper’s argument about this passage is that the essential nature of the Psalmist’s landscape has been forgotten over time. As Winfried Herget writes in a study of the connections between Plymouth Rock and public memory, monuments nourish collective memory, becoming “sites of memory,” alternately constructed and re-constructed depending upon the social or political needs of the moment (125). In a landscape “stripped bare” of its

natural features and filled only with ruined fragments, modern Babylon defies collective memory; it becomes a subject for historical reconstruction. Pierre Nora describes the distinction between history and memory as the difference between “the reconstruction...of what is no longer” and “life...in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting” (3). By correcting common notions and repopulating the ancient landscape with the correct species of willow, Cooper reconstructs the place’s history and authenticity. However, she also disconnects the Biblical landscape from that of the modern Western world, removing the connection provided by the weeping willow. In this instance, the integrity of the *genius loci* is more important to Cooper than is establishing links between the two landscapes.

Historical strata are not only to be found through excavation and methodical reconstruction, as in the Psalm 137 passage, but are also present on the landscape’s surfaces as fragments of the community’s past legible to anyone who possesses the proper vantage point. In *Rural Hours*, Cooper describes how a knowledgeable eye may reconstruct various stages of a society’s development coexisting in the same landscape; this thread in the nature journal reveals that a major aspect of her understanding of landscape history emerges from the idea that civilization progresses in predictable stages. For a visual interpretation of this theory it is useful to turn again to Thomas Cole’s *The Course of Empire* (1834-36).¹⁰ In this series of paintings, civilization rises from a primitive stage into a

¹⁰ Thomas Cole was a friend of James Fenimore Cooper. In an essay concerning Susan Cooper’s treatment of domesticity, Robert Hardy discusses her views on

refined one before finally falling into ruinous "desolation" (Miller 24). In Adam Smith's "The Four-Stage Theory of Development" (1762), society moves progressively through four "ages": those of Hunters, Shepherds, Agriculture, and Commerce (Pittock 262). Stadialist theories were first conceptualized by Scottish Enlightenment philosophers like Smith who were interested in why different cultures, civilizations, and races seemed "unevenly developed," and in the conditions of "primitive man" (Garret 80).

These ideas persisted in various forms into the nineteenth century. Some of the most famous depictions of stadialism in American literature are present in the *Leatherstocking* novels of Susan Cooper's father. In *The Pioneers* (1823), James Fenimore Cooper depicts landscapes that register the various stages of civilization in terms of their impact on the environment. The elder Cooper illustrates a society that, in its most primitive stage, has a mild impact on the environment, but degrades the natural world in its more advanced state. More significantly, *The Pioneers* shows how various stages of civilization can be viewed simultaneously in the frontier landscape. In one scene, the young lady Elizabeth watches a woodcutter and reflects on how "the slow fires, that were glimmering under his enormous kettles, his little brush shelter, covered with pieces of hemlock bark, his gigantic size, as he wielded his ladle with a steady and knowing air...formed, altogether, no unreal picture of human life in its first stages of civilization" (Beard 230). In another significant passage, Judge Temple reflects on the changes that have taken place in the valley since he arrived with

architecture and connects her ideas of a civilized landscape to *The Course of Empire* (23).

the first settlers only five years earlier; he describes the pre-settlement landscape, or the “infancy” of the settlement, as one of fertility and primitive remoteness:

The water was covered by myriads of wild-fowl that migrate with the changes in the season; and, while in my situation on the branch of the beech, I saw a bear, with her cubs, descend to the shore to drink. I had met many deer, gliding through the woods, in my journey; but not the vestige of a man could I trace [...] No clearing, no hut, none of the winding roads that are now to be seen, were there; nothing but mountains rising behind mountains, and the valley, with its surface of branches (235-36).

On Fenimore Cooper’s New York frontier, the savage state of society lies within living memory of its more civilized stages. Throughout *The Pioneers*, he presents characters representative of the various stages of the development of civilization, from the primitive hunter Natty Bumppo, who lives outside the community, to industrious woodcutters living on its borders, and finally to the decadent residents of the village, who lay waste to the wilderness and its game—in two memorable instances, needlessly slaughtering large numbers of passenger pigeons and fish.¹¹

A stadialist theory similar to that presented in *The Pioneers* emerges in *Rural Hours*. In the above passage from James Fenimore Cooper’s novel, the primitive or savage state is determined by the absence of human “traces”—clearings, dwellings, roads—in the wilderness. Architecture, roads, and open fields become primary signals of a place’s state of civilization in Susan Cooper’s nature journal as well. She uses archaeological and antiquarian

¹¹ Fenimore Cooper’s portrayal of these stages carries with it an ironic message, for Natty Bumppo ends up as a role model for how to treat the environment, while many of the settlers are portrayed negatively as ignorant and wanton destroyers of the natural world.

techniques to map the traces of each stage, which often exist alongside each other in the landscape. In one lengthy passage describing the farmlands of Otsego County—a countryside that appears to have “been under cultivation for ages” (*Rural Hours* 88)—she muses on a landscape that contains all stages of civilization, from “a new clearing still in the rudest state, black with charred stumps and rubbish,” to “a spot not only cleared, but fenced, preparatory to being tilled”; finally, she indicates “a field of new land, ploughed and seeded for the first time” beside a farm that has stood since the area was first settled, “yielding every season, for the last half century, its share of grass and grain” (89). This landscape pleases one who views it, Cooper explains, because one can see each stage of landscape history laid out together—can comprehend in an instant the years-long process of civilization: “To one familiar with the country, there is a certain pleasure in thus beholding the agricultural history of the neighborhood unfolding before one, following upon the farms in sight these progressive steps in cultivation” (89-90). Here, the stages are laid out like geological strata across the landscape, revealing the process of civilization to the practiced eye.

Cooper decodes material artifacts in this landscape that also reveal this process. These traces—clearings, tillage, stumps and fence lines, and cultivated fields—require the discernment of an antiquarian viewer. Some evidence is only available to those who observe closely and are familiar with local lore and memory. Inhabiting and knowing the place allows Cooper to understand the seemingly insignificant signs she observes as traces of society’s development: “Here you will observe a little hillock rounding over a decayed stump, there a

petty hollow where some large tree has been uprooted by the storm" (91). Here traces left by farmers resemble natural landscape features to the untrained eye. In other circumstances, "softer touches"—the presence of native plants or European varieties that have been introduced over the years—link the present landscape with agricultural activities of the recent past: "A path made by the workmen and cattle crosses the field, and one treads at every step upon plantain, that regular path-weed of the Old World" (91). In *Rural Hours*, the processes of daily rural life shape a familiar, civilized landscape, as do material artifacts; decoding landscape history and performing an archaeological reading of the landscape involves an understanding of social processes and practices as much as an understanding of material traces.

In the passages on agricultural landscapes, the presence of cut or burned trees and cleared forests indicate the level of civilization that a society has reached. But the planting of trees signals a more advanced stage in which a society has the leisure to appreciate their aesthetic beauty. In fact, the act of planting trees is essential to moving a civilization from its ruder stages toward cultural refinement. In one passage, Cooper lays out the various ways that trees signal this advancement:

[Trees] are connected in many ways with the civilization of a country; they have their importance in an intellectual and in a moral sense. After the first rude stage of progress is past in a new country—when shelter and food have been provided—people begin to collect the conveniences and pleasures of a permanent home about their dwellings, and then the farmer generally sets out a few trees before his door (133).

She laments the destruction of "fine" and "noble" trees, cut down by farmers who

do not yet understand their aesthetic value: "Unhappily, our people generally do not yet see things in this light. But time is a very essential element, absolutely indispensable, indeed, in true civilization; and in the course of years we shall, it is to be hoped, learn farther lessons of this kind" (133). American civilization is not yet at the apex of "true civilization," when, presumably, the right sorts of trees will be valued and preserved. Instead, Cooper registers the fact that American society is more concerned with the trees' "market price in dollars and cents," and with focusing on materialistic gain and display rather than the virtues of "simplicity" that characterize, in her view, a more advanced civilization (133-34).

Agricultural lands represent what is familiar in *Rural Hours*; they are inhabited and shaped by the processes of daily agricultural and community life. They stand not only as places, but as material records of land ownership and farming practices that aid in the preservation of communal memory. As agricultural practices shape the land and the way we read the past into the landscape, private property becomes a public monument to the community's progress. Balanced against this environment are the forest and mountains, spaces that are unfamiliar, uncanny, and uninhabited. Cooper does not designate these spaces as "old," however; rather, they are ageless, or their age cannot be calculated in relation to modern history. If one may gaze upon the pastoral landscape of the farming community and see the progress of history and civilization mapped out neatly, looking upon the forest wilderness allows one to see into the depths of the prehistoric past. This sense of "deep time" surrounding the woods puts mankind's works into perspective, but it remains decidedly

civilization's "other," an inscrutable, sublime entity. Cooper writes,

Of all the objects which crown the gray earth, the woods preserve unchanged, throughout the greatest reach of time, their native character: the works of man are ever varying in their aspect; his towns and his fields alike reflect the unstable opinions, the fickle wills and fancies of each passing generation; but the forests on his borders remain to-day the same they were ages of years since. Old as the everlasting hills, during thousands of seasons they have put forth, and laid down their verdure in calm obedience to the decree which first bade them cover the ruins of the Deluge (126).

While the language Cooper uses to describe the farmscape is tidy and orderly, her descriptions of the forests tend to be more poetic, with vast, sweeping statements about the trees' unchanging nature. Familiar as she was with the contemporary archaeological method of dating ruins by the age of the trees that grow on top of them, her observation that these trees "cover the ruins of the Deluge" is an extreme statement about the forest's antiquity: it has stood "for untold centuries," through "ages of unrecorded time" (127). Her forest seems mineral rather than vegetable in kind, persisting in unchanging cycles at a geological pace.

Cooper meanwhile depicts native plants as "witnesses" to a more recent past, when Native Americans occupied the land. Her rhetoric on this point marks the erasure of local Native tribes while positioning the plants themselves as reminders of the people who once lived in the area:

gyromias and moose-flowers, sarsaparillas and cahoshes, which bloomed here for ages, when the eye of the red man alone beheld them [...] in older regions, these children of the forest would long since have vanished from all the meadows and villages, for the plough would have passed a thousand times over every rood of such ground (91-92).

Cooper's descriptions of Native Americans and the evidence of their impact on

the landscape reveal the tensions between the white frontier history she reads into the land and the ahistorical past she assigns the Indians. In a passage describing "a low barrow" that "has very much the character of the Indian mounds in other parts of the country," Cooper acknowledges that it resembles prehistoric mounds found throughout the country, but reveals that the history of this landscape feature is unknown (143-44). In a landscape that is covered with multiple small hills, "it is sometimes difficult to decide, from a partial examination, whether they were raised by man, or shaped by floods" (143-44). Cooper is unable to account for these supposedly prehistoric mounds in her text. Instead she leaves their status ambiguous. Since they do not figure into her discussion of artifacts that are important to the Cooperstown community, Cooper acknowledges their presence but does not go further in her discussion of them, nor does she try to connect these possibly-man-made structures with other human traces in the landscape.

A third passage, which mentions the discovery of an Indian arrowhead, also stresses the relic's indeterminate status as an historical fragment. Like the passages on the barrow and the native plants, it also stresses the "rarity" of the artifact, and, by extension, of Native Americans in the region:

One would like to know its little history; it may have been dropped by some hunter who had come to the spring, or been shot from the wood at some wild creature drinking there at the moment. Another of these arrow-heads was found a while since in the gravel of our own walks; they are occasionally turned up in the village, but are already more rare than one would suppose (148).

In each case, traces associated with the "little history" of Native Americans are

matters for conjecture. Unlike relics associated with the white community, they do not adhere to the landscape through known narratives, nor do they provide a way into the region's history. Because the Indian relics are not conducive to the overlying white narrative, they fade into the landscape or else exist only as curiosities. The only "monument" the Indians have left behind, according to Cooper, is an intangible one: the names of "the important natural features of this country" were given by Native Americans, and these are "all we leave them, let us at least preserve that monument to their memory [...] we may thus learn how many were the tribes who have melted away before us, whose very existence would have been utterly forgotten but for the word which recalls the name they once bore" (*Rural Hours* 303).

Cooper follows her association between native plants and Native Americans with a description of natural mound formations; unlike the barrow, there is no question that these mounds are not Indian relics but geological formations. What is important to Cooper is that they have the "appearance" of antiquity and can serve as visual markers of the ancient past without containing the burden of history. As natural traces in the landscape they are open to fresh cultural interpretations and can be more easily molded into symbols suiting the white community. As a result, this follow-up passage rhetorically re-emphasizes the idea that this is a "new land," overwriting any possible historical traces of Native American society.

Cooper's choice of mounds in this discussion is not an accident. As I discussed in Chapter II, for the first three decades of the nineteenth century the

debate over the Mound Builders' identity was at its peak, continuing on until the 1890s. For Cooper to specifically mention the mounds, then, and to acknowledge that their formation was due not to Native or other human construction but to natural phenomena, is to drive the point home that the Native peoples have left no true traces upon the landscape other than the "softer touches" of scattered patches of native plants. The mounds she mentions were formed by water over many years, "traces of water-work" that are so "sharp and distinct" that they prove the land's relative youth:

Large mounds rise like islands from the fields, their banks still sharply cut; in other spots a depressed meadow is found below the level of the surrounding country, looking like a drained lake, enclosed within banks as plainly marked *as the works of a fortification*; a shrunken brook, perhaps, running today where a river flowed at some period of past time. Quite near the village, from the lane where we were walking this evening, one may observe a very bold formation of this kind; the bank of the river is high and abrupt at this spot, and it is scooped out into two adjoining basins, *not unlike the amphitheaters of ancient times*...The farther basin is the most regular, and it is also marked by successive ledges *like the tiers of seats in those ancient theaters* (92).

Cooper joins a vision of the ancient geological past—drained lakebeds, the "shrunken brook" that may have been a river "at some period of past time"—with her insistence that this is "new country." Her comparison of the mounds to "a fortification," language that mirrors debates over the original purposes of the mound builder earthworks, and to ancient amphitheaters, simultaneously calls to mind both New and Old World antiquities. Her movement from fortification to theater also mirrors the stages of civilization, from a primitive society to a cultured one; nature itself seems to progress along similar lines in her text.

Cooper's comparison of these landscape formations to both New and Old

World is an attempt to reconcile the nation's geological age with its comparatively new civilization. To have an ancient amphitheater emerging from the landscape is suggestive of her efforts to position herself as the observer and narrator of this landscape history. The earth's geological changes are a drama, just as the changes wrought upon the landscape by civilized farmers are a historical narrative. She is a witness to this drama, proclaiming that "we see with our own eyes fresh proofs that we are in a new country, that the meadows about us, cleared by our fathers, are the first that have lain on the lap of the old earth, at this point, since yonder bank was shaped by the floods" (92-93). In "A Dissolving View," Cooper resurrects the ancient world in the New York countryside, and reprises her role as the observer of a drama in the landscape.

IV. Conclusion: Cooper as the "Second Creator"

In 1852, Susan Fenimore Cooper published the essay "A Dissolving View" in *The Home Book of the Picturesque*, a popular gift book of paintings and essays on the American landscape. Beginning in the manner of a fanciful excursion sketch, she muses on the "brilliant novelty" and "strange beauty" of autumn in the northeast before taking up the topic of antiquities in the landscape:

Look at the ancient temples of India; look at Egypt with her wonderful works; all the proudest edifices of modern times may yet fall to the ground, ere those Pyramids are ruined; they may see the last future acts of the earth's story, as they have stood mute witnesses of a thousand past histories. What were that level country of Egypt, that muddy Nile, without the Pyramids and surrounding coeval monuments? (Johnson and Patterson, 2002 8).

By the end of the essay, Cooper imagines a European scene in the American landscape. She envisions Roman roads winding through New York farm country, which yields artifacts like ancient coins and treasures. In her descriptions of archaeological sites in both America and the Old World, Cooper displays her knowledge of ancient history, her taste for the "excellence and beauty" of ancient monuments, and her awareness of how human history and culture become situated within an otherwise "level" landscape. From her hilltop vantage point, like a painter composing a landscape scene, she imaginatively connects the wonders of the Old World to the hazy countryside below.

Unlike *Rural Hours*, the essay is not as concerned with natural history as with the present condition and future of American civilization and culture. Most critics agree that it is a critique of American culture, and scholarly discussions of the essay tend to revolve on this point. Duncan Faherty, for example, claims that the piece "calls for the development of uniquely American cultural forms reflective of the nation's democratic doctrines" (109). Tina Gianquitto examines Cooper's use of the picturesque in the essay and argues that Cooper "transforms the valley below her into [a] picturesque [view]" in order to critique the inability of American culture to "produc[e] an architecture or a conservation ethic that will encode the culture's history indelibly in the landscape" (184). Robert Hardy also argues that the focus of the essay is a critique of American architecture, and that Cooper "complains of the impermanence of American architecture [...] envision[ing] a rural society based upon a sustainable relationship to the fertile American land, blending old and new, native and European" (224). Hardy

continues on to argue that Cooper's ultimate model for land use includes the preservation of "human ruins" and the natural environment (224).

I would argue that, when seen in terms of Cooper's brand of landscape archaeology as she establishes it in *Rural Hours*, the essay is also a commentary on how the comparatively "new" American landscape has a share in, and is the heir of, the antiquity that lingers in the Old World, particularly that of ancient Greece and Rome. Her discussion of ancient sites is a reflection on contemporary values of nature and the American landscape:

It is well for us that those races of old undertook such noble labors. May we not believe that there was something Providential in the feeling which led them to erect such lasting monuments? They built for us. Such works as the Pyramids, and their cotemporary temples, such works as those of Babel, Paestum, the Coliseum, the Parthenon, belong to the race; their influence is not confined to the soil on which they stand. As the sun of Time descends to complete its course, their shadows are thrown over the whole earth (9).

For Cooper, the world's greatest antiquities are not a matter of nationalistic pride but are important because of their symbolic power to unite the human race. The shadows cast by these famous monuments speak to their antiquity and their persistence in the present and into the future.

It is difficult to keep hindsight at bay while reading Cooper's critique of "the borderers of civilization": Americans poised to enter a future marked by time-saving technologies and flashy but flimsy modern structures but who seem to be forgetting their roots, and who are razing all historical nuance from the landscape. "Look, in fact, at any of the peculiar and most remarkable of the works of the age, and see how speedily all traces of them could be removed," she urges (12). "Fresh hordes of barbarians" could easily erase all signs of

society and culture of the modern day, she claims, because nothing truly monumental has been constructed in the mid-nineteenth century (12). Cooper argues that modern Americans have embraced a sense of "progress" that excludes history, and that these values are reflected in a landscape where antiquities are systematically being destroyed. New York City, for example, has lost the last of its original Dutch houses (12). The image of Babylon resurfaces again here, this time in connection with the process of ruin she sees going on around her in America. Of Babylon, she asks, "How many centuries were required to ruin [it]?" (8).

For Cooper, when mankind takes on the "character of creator," "ris[ing] above his true part of laborer and husbandman...and piles you up hills, pumps you up a river, scatters stones, or sprinkles cascades, [...] he is apt to fail" (6). Just as mankind exhibits hubris in the grand schemes that shape the landscape, it also does so when it takes on the role of time itself, speeding up the cycle of natural decay and perhaps hastening toward its own destruction. The active destruction of relics is equivalent to iconoclasm. Instead of building on lasting foundations, Cooper claims, progress in America leaps from novelty to novelty with little thought for preservation or posterity. This loss is linked closely with the homogenization of the landscape and the subsequent threat to the community's identity, which, as she has demonstrated in *Rural Hours*, is in part constructed through the mnemonic artifacts and fragments in the landscape. In "A Dissolving View," Cooper takes on the role of what Johnson and Patterson have called "a second creator," modeling a possible landscape for her readers and calling for

her contemporaries to make a more significant impression on their homeland.

In another essay in *The Home Book of the Picturesque* titled "American and European Scenery," James Fenimore Cooper writes of an Old World-landscape that is "impressed with the teeming history of the past" (*Home Book* 52). Susan Cooper also remarks on this perception of the persistence of history in the landscape, citing monuments as markers of human presence and progress:

The vast extent of the regions over which these ancient monuments are scattered, the different series of them on the same soil—Druidical, Roman, Gothic, Renaissance, and modern—give one a clearer idea than figures can, of the innumerable throngs of human beings which have preceded the present tenants of the ground, and so fully stamped the impression of man on the face of the old world (10).

Similar to the way that she writes the history of landscape traces in *Rural Hours*, Cooper here employs a stadialist vision of ancient monuments, stressing the tangible "weight" of Old World history as much as she does the sheer numbers of the human race that have passed over the land. American progress, while registered in environmental changes, has not begun to stake out the land in a similar way, and American society seems indifferent to this project altogether in its pursuit of advanced technologies and material gain. Cooper echoes nineteenth-century anxieties about a lack of the "impression" of society through ancient historical sites and artifacts on the American continent:

It is true that our fathers, with amazing rapidity, have changed a forest wilderness into a civilized and populous land. But the fresh civilization of America is wholly different in aspect from that of the old world; there is no blending of the old and the new in this country; there is nothing old among us. If we were endowed with ruins we should not preserve them; they would be pulled down to make way for some novelty (11).

One reading of this crucial passage in "A Dissolving View" suggests that Cooper believes, as many of her contemporaries did, that the American landscape was empty of antiquities. However, in light of the many and varied antiquities that Cooper recounts in *Rural Hours*, and of her persistence in reading the human traces in the American landscape, it might be more useful to view this seemingly contradictory passage as a rhetorical statement that holds contemporary destructive and iconoclastic practices up for critique, rather than as a statement about the landscape itself.

As support for this argument I would point to the paragraph immediately following it, which describes the destruction of some local antiquities: the last original Dutch houses being torn down in New York City. Reading this essay in light of the landscape archaeology that Cooper sets up in *Rural Hours* leads to the conclusion that "A Dissolving View" is concerned not with anxieties over a lack of antiquities,¹² but with an American landscape that contains antiquities that are being systematically destroyed by its people. This destruction extends to the natural environment, and the need to preserve its most notable and noble natural monuments. Against the backdrop of the rush westward to find gold and land, Cooper emphasizes the need to preserve the nation's colonial artifacts, links to its early history and originating identity.

In part, Cooper seeks to impress upon her readers the aesthetic and monumental possibilities of the landscape through picturesque descriptions. It is important, as Gianquitto and others have shown, to acknowledge that Cooper

¹² For a discussion on American anxieties related to a supposed lack of antiquities, see Conn, pp. 127-28.

positions herself as “the picturesque spectator” in the essay (183). However, her treatment of landscape in “A Dissolving View” is not limited to a picturesque gaze, and at certain points she acknowledges antiquities that have no picturesque qualities but are still important for their connections to the ancient past. For Cooper, natural monuments in wild landscapes are shaped by the same set of uniform “noble principles” that emerge in man-made monuments. Her reading of the aesthetic principles of classical antiquities in the landscape in the 1852 essay follows from her discussion in *Rural Hours* of the commonly held theory that antiquities and human creations in general are derived in form from nature:

The rudest savage, the semi-barbarian, and the most highly civilized races have alike turned to the vegetation for their models. Architecture, as we all know, has borrowed almost wholly from the forest [...] the lotus, the honeysuckle, and the acanthus, are found carved on the most ancient works of man yet standing upon the earth—the tombs and temples of Hindostan, and Egypt, and Greece. In short, from the most precious treasures of ancient art, down to the works of our own generation, we find the same designs ever recurring (317).

As this passage from *Rural Hours* shows, the meanings Cooper invests in antiquities embedded in the landscape goes beyond the aesthetics of the picturesque and speaks of the importance of nature in the human monumental imagination.

As each stage of civilization progresses, the use of nature as an aesthetic raw material progresses as well. In *Rural Hours*, Cooper describes how ancient relics like pottery fragments and carvings also reflect this principle of design from nature. In her discussion of the popular contemporary carving design of lion-claw table legs, she makes a direct connection between these and ancient artifacts

and cultural practices: "When first carved, in Egypt, or Asia, or Greece, it probably recalled some signal contest within the bounds of the primeval forest [...]and it has been handed down by the most polished artists of successive ages, until it has reached our own Western World" (318). Similarly, in "A Dissolving View" she sketches out the progression of monuments built by different civilizations at various stages, beginning with "rude ancient tumuli, or barrows, whose origin goes back to periods anterior to history" (7). These have "a peculiar interest," "a spirit of mystery," and "something of the same profound secrecy" of natural formations (7). She argues that, because of the close link between these mounds and natural landscape features, they "have an important place in the long array of works which give a peculiar character to the lands which man has once held as his own" (7). Thus she gives an important place to the prehistoric monuments, which, while they have very little picturesque value and "produce no very striking effect on the aspect of a country," are valuable for the mystery of antiquity that surrounds them. Like the mounds in *Rural Hours*, these are important not necessarily for what they say about the past, but for their effect on how a person situates herself in a particular place in the present.

As if to test this idea, Cooper spends the rest of her essay describing an imaginative "experiment"; she waves a witch hazel branch over the valley below her vantage point, "determined to make a trial of its well-established magical powers" (14). Not a little ironically, the wave of the witch hazel frond easily erases all evidence of the village and farmlands below. Miraculously, with another wave of the wand Cooper fulfills her fancy of "hav[ing] a view of the

valley in the condition it would have assumed, had it lain in the track of European civilization during past ages; how, in such a case, would it have been fashioned by the hand of man?" (14) The result is a landscape that features architecture and relics from various time periods scattered across the land below. Cooper maps out a landscape that is crowded with antiquities, and which give the extant landscape features new purpose: a stone cross marks the village green with special significance as "a monument of some past historical event"; hamlets are "grouped about sites where feudal castles had stood in former times; another appeared on the bank of the river, at a point long used as a ford" (15-16). The only things that are steadfast and unchanging in this landscape are its natural features, which "remained precisely as we had always known them; not a curve in the outline of the lake was changed, not a knoll was misplaced" (14).

Alongside the picturesque hamlet that springs up in place of the village are a heavy stone bridge, a ruined tower, castle, and convent, along with other, more ancient traces: "Something whispered to us that a Roman road had once passed in that direction, that a villa had formerly stood on the same spot as the Priory, and that ancient coins were occasionally dug up there" (15-16). In the "Autumn" section of *Rural Hours* Cooper discusses the mania for treasure-hunting in New York, which was principally a result of traditions that Captain Kidd's pirate booty had been buried somewhere along the state's coastline. Cooper laughs at the notion that treasure hunters would search for it hundreds of miles inland (*Rural Hours*, 232-33). However, she is disturbed by the fact that the treasure seekers destroyed "a remarkable tree" in their pursuits: "wonders are told of its growth,"

she writes, "for it is now some years since it disappeared, and its existence is becoming a tradition of the valley" (231). Cooper mentions another case of treasure hunting in which "the search was declared to be commenced at the instigation of a professed witch, living in a neighboring village, and regularly armed with a twig of wych-hazel!" (233) Clearly she thinks little of such superstitious behavior; her tongue-in-cheek use of the witch hazel branch in "A Dissolving View" suggests that she did not necessarily view her essay as a scathing social critique or a call for change, but rather as an indulgent fancy.

However, in spite of its light-hearted ending, Cooper's essay carries the message that human history and landscape history are foundations and co-indicators of the moral health and identity of the nation and its people. The true treasure to be found is the potential of the land to provide those who inhabit it with connections to the past and the people who once dwelled there; for Cooper personally, this meant a connection to her beloved father and grandfather and a family history that helped shape a community and a nation, as well as her writing career. The newfound wealth in the west might be alluring, but for Cooper it is the established wealth of antiquities and ruins in the east that will perpetuate national identity, just as it perpetuates her family name. Vital connections to the past dissolve when local antiquities are destroyed and when a society focuses more on "flimsy" materialism than the values that established it. Without the material reminders of artifacts and monuments, the future of American history, Cooper suggests, may not guarantee the preservation of American values.

CHAPTER IV

EXCAVATING THE ATOPICAL, EXPLORING THE SELF: LOCATING THE
ARCHAEOLOGICAL LANDSCAPE IN CELIA THAXTER'S *AMONG THE ISLES
OF SHOALS*

The Isles of Shoals are an archipelago located nine miles from the New Hampshire coast and sixteen miles from the coast of Maine: Appledore (formerly Hog Island), Smuttynose (sometimes called Haley's Island), Cedar, Malaga, Star, White, Seavey's, Londoner's, and Duck Island (Thaxter 10-11). On clear days the islands are visible from the New Hampshire coast, and ferries still take tourists on the ten-mile journey from Portsmouth to Star Island as they did throughout the nineteenth century. The Isles of Shoals are divided between Maine and New Hampshire, with Appledore, Smuttynose, and Duck Islands belonging to Maine, and the rest to New Hampshire (13). A collection of dangerous rocks is also part of the landscape, including Shag, Mingo, Square, Anderson's, Devil's Rock, and the infamous "Old Harry" (11-12). These and the numerous submerged ledges and reefs surrounding the islands have been the cause of many shipwrecks (Verrill 210).

In 1869, Celia Thaxter began publishing sketches in *The Atlantic Monthly* describing life on these islands; in 1873 she published these as a book, *Among the Isles of Shoals*. In one passage from this text, she describes how part of the islands' landscape has changed over the years, leaving a large gap in the rock:

Under the hammer and chisel of frost and heat, masses of stone are detached and fall from the edges of cliffs, whole ledges become disintegrated, the rock cracks in smooth, thin sheets, and, once loosened, the whole mass can be pulled out, sheet by sheet. Twenty years ago those subtle, irresistible tools of the weather had cracked off a large mass of rock from a ledge on the slope of a gentle declivity. I could just lay my hand in the space then: now three men can walk abreast between the ledge and the detached mass; and nothing has touched it save heat and cold. The whole aspect of the rocks is infinitely aged (117).

This passage reveals one of the most problematic aspects of the landscape in *Among the Isles of Shoals*: it is a place that is constantly and rapidly changing, filled with contradictions. Changes to the landscape occur over millennia but their effects can be witnessed in the brief span of twenty years. In the passage above, Thaxter literally inserts herself in one version of the place—placing her hand in the crack within a large rock—but then the scene gives way to a completely different version of place in the next sentence, one where “three men can walk abreast.” The landscape has been remade anew, but is simultaneously “infinitely aged.” The image of the changing gap in the rock seems to sum up much of what is problematic about the landscape in *Among the Isles of Shoals*, and why Thaxter’s text at times leaves readers with a hazy view of an unstable place. Because the islands are in the process of constant and rapid change, what it means to be “among” them is not always clear and is often contradictory.

When I first decided to include *Among the Isles of Shoals* in this project, I assumed that it would be a relatively easy matter to locate the text and its landscapes within the larger conversation on landscape and antiquities in literature of the period. Thaxter’s landscapes are teeming with artifacts, monuments, and other traces of past human settlements. However, it soon

became clear that the project was not going to be simple at all; the best word I have found to describe the complexities of *Among the Isles of Shoals* is “entanglement.”¹ In one sense, this entanglement occurs on a critical level. Seemingly without any particular logic, the book brings together genres such as travel writing, autobiography, poetry, and history. In spite of, or perhaps because of, this confusing amalgamation of genres, the book is usually assigned the label of “regionalism.” The period it was written in, its occasional nostalgic tone, and its attention to place seem to make *Among the Isles of Shoals* fit under the banner of regionalism. However, the more I have read and re-read the text, the less I agree with this assignment and begin to see it as a too-easy resignation of the text to a particular space within American literary criticism. Part of this project, then, is to see what might be gained by unmooring *Among the Isles of Shoals* from regionalism and instead setting it within the larger mythogeographic tradition of the islands: a tradition that, as I will explain, was not bound to any particular genre or even to any particular art form. In this new context, I argue that Thaxter’s creation of “evasive” landscapes in *Among the Isles of Shoals* serves the larger purpose of “protecting” and “preserving” the islands that she loved from the rapid social and environmental changes that were taking place there in the 1860s and 1870s.

In taking this approach, I examine the role that material artifacts, relics, and other traces play in *Among the Isles of Shoals*, particularly how they function in Thaxter’s construction of identity and place: the self-in-place. If taken from the

¹ Many thanks to Amy Manning, who suggested this word to me.

regionalist context, the text seems to reflect more about the author's struggles with her identity. It reveals her conflicted feelings over how to view herself in relation to a place that she was exiled from after her marriage and to which she later returned. Related to this conflict were her concerns over the economic and social future of islands that were becoming more important to the nation as a tourist attraction than as a fishing community as the years went by. This issue was problematic for the author, because her family's hotel benefited financially from island tourism. However, by the end of the book, Thaxter places the most tenable future of the islands into the hands of Swedish and Norwegian immigrants, suggesting that it is they who will repopulate and reinvigorate the dying Shoals community.

An analysis of the archaeological imagery and language in the text reveals that the main focus of this book is not the regionalist, nativist turn toward preservation and isolation of place from outsiders. Rather, Thaxter presents a place that is averse to monumentalization, historicization, and preservation of the past at the expense of the present and future. Instead she offers a version of the islands that seems contradictory: it is both cleared, empty space, but it is also tied to history through artifacts and relics that surface and resurface. Instead of being preserved, human traces are continually crumbling and wearing away; however, there is never a lack of these traces. In spite of the sense of loss that such change might suggest, Thaxter's tone is not that of nostalgia for the lost past. Rather, she suggests there is an urgent need for the place to be revitalized with a completely separate future. One particular scene expresses this sentiment

powerfully. In this passage, Thaxter describes a relic: a skull that some young people dug up while on a pleasure trip, and which she later brings home:

It had lain so long in the earth that it was no more repulsive than a bit of stone, yet a nameless dread invested it. At last I took it in my hands and pored over it till the shudder passed away forever, and then I was never weary of studying it. Sitting by the driftwood blaze late into the still autumn nights alone at my desk, it kept me company,—a vase of brilliant flowers on one side, the skull on the other, and the shaded lamp between, equally lighting both. A curious head it was, thick as an Ethiop's, with no space above the eyes, high above the ears, and heavy behind them. But O, those hollows where the eyes once looked out, beholding the same sea and sky we see to-day! Those great, melancholy, empty hollows,—what sort of creature gazed from them? [...] Little roots of plants were clasped about the temples. Behind the right ear were three indentations, as if made by some sharp instrument, suggesting foul play. An Indian tomahawk might have made those marks, or a pirate's cutlass: who can say? What matter is it now? I kept the relic for months, till it crumbled so fast when I daily dusted it that I feared it would disappear entirely; so I carried it quietly back and laid it in the grave from which it had been taken, wondering, as I drew the shallow earth over it, who had stood round about when it was buried for the first time, centuries ago; what manner of people, and were they afraid or sorry. But there was no voice to answer me (175-77).

This one relic contains many meanings and is located at the crossroads of a number of contexts, making it a symbol of the problematic relationship between self, landscape, and antiquities in *Among the Isles of Shoals*. The skull is both stone and bone, uniting elements of nature and humankind. Rather than history or narrative, a mysterious “nameless dread invest[s]” it: a feeling that dissipates the longer Thaxter touches and studies the object, and is replaced by a kind of obsession as she “takes it in her hands” and is “never weary of studying it.” This fascination is not unlike the “auto-erotic pleasure” of antiquarianism that I discussed in Chapter I. To recall Mike Goode's description, the emphasis on pleasure for the eighteenth-century antiquarian was viewed as essentially

unproductive, "rejecting historical 'direction' in favor of the pleasure of historical reflection as an end in itself" (61). This approach to antiquities describes Thaxter's brand of genteel antiquarianism, and the pleasure she takes in imagining the original contexts of the material artifacts she finds.

Thaxter not only studies the skull intently, but also arranges it beside a lamp and flowers like a still life on her desk. Her act of positioning the skull, lamp, and flowers in relation to each other suggests a connection between the roles of the antiquarian and the artist. It is important that she describes these objects as items on her desk, especially considering my discussion in Chapter I of the desk as a liminal space that connects the private and public worlds of production and consumption.² For Thaxter, especially later in life, visual art and expression became an important way to construct her public identity. Her appearances in her cottage at poetry readings, dressed in the colors of the native sandpipers; her love of painting china pieces with beautiful floral patterns; her practice of gardening as an art form; and her role as a hostess on the islands all speak to this interest in visual presentation and the public self. Here the lamp sheds light "equally" on the "brilliant" vase of flowers and the skull, symbols of life and death but also symbols of the artist and the antiquarian. Here Thaxter presents us with a tableau that evokes the ways in which the imaginative pleasures of the antiquarian are related to the creative forces of the artist, perhaps as a source of inspiration or perhaps as another aspect of the creative imagination.

² See Annegret Pelz, "The Desk: Excavation Site and Repository of Memories" for more discussion on the desks of German women writers as sites where collected objects store memory. Significantly, Pelz describes how excavation became a metaphor for autobiographical writing.

But when Thaxter follows up these descriptions with a comparison of the skull to “an Ethiop,” the outside world suddenly floods into her quiet study and new contexts enter the fray. The skull may have belonged to an African slave who once lived on the islands, but the sheer antiquity of the relic seems to echo the mound-builder theories of settlement by the ancient civilizations of Africa, Europe, and East Asia that I discuss in Chapter II. If seen in this light, the skull (at least imaginatively) dates the islands not only to early colonial history but also to the “original (prehistoric) settlement” of the nation. However, in spite of this suggestion, for Thaxter the skull remains a “curiosity” rather than evidence of this early history. It represents what cannot be known about the islands’ past. Instead of pinning a particular theory of origins on the skull, she explores more imaginative possibilities: pirates or Indians may have killed the original owner of the skull. Imagining the relic’s past is a form of adventuring for Thaxter in this portion of the description, where she engages with the romantic, sometimes violent, and semi-mythical past of the Isles of Shoals.

By the end of the section that I quote above, Thaxter finds that her constant attentions to the skull are actually destroying it. It is too fragile for such intense study and she reburies it, finding “no voice”³ to answer the questions she still has about it. Thaxter’s awareness of the potentially harmful powers of her antiquarian interests may perhaps be considered cautionary; too much curiosity about an antiquity can ultimately destroy the fragile remains of the past.

However, her description of the near-destruction of the skull also speaks to what

³ For a similar moment in which ancient human remains are “voiceless,” see Warren K. Moorehead’s 1890 report on “Fort Ancient” (118).

Thaxter saw as the futility of trying to reconstruct the gaps in the islands' history, or of preserving objects that seem meant ultimately for utter decay and oblivion. If Hale saw "the genius of oblivion" as a tool for reconstructing and reviving a particular version of the ancient past, Thaxter considered oblivion necessary to maintain the imaginative potential of the islands' past, thus ensuring an unlimited imaginative foundation on which to build their future role in society.

As a place where the "original population" of Shoalers was seemingly "dying out" and giving way to invasions of tourists, the Isles required a sense of the past that was not exclusionary to potential newcomers—i.e., immigrants—who could revive its society. Past such as the one Susan Fenimore Cooper describes in *Rural Hours* may be considered exclusionary pasts: they allow little interpretive room for anyone other than the founding family and other white settlers who first arrived in Cooperstown to have a say in the construction of the place's historical foundations. These foundations are geared toward the growth and realization of the future of the place through an increase in a resident population with similar color, religious background, historical background, and values as the founders of the place. Thaxter, I would argue, is motivated to construct the landscape history of the Isles of Shoals in such a way that the future populations are selected for the good of the place rather than for the good of a particular ethnic, racial, or religious group.⁴ As I will go on to explain in more detail, she seeks to present a version of the islands' past that will

⁴ By the end of *Among the Isles of Shoals* Thaxter suggests that it is Scandinavian immigrants who are the most likely heirs to and restorers of the dying community on the islands.

not make them an exclusive place, and that will leave them imaginatively open to future settlers.

In Chapters II and III, I discuss how Hale, Sedgwick, and Cooper use archaeological language to connect landscape to configurations of national and personal identity. Explorers and archaeologists in the 1820s studied ancient ruins in order to explain American prehistory, and many suggested that a great civilization once dominated the land. Hale and Sedgwick seized upon the imaginative possibilities of this theory, using antiquarian models of authorship to construct archaeological landscapes that served as subtle rhetorical devices in the Indian Removal debates. Hale "excavates" the mysterious mounds of the west, attributing them to exiles from the ancient city of Tyre. Sedgwick uses archaeological and antiquarian language to embed meaning in various sites of colonial Massachusetts. An antiquarian reading of "The Genius of Oblivion" and *Hope Leslie* reveals the processes of preservation and erasure in the landscape: in Hale's case, serving cultural justifications for rewriting the land into the victorious white narrative; in Sedgwick's case, exposing the complex rhetoric that Anglo-Americans used to write this narrative.

Nearly three decades after Hale and Sedgwick's texts were published, Susan Cooper drew on the antiquarian model of authorship to explore how material artifacts in the landscape connected her particular region to the nation's history. She also used the archaeological landscape to explore personal identity and family history. Antiquarianism and archaeology provided Cooper with a framework for discussing identity and history in terms of material artifacts.

Identity arises from place in relationship with the artifacts that also populate that place. These artifacts orient the self in terms of time as well as space, but again the emphasis is on relationship: how an artifact can connect people across time as well as space. They also can be brought to bear on questions about what one's life means in the greater scheme of history and in light of those who have gone before.

Hale, Sedgwick, and Cooper map out particular places using archaeological language. Their use of archaeology situates their landscapes and makes them "locatable" within the larger space of the nation. These authors go beyond the surface of the landscape, showing its depths through their exploration and imaginative excavation of artifacts, ruins, and monuments; they emphasize this deep artifactual landscape as a site where the histories of humans and the land intertwine. The traces that they uncover in their texts situate particular landscapes within the national imagination. In Cooper's case, family history is national history; the antiquities in her landscape signal a personal connection to the land, enabling her to define herself in terms of her family's role in founding Cooperstown while simultaneously celebrating the transition from wilderness to civilization on the American frontier. In Hale and Sedgwick's texts, human traces in the landscape make an argument for a particular connection to the land that is based on race and culture. Hale's landscapes are carefully documented and defined by the hero of her poem, Ormond, who simultaneously gazes upon the land with the eye of a scientist and an aesthete. Sedgwick, too, incorporates the language of the sublime in describing her landscapes, also drawing upon

imagery that was familiar to her contemporaries, such as John Winthrop's "city upon a hill." In "A Dissolving View," Cooper uses picturesque language to experiment with a less "concrete" landscape, imagining the valleys of New York transformed into a British countryside. However, the natural features of the transformed valley "remained precisely as we had always known them," familiar and recognizable as a particular place (Johnson and Patterson 14).

This chapter will focus on landscapes that resist this sense of familiarity, and which resist being mapped through artifacts and other human traces. Unlike the works of the authors I discuss above, Celia Thaxter's "Among the Isles of Shoals" presents an island landscape that is in many ways disconnected from the rest of the nation. However, her text is concerned with the impact of the outside world on the islands, and how the resulting economic and social transformations affect both the landscape and her own identity within—and relationship to—this changing place. The artifacts she describes are simultaneously commodities marketed to and visually consumed by tourists, are personal effects, and are objects that belong neither to the land nor to those who live or visit there. They disappear and reappear in a cycle of excavation and reburial. Artifacts in *Among the Isles of Shoals* function as touchstones to a murky past; they evoke an idea of time as a physical presence on the land. But they also serve as markers in Thaxter's life, surfacing within the memories and personal stories that she unearths for her readers. There was much at stake for Thaxter in her creation of place. As Norma Mandel writes in her biography, *Beyond the Garden Gate*,

The impact of the islands, from [Thaxter's] arrival at age four to her marriage at sixteen, and then for the rest of her life, cannot be overstated...The Isles of Shoals were the controlling force in her life—they inspired her, overwhelmed her, invigorated her, and in her final years provided the setting for one of her most cherished achievements, her island garden (5).

Writing *Among the Isles of Shoals* was in some ways an act of self-preservation by one whose deepest sense of self depends on a version of the islands that she learned to love in childhood. Thaxter uses archaeological imagery to express the fundamental identity-creating relationship of self to environment. Artifacts such as grave markers, old foundations, or even a skull function as parts of her construction of herself as well as her landscape.

I will look at specific examples of how Thaxter uses archaeological images and antiquarian lore to depict of the Isles of Shoals as a place that fluctuates between geographical and historical fragmentation and wholeness. She does this, I argue, for two purposes: to reflect her own complex relationship to the islands, and to respond to the increasingly popular notion of the islands as a tourist attraction. To these ends, she chooses to depict the Isles—a place that one contemporary describes as "full of bones"—as a fragmented space that resists the persistence of history and acts of monumentalization (Gage 50). Although her book was (arguably) purposed as a travel guide, Thaxter imaginatively excavates the material traces of the islands' "extinct races" (early colonial fishing communities) and her own memories to transform the Isles of Shoals from geographically specific tourist attraction to a mythological space that resists commodification.

In the next section, I will explore what I have termed the

“mythogeographic” tradition that Thaxter draws upon to construct this fragmented, mythological space, discussing how it is similar to regionalism but also how it emerges from something larger than the regionalist tradition. Section II examines how Thaxter draws upon this mythogeographic tradition and also how she departs from it in her depiction of the islands. She inserts her own history into the larger traditions and mythology of the islands, but also acknowledges that the old ways are dying out. For Thaxter, the tourist trade that was nourished in part by the popular myths of the Islands did not represent the future of Shoals civilization, but was instead supplanting it with a temporary and always-changing population. Part III examines more closely how Thaxter constructed the autobiographical portions of *Among the Isles of Shoals* using archaeological imagery, and Part IV continues this discussion with an examination of the impact of the “fragmented” nature of the islands on her construction of the self-in-place. I conclude in Part V with a discussion of how images of fragments in Thaxter’s landscapes operate as a response to threats facing the Islands’ society and culture in the 1860s and 1870s.

I. Regionalism and the Mythogeography of the Isles of Shoals

Thaxter’s blend of scientific and lyrical language, nature observation and historical speculation, and personal recollections and public histories, raise questions about the genre of *Among the Isles of Shoals*. Modern critics have found the text difficult to classify. Judith Fetterley remarks, “its very status as a

book is questionable [italics Fetterley's]" (38), pointing out that, "it lacks most of the features that typically give coherence to a text" (39). Fetterley was one of the first critics to tackle the problem of genre in *Among the Isles of Shoals*. In her essay, "Theorizing Regionalism," she argues that the text lacks structure,⁵ and that this lack of structure is part of a pattern that reveals Thaxter's process of theorizing how person, place, and writing are in relationship with each other (47). Early on, Thaxter has been associated with local colorists,⁶ and Fetterley argues that, while *Among the Isles of Shoals* does not contain all the criteria that generally define regional writing, it demonstrates a thought process that aligns with the goals of writers like Sarah Orne Jewett or Elizabeth Stuart Phelps (40-41). For Fetterley, Thaxter performed her regionalism in daily life, becoming a "symbol" of the islands that were so dear to her and an inspiration to her literary friends (41). However, while Fetterley makes a persuasive argument for Thaxter's importance to regional writing as an inspiration for the likes of Jewett and Whittier, we are still left with a text that cannot be distinctly classified as "regionalist."

Complicating matters further are speculations on why Thaxter, who was primarily recognized as a poet, chose to publish her serialized sketches in book format, a cheaper version of which later became available at railway stations for interested travelers (Mandel 71). She certainly needed to help support her family

⁵ Scholars have observed that Thaxter structures the book loosely around seasonal changes. See Littenberg, page 142.

⁶ See Williams, Sister Mary, C.S.J. "The Pastoral in New England Local Color: Celia Thaxter, Sarah Orne Jewett, Alice Brown." *Dissertation Abstracts: Section A. Humanities and Social Science* 32 (1972): 6947A-6947A.

financially, owing to her husband's chronic unemployment and the social demands of his upper-class family (41). There has also been a discussion of whether Thaxter published *Among the Isles of Shoals* as a kind of advertisement for her parents' Appledore hotel. Fetterley has described the backdrop of economic and family issues surrounding the book's publication as "a time when a rival hotel threatened the Loughton family business on the islands" (38).⁷ However, in spite of the implication that Thaxter published the book in order to bolster the family business, there is little evidence that the Appledore House was directly "threatened" by the Oceanic Hotel, which was built on Star Island in 1872-73 (Tolles 121).

In his memoir, Oscar Loughton suggests that the family's business could barely keep up with demand. In August of 1872, he describes conditions at the Appledore: "The hotel was overflowing with people, some even sleeping on the billiard tables; not a vacant room to offer Mr. [John R.] Poor,⁸ but he insisted on remaining, and finally I gave up my room to his wife and daughter and he slept on a sofa in the writing-room" (82). He goes on to describe relations between the two establishments, writing that in June of 1873 "both hotels...with flying colors,

⁷ According to Bryant F. Tolles, due to increased competition among resorts in the late nineteenth century, "The New England seaboard hostelries, consistent with the national practice, successfully connected with their potential customer base through self-generated broadsides, brochures, booklets, and viewbooks, as well as newspaper, magazine, and tourist guidebook essays, entries, and advertising. Supplementing the printed word was generous visual illustration (engravings, lithographs, and photographs) that conveyed selective and stylized images that built on the printed word and further captured the attention and imagination of the reading and viewing public" (12-13).

⁸ Poor later built the Oceanic Hotel on Star Island (Loughton 82-83).

swung wide their doors,” and that a yacht race hosted by the Oceanic “brought so many objectionable people...that [the Oceanic’s] exclusive guests moved over to the Appledore to escape the noise and confusion” (84-85). Laighton asserts, “the new hotel was not throwing us in the shade, though it had an elevator and modern improvements,” and remarks, “we found the new hotel did not harm us. All of our guests stuck to us, and the tremendous advertising of the Oceanic was bringing new people to Appledore” (85). The great amounts of money and energy that Poor spent to lure guests to the Oceanic seems to greatly outweigh Celia Thaxter’s little book, if at least in sheer volume. Therefore, it seems unlikely that Thaxter’s motives for publishing *Among the Isles of Shoals* were primarily driven by the needs of the family business, even if the text did attract more tourists to the islands.

Before Celia Thaxter began writing the sketches that would eventually be published as *Among the Isles of Shoals* in 1873, a body of writing on the islands stretching back to the early seventeenth century already existed. Over many years, a picture of the islands that resonated in the popular imagination gradually took shape across multiple genres. Enough writing on the Shoals existed by the latter half of the nineteenth century so that an agreed-upon portrait of the islands existed: what I am calling the “mythogeography” of the Isles of Shoals. This term refers to a collection of representations that, over a substantial period of time, formulate an idea of place that exists through a kind of textual consensus. It is mapped through cultural production and cultural assumptions, through political interventions such as the establishment of territorial boundaries and official

government records, through ethnographic description, through cartographic measurement and geographic records, and through descriptions of personal experience.

In examining the ways in which Thaxter was connecting constructions of self and place through material artifacts and monumental landscapes, it is useful to consider her text as part of a larger mythogeographic tradition. Her textual rendition of the islands does not spring wholly from the contemporary regionalist impulse, but also from traditions stretching back to the seventeenth century. She preserves these traditions at a time of great change at the Isles of Shoals and within the nation as a whole, but also uses them to comment upon the present time and the economic and social future of the place. In this way she brings these traditions into the present and projects an idea of the islands for the years to come.

While in many cases a place's mythogeography may contribute to its representation in regional writing, I would distinguish "mythogeography" from "regionalism" by arguing that the former is not limited to any particular genre of literature, requires a broad documentation, and is not restricted to any historical period. Instead, it grows and changes in meaning and representation over time. It is a discursive construction that may be expressed through different types of cultural productions: visual representations, musical interpretations, poetry, fiction, travel essays, epistolary chronicles, government reports, letters, and histories. Regionalism, however, is a specific literary genre that developed sometime in the nineteenth century. As Richard Brodhead argues, it arose as a

genre in the 1860s and remained a major literary form through the turn of the century (115). Later Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse would claim that regionalism actually began with the work of Alice Cary in the 1840s (104). Though they may disagree on when regionalism first emerged, these critics agree that it has particular definable characteristics, although these have been much disputed over the last 20 years.

For Brodhead, regional writing had to contain regional dialect, "colorful personifications" of local characters, and feature a place far removed from the modern industrial world, "a zone of backwardness where locally variant folkways still prevail" (115). He points to a body of criticism that saw regional writing as "cultural elegy," memorializing vanishing ways of life and localities, either due to the forces of modernity, tourism, or industry (119). Brodhead was particularly interested in the connections between elite tourism and the exploitation of regions in literature. He cites Dunnet Landing in Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896) as an example of a vacation spot that the elite would be interested in, "a place to come to" (145). As a resort and a retreat, the Maine town provided an escape from "1890s urban modernity" (146). He complicates this relationship between vacation spot and "home world," however, claiming that the vacation place is not really separate from that world but is instead "an extension" of it (147). To this end he brings in the cultural and literary histories of texts publicizing the New England coast for tourist consumption (150-51).

Fetterley and Pryse differ from Brodhead, suggesting that regionalist texts

can challenge “touristic images,” whereas Brodhead saw them as participating in elite class identity formation.⁹ His critique of regionalism seems similar to critiques of the pastoral, as “erasing” class issues while ideologically supporting the elite class,¹⁰ while Fetterley and Pryse suggest that regionalism can give voices to the marginalized (5-6). Their theories in *Writing Out of Place* do not take into account ideas of place as practice, or a collection of practices, and instead differentiate between topography and discourse. They argue that regional writing privileges those within the region rather than those outside—that it should be viewed as a site of resistance, played out through ideas of place that seem based partly in fantasy, partly in ideology, and partly through the way a people define themselves, and through the way they are viewed and consumed on “the outside” (8).

In some ways, regionalist writing creates “fictions” around real places and their place in society and history. Brodhead argues that regional writing records “contemporary reality” and also “compose[s] a certain version of modern history”:

⁹ Thaxter works within the context of tourism described by Brodhead and Fetterley and Pryse. She does not deny the economic force of tourism at work on the islands, but at the same time she does not challenge it outright. The degree that she looks forward to the revitalization of the local community through changes such as increased immigration rather than “sealing off” the place by trapping it in time like a nostalgic museum-like space separates her from writers like Sarah Orne Jewett, whose town of Dunnet Landing Brodhead cites as an example of an escape from “1890s urban modernity” (146).

¹⁰ For further analysis of the social interventions of the pastoral mode in American literature, see Lawrence Buell, “American Pastoral Ideology Reappraised.” *American Literary History* 1.1 (1989): 1-29; Jan Bakker, “Some Other Versions of Pastoral: The Disturbed Landscape in Tales of the Antebellum South.” *No Fairer Land*. Ed. J. Lasley Dameron, et al. Troy, NY: Whitston; 1986: 67-86; Claire Lawrence, “A Possible Site for Contested Manliness.” *ISLE* 4.2 (1997): 17-37.

one that appears to remove the place and its people from history itself, “constituting it as a self-contained form belonging to the past rather than an interactive force still adapting in the present” (121). In a similar way, mythogeography also creates a larger narrative around a particular place. The mythogeography of the Isles of Shoals tends to emphasize the islands’ romantic history and the ways that folklore and local legends have come to characterize the landscape. For the most part it neglects the day-to-day lives of the islands’ contemporary fishing population, unless to remark upon the picturesque appearance of fishing shacks or the fishermen themselves (who are often depicted as a “dying race”). In many accounts the islands are a primordial place, violent and volcanic in nature; yet their ruinous and fragmentary structure also evokes the classical antiquity of Pompeii. This (usually implied) connection to the ruins of antiquity gives the place the dream-like quality of a far-away or forgotten world.

While the appeal of the Shoals’ mythogeography was not limited to tourists, those who flocked to the islands, especially at mid-century and into the latter half of the nineteenth century, came with expectations based in great part on this particular construction of the islands in popular literature. By looking at the ways that literature contributed to and sustained the isles’ mythogeography, we may better understand how Thaxter inserted her own writing into the mix and, subsequently, how her text transforms the geography of public myth into something private, mapping self onto place and place onto self, and at times obscuring the public view of a place, or collapsing the distance between human

subject and a place that had become iconic in American letters.

The earliest records of the Isles date back to the early 1600s. In spite of their remote location and rocky, inhospitable environment, the Isles of Shoals were an important colonial cod fishery; eventually, permanent fishing settlements were established there (Harrington 253). John Smith, who visited in 1614, is credited with being the first to represent the islands on a map (Mandel 3). A cairn of stones standing on Star Island is popularly attributed to Smith, and stands as one of two monuments to the "discoverer" of the Isles (Drake 167). The fishery flourished until the 1770s, when those living on the Shoals were ordered by the British to evacuate to the mainland (258). After the war, the cod industry never completely recovered, and the few who returned to the islands were often depicted as violent and uncivilized. The reputation of this postwar community became part of local legend, as in this description by early twentieth-century travel writer A. Hyatt Virrell:

the inhabitants of the Isles of Shoals at that time formed a community which was probably the most ignorant, vicious, lawless, and illiterate in all America, the islands being referred to as the 'Godless Isles.' Few could either read or write, there were no records of births or deaths, few knew even their own ages, marriage ceremonies had been dispensed with, promiscuity was almost universal, and every man was a law unto himself. Also there were ugly stories of wrecking and of vessels deliberately lured to destruction upon the rocks and reefs (212).

Here Virrell describes a place that, while it was one of the earliest to be settled by English colonists, had regressed to the status of a lawless place. They are separated from the mainland communities not only by nine miles of ocean but by virtue of the fact that they lacked the civility, propriety, and law and order of communities like Portsmouth, Amesbury, or Newburyport.

Nineteenth-century descriptions of the Isles of Shoals reveal a sense of the historical separation between the islands' pre- and postwar societies. The evacuation of the fishing settlements in the 1770s marks a gap in the recorded history of the place, where, in Virrell's words, "there were no records of births or deaths." In its uncivilized post-Revolution state, the inhabitants of the Shoals failed to maintain the continuity of official recorded history with the islands' prewar society. This period in Shoals history became a source of romantic fascination to the tourists who visited the islands from the 1830s on. Marcia B. Littenberg writes that such "romantic" tourist destinations in New England were seen as an escape from urban life (141). In her argument she employs Carolyn Merchant's idea that, by the nineteenth century, attitudes toward nature were divided between a utilitarian appraisal of natural resources and appreciation of "unspoiled" environments that were suitable for "spiritual and moral comfort": "the same middle-class individuals who profited from the use of nature's resources also sought the antidote of weekend excursions to New England's lakes and mountains. The same merchants and industrialists who were subjected to the stresses of competition sought unspoiled nature's psychic comfort" (141).¹¹ Historians and travel writers emphasized the isles' "romantic" history, retelling legends of pirates like Captain Teach and Blackbeard who supposedly buried treasure on the Shoals.¹² To quote historian William Varrell,

¹¹ Merchant discusses this dichotomy in *Ecological Revolutions* (1989).

¹² See Samuel Adams Drake's *Nooks and Corners of the New England Coast* (1875), Estelle Jane Paige's "Neighbors: New Hampshire and Maine: The Isles of Shoals" (1952), and A. Hyatt Verrill's *Along New England Shores* (1936).

Few barren islands have been the scene of as much historical activity as the Isles of Shoals...they have played major roles on many pages of history. As well as being one of the very first settlements in America, they have been one of the most popular resorts of Victorian America, home of ghosts, the scene of buried treasure, dreadful shipwrecks, and cold blooded [sic] murder (92).

Varrell goes on to describe the importance of the islands to early settlements in the northeast and their imaginative appeal to Victorian visitors in the nineteenth century.¹³ These and other legends became part of the dramatic early history of the Isles, and popular romantic subjects of poetry and travelogues throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century.¹⁴

Due to this popularity, the Shoals' history was readily available to those who were interested in learning about it. As historian John Scribner Jenness declares in *The Isles of Shoals, an Historic Sketch* (1873), stories of the islands' past were not only "of general interest to the public" (9), but were of particular interest to tourists. In the introductory pages of his history, he writes:

It is our utmost hope, that some selections from the highly romantic early annals of the Isles of Shoals, together with a brief sketch of the social, moral, and religious condition of the motley, shifting population, who formerly in large numbers inhabited these rocks, may serve to while away a vacant hour or two of some summer idler, amid these once busy scenes (10).

¹³ The mention of "cold-blooded murder" here is a reference to the killing of Annetta and Karen Christianson by Robert Wagner on Smuttynose Island in March of 1873. Thaxter's thrilling account of the incident, "A Memorable Murder," was published in *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1875. The site of the murder became popular among tourists, who would bring home "souvenirs" of the crime—scraps of blood-spattered wallpaper from the home where it took place, for example [See Chadwick for a tourist's account of travel to the murder scene].

¹⁴ See, for example, Chadwick's "The Isles of Shoals" (1874), Moore's "The Story of the Isles of Shoals" (1898), or the poem "Appledore" (1878), by J.W., all of which were published in popular magazines.

It seems that Jenness thought vacationers would want either to read about the history of the place before traveling there or to enjoy reading it while vacationing at the Isles. In any case, he argues that understanding the place's natural and human history—the significance of the material artifacts, monuments, geological formations, flora, and fauna one encountered in a tour of the islands—is an integral part of the tourist experience.

Travel guides place the tourist in a position of (albeit limited) authority over a place's history as well as its topographical features. In a place as romanticized and as geographically, socially, and culturally disconnected as the Isles of Shoals, geological and ecological descriptions, early history, local folklore and legends, and the sum of others' experiences gave the tourist a foundation of knowledge. And as much post-bellum writing on the Shoals demonstrates, as a place "in the midst of the sea" (Wayne) the islands provided the unwary tourist with uncertain footing at best and a sense of disconnection from the rest of the world. Chadwick writes: "After having staid [sic] here for a few days the towns and cities of the continent become a dream, a myth, to you. Going back to Boston, you are surprised to find both the State-Houses still standing. One's experience here begets a feeling that our ordinary world is too large" (676). Fragments, traces, graves, and gaps are scattered across this dream-like place, and most of these are described as crumbling away, not as enduring testaments.

What remains is a ruinous literary landscape that resists the authority of the archaeologist or antiquarian, and an audience of readers and travelers that did not necessarily want this authority anyway. As Chadwick hints, the romantic

idea of the islands and the folklore that provided so much of their appeal was sometimes at odds with archaeologists' findings (671). In Jenness's words, "The Shoals have never enjoyed their local antiquary," and the task of antiquarian collection and interpretation would be "laborious to the writer, while the minute relation of petty occurrences among a community of fishermen and sailors, especially now that the entire population has been swept away, must needs prove wearisome to the general reader" (9-10). An essential part of the tourist's (and armchair traveler's) experiences of the Isles was the thrill of romance, not the "jeune and trivial materials" of the antiquarian (9). Above all the islands represented an imaginative as well as physical escape for the ill and world-weary: a place where one might find buried pirate treasure (Paige 146-47) or see the spot where a lovelorn fisherman supposedly jumped to his death (149). Aubertine Woodward Moore sums up the heart of this experience in her 1898 article:

A delightful mystery surrounds the story of the Isles of Shoals. Whoever attempts to penetrate it yields to its spell. It wholly captures the fancy of the favored mortal, who is personally brought under the subtile [sic] charm of the atmosphere, outline, coloring and music of these jagged, wind and wave-swept rocks. They are Enchanted Islands, whose origin is unknown, whose period of usefulness to man cannot be computed, and whose complete cycle of romance will ever remain untold (519).

Travel articles like Moore's depict the Shoals as a place that, like the island of the lotus-eaters, hovers vaguely on the edge of the nation like an offshore dreamscape. Her description brings to mind Gerald K. Gresseth's commentary on the Sirens' island in Homer's *The Odyssey*: "There is no real geography here, only mythology" (208). Nathaniel Hawthorne recognized this quality of the place

when he visited in August of 1852: "It is quite impossible to give an idea of these rocky shores,—how confusedly they are tossed together, lying in all directions; what solid ledges, what great fragments thrown out from the rest" (436). Celia Thaxter, charming as she was in Hawthorne's eyes, is the "pretty Miranda" inhabiting this unaccountable place (437).

Part of the isles' charm lay in their barren and "ruinous" landscape. Writers focused on traces of the early settlements including cellar-holes, walls, and monuments, not only as sites that might interest the curious tourist, but also as material remains of the isles' "lost" history—the record of a place that has gone from civilization to savagery and back again. Hawthorne remarks on a sightseeing expedition to a graveyard on Star Island, describing how difficult it could be to distinguish a gravestone in the rocky landscape: "[the gravestones] were of red freestone, lying horizontally on piles of the granite fragments, such as are scattered all about. There were other graves, marked by the rudest shapes of stones at head and foot. And so many stones protruded from the ground, that it was wonderful how space and depth enough was found between them to cover the dead" (418). In her 1875 travel sketch "Some Starry Days," Alice Wayne makes specific references to "ruins" on the Shoals, which are "a vision of barren desolation":

Everywhere, beyond the hotel buildings, barren rocks and crumbling stone-walls. A further study revealed a deserted, broken-paned school-house; an old time-stained church, on the highest point of the island, beyond reach of the mighty waves of the winter storms; and one granite column standing in bold relief against the sky. Later we took in the fact of grass growing in the centre of the island, in the hollows amongst the rocks, one tiny enclosed burial-place, and graves everywhere (Accessible Archives).

Wayne goes on to describe the isles as dramatic geological curiosities, marked by thundering gorges and chasms “that seemed as though rent asunder in some wild throe of nature” (Accessible Archives). The isles’ topography suggests catastrophic, perhaps even volcanic, transformation:

Anything more confused than the general appearance of these isles it would be hard to find. It is no well-ordered layer of rock, or abrupt, detached masses of granite, but the stratified rocks stand on end and run into those of volcanic origin, and sudden terminations meet you everywhere. Everything is upset, and no part of Star is more chaotic than the interior, for there the loose rocks are best accounted for by the supposition that they “rained down” (Accessible Archives).

In his 1875 travelogue, Drake, too, remarks on the islands’ similarity to a volcano (161). He echoes the “confusion” described by Wayne, writing, “In winter, or during violent storms, the savagery of these rocks, exposed to the full fury of the Atlantic, and surrounded by an almost perpetual surf, is overwhelming. You can with difficulty believe the island on which you stand is not reeling beneath your feet” (161). He also remarks on how White Island would make a good subject “for a painting of the Deluge!” (162)

The depiction of a catastrophic and ruinous landscape is common in writings on the Shoals during the latter half of the century, although antebellum writers certainly registered the presence of ruins on the islands. In 1843, author Richard Henry Dana wrote in a journal entry about Smuttynose, “It is in rather ruinous condition, and only two houses on the island are inhabited. It once contained a population of four hundred or five hundred souls. This, however, was before the Revolution, and there are no signs of its former prosperity but the pier, a few hollows where cellars were once dug, and some moss-covered

tombstones" (120). For Wayne, who wrote in the 1870s, the village of Gosport is a place where the tourist can witness the transformation of an inhabited place into a kind of ghost town; a latter-day Pompeii wiped out not by a volcanic disaster but by changing economic needs: "Great are the changes that this island has seen within a few years past. All of it, excepting a small hotel and one or two cottages has been purchased for a summer resort. The whole village, save a few small houses that could be of use as a part of the hotel, has been destroyed" (Accessible Archives). After musing on the changes that the island's economy and topography have undergone throughout the century, Wayne concludes by referring back to the material traces of the past that cling to an environment which, by its nature, is inhospitable to the preservation of human life or history:

But the falling stone walls that remain as pasturing inclosures [sic], the old school-house and the church on the hill, tell a tale of other days. And everywhere are the graves of centuries! The birds sing as sweetly, the flowers show as brilliant colors, and the sea sings its lullaby as of old, but only the dead still keep their claim. Many a day did I sit and consider whither all the living had gone— those to whom this barren isle was all the world, and who loved it at least as well as we do our homes. They have not sought the other islands of the shoals, and surely the mainland could never seem like home after life in the midst of the sea.

The decrepit stone walls and other ruined structures become *memento mori* of past residents, whose mysterious disappearance and "extinction" became a romantic meditation for travelers like Wayne.

II. Celia Thaxter's Uses of Mythogeography

As a testament to the interest the Isles of Shoals held for a large and

literate audience, the sketches from Celia Thaxter's *Among the Isles of Shoals* (1873) were initially serialized in *The Atlantic Monthly* from 1896-97 before being published as a "little" book in 1873 (Fetterley 38).¹⁵ *Among the Isles of Shoals* brings together the familiar motifs common in contemporary travel writing. Thaxter includes legends of the post-war Shoalers and ethnographic sketches of present residents; descriptions of a barren, ruin-filled landscape; and the ghost stories, historic sketches, and descriptions of monuments that the average Shoals tourist (as identified by her contemporary, Jenness,) would be interested in reading. In short, while Thaxter draws a great deal upon the popular mythogeography of the place in her text, this construction of the islands is not absolute in *Among the Isles of Shoals*. Although she reproduces the popular image through lyrical language and romantic subjects, she also challenges it through the exacting language of a natural historian, one whom Tina Gianquitto would refer to as a "good observer of nature".¹⁶ In her study of women's scientific writings on nature in the nineteenth century, Gianquitto writes,

Many women writers of this period [1820-85] used the natural world as a platform for discussing issues of domesticity, education, morality, and the nation. Many...also adhered to the tenets of natural theology in their representations of nature and accordingly pictured the natural world as a space designed by a benevolent deity and given to humans as a paradigm of ideal behavior. The value in this view of nature was immediately apparent to women writers: it created a space in which they could encourage their

¹⁵ Fetterley explains that this was "the very format [Willa] Cather objected to when in 1925 she undertook to edit Jewett for Houghton Mifflin" (38).

¹⁶ In *Good Observers of Nature*, Gianquitto examines the changing ways in which women writers in the nineteenth century engaged with scientific advancements in their descriptions of nature, particularly in the areas of natural history and botanical studies.

female readers to interact with and learn from nature's example (1).

Celia Thaxter is an exception to the rule; she did not espouse a traditional Christian worldview and remained a religious skeptic for most of her life (White 61). Neither is Thaxter's focus strictly on mastering the scientific language of her day; her masterful depictions of the islands' ecology and natural history are based on close observation, on her construction of the islands as habitat, rather than on the study of natural history for its own sake. Her inclusion of memories of life on the islands direct the reader toward a version of place based not just on popular romantic legends but on an intimate association with them. She mingles these two versions of place; the mythogeography of the Shoals overlaps with her own personal geography. This palimpsest is revealed through artifacts, archaeological imagery, and the language of excavation in *Among the Isles of Shoals*.

Thaxter's personal memories are filled with artifacts that have their own stories. Objects as simple as flotsam brought into shore on the tides hold special significance:

a broken oar; a bit of spar with a ragged end of rope-yarn attached; a section of a mast hurriedly chopped, telling of a tragedy too well known on the awful sea; a water-borne buoy, or flakes of rich brown bark, which have been peacefully floated down the rivers of Maine and out on the wide sea, to land at last here and gladden firesides so remote from the deep green wood where they grew; pine-cones, with their spicy fragrance yet lingering about them; apples, green spruce twigs, a shingle, with some carpenter's half-obliterated calculations penciled upon it; a child's roughly carved boat; drowned butterflies, beetles, birds; dead boughs of ragged fir-trees completely draped with the long, shining ribbon-grass that grows in brackish water near river mouths (22).

Each of the objects in this litany has traveled a great distance over the sea to arrive at the Shoals, and each has gone through a kind of life-cycle in which its meaning has changed from one geographical context to the next. The pine cones, branches, and bark, which began their journey inland—perhaps as waste products of the lumber industry—enter a stage of transition on their journey over the sea before finally taking on new meaning as sources of fuel and fragrance on the islands. The child's boat, the broken oar, and the "mast hurriedly chopped" are "full of suggestions" as well, leaving their originating stories to become part of Thaxter's landscape. They are among the "things [that] make our world: there are no lectures, operas, concerts, theaters, no music of any kind, except what the waves may whisper in rarely gentle moods; no galleries of wonders like the Natural History rooms, in which it is so fascinating to wander" (99). For Thaxter, the islands provided a "gallery of wonders" that she could reconstruct in her own textual curiosity cabinet. She exhibits her childhood memories alongside vital objects and the traces of those who have lived there before her, reconstructing and preserving these by defining their relationships to each other: connecting traces from the far-away past with her own life story.

As I discussed in Chapter I, there was widespread concern during the postwar years with the preservation of the past, whether through monuments, museums, or literature. *Among the Isles of Shoals* was published just before the nation's centennial, during the height of the Colonial Revival, which Alan Axelrod describes as, "[emerging] as a multifarious and often urgent response to social stress and crisis: war, urban rootlessness, mass immigration, and economic

depression" (ix). Thaxter's fascination with the islands' colonial ruins, monuments, and artifacts marks her text as part of this cultural movement, arriving at a historical moment where the colonial history of the islands became of great and pressing interest to readers. Her text should be considered a product of the larger postwar stresses on American society and the islands in particular. The Shoals were economically depressed and had been so for nearly a century. While they had largely escaped the destruction of the Civil War, their population was in flux as a result of the war's aftermath of increased wealth and leisure time and the continued downward spiral of the traditional fishing industry; the native population of fishermen was shrinking while tourists flooded the hotels in the summer months.

Thaxter does not "preserve" the islands strictly according to the definition of regionalist writing; she does not, for example, "memorialize a vanishing way of life" or "remove the place and its people from history itself" (Brodhead 121). And unlike the local colorists, she was not "[celebrating] the preservation...of the lives of humble, ordinary people in an environment threatened by time, change, and external disruption" in such a way that she was also obscuring the problems facing the islands (Campbell 7). Instead, at the end of *Among the Isles of Shoals* Thaxter leaves her readers with comments that reflect the drastic changes to island society:

Since writing these imperfect sketches of the Shoals it has become an historical fact for the records of the State of New Hampshire that the town of Gosport has disappeared, is obliterated from the face of the earth, nearly all the inhabitants having been bought out, that the place might be converted into a summer resort. Upon Appledore a large house of entertainment has

been extending its capabilities for many years, and the future of the Shoals as a famous watering-place may be considered certain (183-84).

In this modern-day Pompeii, the residents are "bought out" rather than destroyed by a volcano, but the result is still catastrophic: a town has been "obliterated from the face of the earth." Thaxter continues with a discussion of the possibilities of greater numbers of Swedish and Norwegian settlers settling on the islands, hopeful that more immigrants to the United States will choose to live on the Shoals and revitalize the population: "It is to be hoped that a little rill from the tide of emigration which yearly sets from those countries toward America may finally people the unoccupied portions of the Shoals with a colony that will be a credit to New England" (184). These final reflections suggest that Thaxter's sights are not set on preserving unchanged the Shoalers of the past, but on practical solutions for the future of the disappearing "native" population in the face of increasing commercialization of the place through tourism. Her proposition suggests that, while she makes use of popular island images and caters to the expectations of readers and tourists who were aware of the romantic aura surrounding the Isles of Shoals, she also envisions room for change and improvement for islanders. She seems to think an influx of immigrants as necessary in a place that was becoming less "picturesque" and more modern, and where some among the native islanders seemed to resist the movement toward civilization and modernity:

Of late, the fires before referred to, kindled in drunken madness by the islanders themselves, or by the reckless few who have joined the settlement, have swept away nearly all the old houses, which have been replaced by smart new buildings, painted white, with green blinds, and with modern improvements, so that yearly the village grows less picturesque,--

which is a charm one can afford to lose, when the eternal smartness is indicative of better living among the people (54-55).

These "smart new buildings" contrast with the cellar holes, ruined walls, and aging monuments found on the islands, and which fascinate Thaxter. She strikes a balance between the ancient and modern structures on the island and sees value in both for tourists and islanders.

Thaxter's own sense of the islands as the place she is "rooted" in, and the personal "rootlessness" she felt during her years on the mainland, also drive her text. The soil on the islands is thin, not particularly suitable to "putting down roots"; yet what earth existed on the islands was viewed in Thaxter's time in terms of human presence and the life of the past. In *The Isles of Shoals in Summertime* (1875), Leonard Gage writes:

"it is plain that death has gone before you, and one of the most impressive surprises which you can have in your life will come upon you when in wandering over Star Island you suddenly notice the tiny bits of granite turned up on the edge, and discover by the proximity of two more pretentious monuments, that you are treading on the dust of the dead. Very little soil is there on the islands, hardly enough to cover a body; but what there is has been carefully removed for the purposes of burial. I once had the good fortune to buy the only cleared field on the island, it was about as large as the land covered by an old fashioned country meeting house. I meant to build some day a tiny little summer cottage on it, but I never dared to dig it up, lest I should find it full of bones, for the time was when the population of the Isles of Shoals was measured by the hundreds and not by tens, and every inch of soil on the islands must be mixed with human dust (50).

In this passage, the islands and human remains, the land and man-made monuments, cannot be told apart. On the islands there is "hardly enough [soil] to cover a body," and what earth there is may be "full of bones." To stand upon the islands is literally to stand upon the bodies of the dead; the human body

becomes a geographical feature, while the land becomes infused with human history. Thaxter uses this popular image of the Shoals as a place where human traces are never permanently buried: a place where the land's secrets are occasionally "dug up," for better or worse. Her personal history twines with the history of the place, and both are marked through acts of artifactual excavation and preservation in her text.

III. The Archaeological Landscape and the Construction of the Self-In-Place

Celia Thaxter moved to the Isles of Shoals at age four; she left soon after her marriage, returning to nurse her ailing parents in the early 1870s before eventually taking up permanent residence there, away from her estranged husband (Kilcup 428). The islands were a powerful formative force throughout her life; this influence became part of her public persona, especially in later years when she would wear only black, white, or gray—the colors of the sandpipers that lived at the Shoals (R. Thaxter 138). Thaxter explores facets of her personal history in *Among the Isles of Shoals*; she is concerned with the history of the landscape that in part shaped her childhood and which was changing with the transformation of the islands' economy. She identifies the islands' ruins with the tourist trade, romantic reminders of the past life of the place. They are also part of a landscape that, as she at times describes it, is continually fighting to erase all evidence of human presence. In this landscape, living memory and human records play a vital role in preserving knowledge of landscape history, and

Thaxter presents herself as an "insider" who can interpret artifacts and imagine the roles they played in the past, while acknowledging the role they play in the present and their likely future of obscurity.

While she plays the role of island insider, she also takes on that of antiquarian, particularly in passages that deal with these antiquities. She tends to engage playfully with this model of authorship, using it to emphasize how the imagination may connect one to a place. However, she also uses antiquarian discourse to distance herself from the "Shoalers" she is describing. For Thaxter the role of antiquarian allows her to remain "among" the Isles of Shoals, lending her a sense of authority over history's imaginative properties. It enables her to operate within her own liminal position in relationship to the islands, her dual sense of herself as islander and mainlander. For example, in a passage on the debate over the origins of a structure traditionally attributed to John Smith,

Thaxter writes:

It is a part of the religious belief of the Shoalers, that the ruinous cairn on the summit of Appledore was built by the famous John Smith and his men when they discovered the islands in the year 1614; and I will not be so heretical as to doubt the fact, though it seems just as likely that it was as set up by fishermen and sailors as a landmark. At any rate, nobody knows when it was not there, and it is perfectly safe to imagine any origin for it (32).

While the islanders are nearly superstitious in their insistence on the ruins' origins, Thaxter allows that there may be any number of explanations for them. She is comfortable with an indeterminate landscape history that is nearly illegible and becoming more so over time.

The process of ruination does not necessarily occur over a long span of years but can occur in a lifetime. In one instance, Thaxter remembers friends on Star Island—Bennaye and Nabbaye—who died, their “dust...mingled in the thin earth that scarce can cover the multitude of the dead on Star island” (77).

Another family occupied their house but soon also had passed on, and “the house in which they lived has fallen to ruin; only the cellar remains, just such a rude hollow as those scattered over Appledore” (77). Thus Thaxter sees human history’s movement on the islands in terms of rapid and dramatic change.

Humanity literally “clings” to the islands through what Thaxter terms “an intense and abiding affection” rather than through permanent built structures or firm foundations (16). However, civilization is also a force of “devastation” on the Isles of Shoals (21). For example, it is the direct cause of deforestation in a place that had few trees to begin with, having created “fossilized” trees in the center of Appledore. Thaxter describes the evidence she has found that supports the idea that trees once grew more abundantly on the islands:

It is very probable that the islands were wooded many years ago with spruce and pine perhaps,—a rugged growth. I am certain that cedars grew there, for I found on the highest part of Smutty-nose Point, deep down in a crevice in the rocks, a piece of a root of cedar-wood, which, though perfectly preserved, bore marks of great age, being worn as smooth as glass with the raindrops that had penetrated to its hiding place (24).

In this penetrating view of the islands Thaxter draws evidence of the extinct species from its concealing crevice. She continues, writing accounts of her own explorations, stories that occurred within living memory, and a colonial document as further evidence of trees that once existed on the Shoals:

I have seen the crumbling remains of the stump of some large tree in the

principle gorge or valley at Appledore. The oldest inhabitants remember quite an orchard on Smutty-nose. In the following note...from 'Christopher Leavitt's Voyage into New England' in the year 1623, it appears that there were trees, though not of the kind the voyagers wished to see (24-25).

What Thaxter's antiquarian vision of these and other artifacts in *Among the Isles of Shoals* reveals is a continuous transformational relationship between the devastating forces of nature and culture, both of which operate as erosive forces on the landscape.

IV. Autobiography, Fragmentation, and the "Empty Landscape"

While Oscar Loughton's comments about the success of the Leighton's hotel business in *Ninety Years on the Isles of Shoals* may put to rest the idea that Thaxter published her book as a kind of artistic advertisement in response to a supposed threat from a rival hotelier, they do reveal another kind of "threat" to the islands: the influx of tourists that were the family's bread and butter, and whose presence resulted in certain changes to the island landscape, its nature, and its residents. Many of these changes are documented in photographs collected in *Gosport Remembered*. In this collection of photos and essays on the Isles of Shoals, historian Peter Randall comments on evidence provided by photographs from Gregory Laing. For Randall, these photographs raise an interesting question about the landscape history of the Isles of Shoals, although he does not dwell on the problem for too long:

With a few exceptions, the photographs are undated, but it appears that many were taken in the 1860s. This raises another question, because in

Among the Isles of Shoals, published in 1873, author Celia Thaxter says most of the old village had been gone for more than 20 years. The reader will see that these photographs show many houses scattered about Star Island. Was the village much larger than what is shown in these photographs, or was Celia Thaxter stretching things a bit with her dates? (x)

Randall's comments are suggestive, and inspire a certain amount of speculation about Celia Thaxter's motives in representing the islands in a particular way. For one, the presence of village houses in these photographs—houses that Thaxter claimed "had been gone for more than 20 years"—indicates that she may have imaginatively cleared the landscape for a purpose. This act of emptying the landscape hearkens back to similar actions taken by authors like Hale and Sedgwick in the 1820s, and to a theme present in American literature since the colonial period. An empty landscape is one that may be more easily claimed by another, and imagining a place where the population has "vanished" (even if that is not the case in reality) creates the space necessary for repopulating that landscape according to one's desires.¹⁷

The "vanishing" Shoals population is a phenomenon documented almost entirely by outsiders. As Randall writes, "Except for wills and the Gosport church and town records, little written material remains from the residents. Therefore, we have had to rely primarily on visitors to tell the story" (xii). His comment reveals the central role that tourists and other outsiders played in representing the

¹⁷ The implied connection between the clearing of Indian land and of the Shoals emerges in the 1830s, when the "Society for Propagating the Gospel Among Indians and Others in North America" sponsored ministers who lived on the islands (Thaxter 53-54). Thaxter commends a Rev. Mason, who served the islanders in the 1850s and who helped them rise above their conditions (53-54). The idea of the islanders as "others", not distantly related to the "otherness" of savages, surfaces throughout Thaxter's text, even though she is a Shoaler herself.

Shoalers to the rest of the nation and the world. They were at times portrayed as a "dying race," which was strengthened by the influx of outsiders and the business they brought. As Mandel puts it, "In the eyes of most people, the Isles of Shoals in the mid-nineteenth century were home to a dying community, inhabited by a derelict population scarcely earning a living from the sea" (4). Just as "vanishing" Native Americans made important subjects for documentary preservation by anthropologists in the late nineteenth century, the passing of these "original" Shoalers became a topic of picturesque description and a certain amount of pains on the part of writers to record their traditions and customs, especially in the commonplace descriptions of gravestones, fishing huts, and local stories, speech patterns, and manners. Thaxter certainly presents picturesque and comical portraits of Shoalers in *Among the Isles of Shoals*. While these are not unsympathetic, they do reveal the separation between the more genteel Loughton family and the fishermen who also inhabited the islands. There were degrees of class and status on the islands, even in such a small community, extending from the lowliest fisherman to the wealthiest tourist.

But Celia Thaxter's sense of separation from this "vanishing breed" of Shoalers implies something more profound than class difference. At different times in her life, Thaxter performed the roles of "resident" and "visitor" on the Isles. After her marriage, she divided her time between the islands of her youth and her new home in Newtonville. She longed for the close-knit family life of her childhood while her relationship with her husband became increasingly distant. Space and place are fundamental registers of this tension and of the resulting

personal and interpersonal conflict for Thaxter. Thus one autobiographical subject that was at stake for Thaxter in her writing was her sense of exile from the islands where she spent her childhood. She empties the landscape and repopulates it with the things she desires: memories connecting her to favorite childhood places, objects and other traces that allow her to close the gap between present and past. Even her projections for the future are based in her desire for island life to continue, if not according to its original traditions, at least with families who will continue to make the islands a home. The call at the end of the book is not for more tourists, but for more families who will re-colonize and call the islands "home."

In the winter of 1855-56, Celia and Levi Thaxter moved to Newtonville, a town just outside of Boston (R. Thaxter, 52). Rosamond Thaxter writes that during the following year, Celia was depressed at the separation from her family and her childhood home, although her early years of marriage were also "a precious period, with her own home and family" (54). During her time on the mainland she visited her family's hotel and helped her aging parents during the busy summer months, but otherwise remained tied down by family responsibilities in her mainland home (Mandel 40-41). In letters to her family and friends, Thaxter describes her life in Newtonville as a kind of exile from the place she loved most. Mandel quotes a letter from Celia to Elizabeth Hoxie in January of 1859, in which her sense of separation and loneliness come through:

"Somehow 'crude' is the word that expresses this place. It seems to be at the world's end—lonely, un-get-at-able, uninteresting, not one beloved, friendly face

within reach, no children for ours to play with, but it might be a great deal worse too..." (41). After her third child, Roland, was born in 1858, she became more depressed with her situation (Mandel 43). Biographer Norma Mandel writes that at this time, "Celia was desperately lonesome for her family, her islands, her childhood" (43). Rosamond Thaxter records an amusing anecdote:

One day she greatly astonished her maid, who overheard Mrs. Thaxter exclaim, while cutting up a fish for dinner: "Blessed old haddock with your lilac skin all striped with black and your lovely old intelligent countenance, can't you tell me the last news from the salt sea, or did you leave it too long ago?" Always part of herself was back with the seagulls, the waves, and the scarlet pimpernel. The returning fishing boats, with all the memories of childhood hours and dear faces lived in her imagination (59).

Later in *Among the Isles of Shoals*, Thaxter would write of the islands, "to wild and lonely places like these isles humanity clings with an intense and abiding affection. No other place is able to furnish the inhabitants of the Shoals with sufficient air for their capacious lungs...they must have sea-room" (16-17). As Rosamond Thaxter points out, it was her desire for a return to place and family that spurred Celia to write her first poem, "Land-Locked" (59).

An analysis of Thaxter's poetry helps us understand how *Among the Isles of Shoals* fits thematically with her other work. For while Fetterley is correct in saying that *Among the Isles of Shoals* does not fit into Thaxter's body of work due to its difference in genre (38), it does bring in the motifs of exile, distance, and her sense of connection to place that she develops from her earliest poems and throughout her writing career. She emphasizes the social disconnection between the Isles and the mainland, especially in depictions of her isolated childhood as the daughter of a lighthouse keeper. Of her youth on Star Island,

she writes, "The faint echoes from the far-off world hardly touched us little ones. We listened to the talk of our elders. 'Winfield Scott and Santa Anna!' 'The war in Mexico!' 'The famine in Ireland!' It all meant nothing to us" (123). For Thaxter and her younger brothers, all news of the nation and the rest of the world was "far-away news." Thaxter seems to hint here that while tragic events like war and famine were apparently a source of concern for their parents, the children's geographical isolation reinforced their innocence. After describing a fanciful childhood game in which she and her brothers imagined that the faintly visible coastline was an exotic palace, Thaxter explains that even small changes carried great significance for the island children:

Each of these changes, and the various aspects of their little world, are of inestimable value to the lonely children living always in that solitude. Nothing is too slight to be precious: the flashing of an oar-blade in the morning light; the twinkling of an oar-blade in the morning light; the twinkling of a gull's wings afar off, like a star in the yellow sunshine or the drowsy summer afternoon... (169).

For the children, the islands are solid ground, while the mainland is a blurry place subject to their imaginative interpretations. As I will show, Thaxter reverses this perspective when she describes the experience of a traveler from the mainland approaching the islands. This reversal springs both from her use of conventional imagery used to describe the islands beginning in the 1840s and 50s, but also, I would argue, from her desire to obscure a place she loved and wanted to protect from outsiders.

Thaxter's descriptions of the spaces between islands and mainland provide much of the emotional impact in her poetry and prose. Her poem, "Land-Locked," provides a good example of how the poet manipulates the spaces

between islands and mainland in order to create a sense of the emotional impact of exile, isolation, and loneliness in her adult life. The piece was published by her husband without Thaxter's knowledge in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1861, and emphasizes the distance between land and sea for the exiled islander. The first two stanzas describe an elegiac evening atmosphere:

Black lie the hills; swiftly doth daylight flee;
 And, catching gleams of sunset's dying smile,
 Through the dusk land for many a changing mile
 The river runneth softly to the sea.

O happy river, could I follow thee!
 O yearning heart, that never can be still!
 O wistful eyes, that watch the steadfast hill,
 Longing for level line of solemn sea! (Making of America)¹⁸

Here the space between the speaker and the ocean that she longs for is obstructed by the dark hills and "dusk land" that interrupt the line of sight between the two places. The river is a like a lifeline between the speaker and the sea, a symbol of the desire that links her to the place she longs for. Part of the essence of exile and being "land locked" is the sensation of being unable to see across a great distance. With the faculty of sight restricted, the speaker relies on memories of sounds to keep the place she dreams of alive in her imagination:

To feel the wind, sea-scented, on my cheek,
 To catch the sound of dusky flapping sail

¹⁸ Rosamond Thaxter makes note of the family home's situation in Newtonville: "From the back windows of the new house a lovely view of the river could be seen, and in another direction lay the hills of Waltham...It was to the Charles River that Celia looked wistfully, as it nearly encircled the town and flowed on past Watertown, past Cambridge, finally to empty into the sea at Boston Harbor" (52).

And dip of oars, and voices on the gale
Afar off, calling low,---my name they speak!

O Earth! thy summer song of joy may soar
Ringing to heaven in triumph. I but crave
The sad, caressing murmur of the wave
That breaks in tender music on the shore.

Thaxter records these experiences of sight and sound as they relate to distances and spaces. The sounds of the seaside community seem to call out the speaker's name and draw her across the distances between her landlocked home and the shore. These sounds evoke the islands as distant objects more clearly than visual descriptions of the place. They determine the proximity of the speaker to the place she desires and stimulate the imagination when she cannot see the islands.

Thaxter sets up the ethereal qualities of the islands early on in the book, beginning with the image of the Shoals as fragments that form a whole in and of themselves, but which are not connected with the sweeping landscapes of the North American mainland. There seems to be a connection between the fragmentary nature of the islands and the structure of the book, as Thaxter uses the term "fragments" to describe her writing almost immediately, deeming it "fragmentary and inadequate sketches of the Isles of Shoals" (5). In these opening lines, she defines her role both as one who is presenting information to interested tourists, armchair or actual, and as one who is presenting something "inadequate." She writes, "some account of the place, however slight, is so incessantly called for by people who throng these islands in summer, I should hardly venture to offer to the public so imperfect a chronicle, of which the most

that can be said is, that it is, perhaps, better than nothing" (5). Thaxter's apologetic statement belies a strategy of revealing and concealing, exhumation and burial. This strategy is similar to that which she employs in defining and revealing herself as a self-in-place, a fact that becomes more poignant with the realization that in later years Thaxter herself became an attraction of the islands, ensconced in the cottage where she held court among her literary friends.

But it was also clear that in the 1870s Thaxter understood the potential literary importance of the Islands and their significance in the national imagination. Certainly she was aware of their longstanding mythogeography and the role they played in contemporary literature. She compares the Isles of Shoals to the Galapagos Islands of Herman Melville's "The Encantadas," writing, "Very sad they look, stern, bleak, and unpromising, yet are they enchanted islands in a better sense of the word than are the great Gallipagos [sic] of which Mr. Melville discourses so delightfully" (7). Thaxter spends subsequent pages articulating this "better sense" as she sets up the Shoals as an inviting but mysterious and—like the Encantadas—often dangerous destination. However, it is easy to see why Thaxter selected this particular text, and these particular islands, to compare to her own. Like Melville, who muses upon "abandoned cemeteries of long ago" (99) and on the ruins and relics left behind by pirates who inhabited the Galapagos, Thaxter presents dreamlike images of the pirates and others who left their traces on the Shoals. Both authors assemble illusory geographical fragments into "place," while foregrounding a sense of self in relation to that place: especially in the sense of self as the one who narrates a place not into

being, but into a particular personal meaning—a form of self-revelation. And both authors present their islands as places that have fundamentally shaped them as people. Melville's remarks on this subject are sinister; he has found a hell rather than a home and is haunted by a particular gothic vision: "I have seemed to see, slowly emerging from those imagined solitudes, and heavily crawling along the floor, the ghost of a gigantic tortoise, with 'Memento *****' burning in live letters upon his back" (103). There are, of course, differences between the two texts. Melville is writing an account of his travels to the South Seas (Berthoff 58), while Thaxter is writing from the position of both insider and outsider. This goes far in explaining her combination of the travel and autobiographical modes. And while Melville is reconstructing Galapagos "society" upon an empty space "where change never comes" (99), Thaxter is clearing space within a populated place that has undergone a great deal of change since her family opened its hotel.

In "Sketch Second: Two Sides to a Tortoise," Melville describes himself as "an antiquarian of a geologist, studying the bird-tracks and ciphers upon the exhumed slates trod by incredible creatures whose very ghosts are now defunct" (105). He also depicts the Galapagos as the receptors of various human objects, flotsam that connects the islands to the inhabited world—but always with a hint of death and tragedy that he interprets for the reader: "mixed with the relics of distant beauty you will sometimes see fragments of charred wood and mouldering ribs of wrecks" (100). Thaxter, too, recounts ghoulish discoveries in the waters off the islands and on its beaches, from human remains to the wreckage of ships. While she does not proclaim herself an "antiquarian," she

performs similar acts of authorship, collecting, examining, and explaining the artifacts she finds on the Shoals. As in Melville's sketches, the beach in *Among the Isles of Shoals* is often the site where forgotten objects, both natural and man-made, collect:

As a child I was never without apprehension when examining the drift, for I feared to find some too dreadful token of disaster. After the steamer Bohemian was wrecked (off Halifax, I think) a few years ago, bales of her costly cargo of silks and rich stuffs and pieces of the wreck were strewn along the coast even to Cape Ann; and upon Rye Beach, among other things, two boots came on shore. They were not mates, and each contained a human foot. That must have been a grewsome [sic] discovery to him who picked them up (23-24).

In this passage, Thaxter mingles the notion of treasure with that of death, a blend of pleasure and danger that surfaces throughout her text. Part of the islands' romantic past included legends of the wealth buried there, but Thaxter's childhood memory serves as more of a warning than an invitation. The image of the two boots can be read as a symbol for the jarring fragmentation of self that, for Thaxter, can be a result of island life. They hint back at her title, which is not "On" the Isles of Shoals but "Among" them. To be among them, one cannot be on solid ground. One must either be no place at all, or must be in the water—a place where one might encounter gruesome human dismemberment, as in this scene:

Last winter some of the Shoalers were drawing a trawl between the Shoals and Boone Island, fifteen miles to the eastward. As they drew in the line and relived each hook of its burden, lo! a horror was lifted half above the surface,—part of a human body, which dropped off the hooks and was gone, while they shuddered, and stared at each other, aghast at the hideous sight (89).

Here is another scene of human dismemberment that Thaxter found significant

enough to include in her account, although she did not actually witness it herself. But this scene, along with that of the boots, suggests that her reference to being “among” the isles can be drawn into darker images of dismemberment or disembodiment. Though she claims to be differentiating herself from Melville, like him she draws on darker stories and experiences of the place in her rendition of the landscape. The island environment destroys as it creates, especially when it comes to the construction of the self-in-place.

In another passage this relationship between self and place becomes even more uncertain as Thaxter presents the view from the perspective of an approaching traveler—one who is “among” the islands by literally being in the sea: “As you approach [the islands] they separate, and show each its own peculiar characteristics, and you perceive that there are six islands if the tide is low; but if it is high, there are eight, and would be nine, but that a breakwater connects two of them” (9-10). The islands shift and change according to the tide. Two of them continuously move in and out of existence at different times of day and night: they are “there” at low tide, and “gone” at high tide. The effect is certainly mysterious but also partakes of the idea of the continuous ritual/cycle of burial (or submersion/disconnection) and exhumation (or revelation, wholeness, connection) that gives a kind of tidal rhythm to Thaxter’s text:

The coast-line varies, of course, with high or low tide. At low water the shores are much more forbidding than at high tide, for a broad band of dark sea-weed girdles each island, and gives a sullen aspect to the whole group. But in calm days, when the moon is full and the tides are so low that it sometimes seems as if the sea were being drained away on purpose to show to eager eyes what lies beneath the lowest ebb, banks of golden-green and brown moss thickly clustered on the moist ledges are exposed, and the water is cut by the ruffled edges of the kelps that grow in brown and

shining forests on every side (19).

Thaxter alternately reveals and conceals her island landscape for the reader. The actions of the tides mirror the role of the author, who deliberately—"on purpose"—shows the reader these submerged forests of moss and kelp. These revelations are not always pleasant and are at times "forbidding."

Thaxter's "fragmented" descriptions have interesting implications for the construction of the self-in-place. Going back to the differences between "dominated" and "appropriated" landscape that I introduced and discuss in Chapters I and II, it can be argued that while the Shoals have been represented on maps and navigational charts since 1614, they resist institutional shaping. However, they also resist appropriation. Although they are Thaxter's "true home" and the place upon which she builds her authorial and personal identities, they are not "lived space" in the sense of Sedgwick's Native or colonial settlements or Cooper's New York countryside. Barely civilized in some respects, yet long inhabited, the islands are not easily molded to human lifeways. Human beings become another element to be worn down by the rock and the weather. Nature's rhythms shape the Shoalers' bodies as much as they do their lives.

For example, in a description of Shoals fishermen, Thaxter writes how they have adapted to "wild" movements in order to survive on the rocky shores: "Nearly all the Shoalers have a singular gait, contracted from the effort to keep their equilibrium while standing in boats, and from the unavoidable gymnastics which any attempt at locomotion among the rocks renders necessary" (4). The islands seem even harder on the women who live there:

I never saw such wrecks of humanity as some of the old women of Star Island, who have long since gone to their rest. In my childhood I caught glimpses of them occasionally, their lean brown shapes crouching over the fire, with black pipes in their sunken mouths, and hollow eyes, 'of no use now but to gather brine,' and rough, gray, straggling locks: despoiled and hopeless visions, it seemed as if youth and joy could never have been theirs (66).

Thaxter follows this passage with a poem, "A Woman of Star Island. Isles of Shoals, 1844," which presents the figure of a half-dead "wreck in woman's shape" (67). For all its ethereal beauty, the hardships presented by the island environment perform persistent, violent acts upon the human body over time. This reality does not cancel out the islands' seemingly contradictory healthful aspect, rather it displays the power of the island landscape to shape human bodies as well as cultural practices.

Part of Thaxter's presentation of the islands as a dramatic archaeological landscape includes passages describing abandoned homes and cellar-holes of houses that are no longer there; in these passages she suggests that the Isles of Shoals will not only shape but outlast its human inhabitants and human culture. She meditates upon these traces as symbols of loss, both of family life and of civilization itself, while also describing them as sites of interest to tourists, a role that they had played in travel literature for over fifty years. In one passage describing ruins on Appledore Island, she writes:

Its southern portion is full of interest, from the traces of vanished humanity which one beholds at every step; for the ground in some places is undermined with ancient graves, and the ruined cellars of houses wherein men and women lived more than a century ago are scattered here and there to the number of seventy and more. The men and women are dust and ashes; but here are the stones they squared and laid; here are the thresholds over which so many feet have passed. The pale green and lilac

and golden lichens have overgrown and effaced all traces of their footsteps on the doorstones; but here they passed in and out,—old and young, little feet of children, heavy tramp of stalwart fishermen, lighter tread of women, painful and uncertain steps of age (29-30).

Thaxter introduces the archaeological traces as being “full of interest,” a phrase that makes them seem like a major attraction on the islands. She translates archaeological remains to tourist attractions in language that recalls descriptions of Pompeii. The graves are “ancient” and the cellars “ruined,” and, like the destroyed Italian city, the remains of the homes are the most evocative traces. They are suggestive of the passage of men and women who “are dust and ashes” in the reader’s imagination. But Thaxter goes further in her descriptions than these conventional meditations, not only “people[ing] these solitudes again” (30), but making calculated judgments about the functions of the ruins she sees. In one instance, she explains that some of the cellar holes appear “double, as if two families had built together” (31). In another passage, she speculates about the location of the first meeting-house on the islands, explaining that the lack of remains is likely due to the type of construction used in the earliest times: “Probably there was no cellar beneath it, and the slight underpinning has been scattered and obliterated by time,—a fate which many of the houses must have shared in like manner” (32). Thaxter merges this information back into a discussion of the power of nature to obliterate built structures and civilizations, blending her own archaeological and antiquarian theories with conventional meditations on the transient nature of human achievements: “When man has vanished, Nature strives to restore her original order of things, and she smooths [sic] away gradually all traces of his work with the broad hands of her changing

seasons. The men who built the Pyramids felt this; but will not the world spin long enough to level their masonry with the desolate sands?" (32)

Thaxter moves between childhood impressions of innocence associated with the landscape to the ways that same landscape was implicated in human destruction.¹⁹ But it is significant that in her view, true islanders understood and accepted this aspect of being and living on the Shoals. Thaxter accepts the hazards of life on the islands and on the water that a mainlander perhaps would not be able to understand.²⁰ In one passage, she plays up the islands' mystery and isolation by casting a veil between mainland and islands:

the mirage steals down the coast-line, and seems to remove it leagues away. And what if it were to slip down the slope of the world and disappear entirely? You think, in a half-dream, you would not care. Many troubles, cares, perplexities, vexations, lurk behind that far, faint line for you...And so the waves, with their lulling murmur, do their work, and you are soothed into repose and transient forgetfulness (16).²¹

¹⁹ "The Wreck of the Pocahontas' (1867) was another popular early poem. As in 'Watching,' the child narrator is lighting lamps, but this time a storm appears, which is so violent that the islanders are isolated for weeks and a ship, the *Pocahontas*, is destroyed on the rocks. In *Among the Isles of Shoals*, Thaxter describes how she actually witnessed this storm in 1839 when she was living on White Island. The child in the poem—like Thaxter herself—struggles to find meaning in the dichotomy between nature's beauty and nature's destructiveness, until she hears 'a voice eternal' telling her to accept 'Life's rapture and life's ill'" (Mandel 57).

²⁰ Thaxter's husband Levi was nearly killed in a boating accident off the Shoals, an incident that caused him to move his family away from the islands and to fear traveling to them for the rest of his life. Celia, meanwhile, accepted dangers like this as a risk of island life (CITE).

²¹ The tone of this passage is ambiguous. Her description of the "forgetfulness" one experiences on the islands recalls the laziness and self-indulgence of the Lotus-Eaters, while the "soothing waves" could also turn violent, and were often a cause of death for the Shoalers.

This portion of the text reads almost comically like advertising copy for a present-day Caribbean cruise in its appeal to the world-weary tourist. However, “repose and transient forgetfulness” are likely states of mind that Thaxter herself sought on her visits to the islands in the 1860s and 1870s: a time when her parents were ailing and her marriage was troubled. If the islands appear like hazy fragments from the shore, the mainland is a murky “mirage” that becomes meaningless. It becomes synonymous with life’s complexity.

V. Conclusion: Preservation and Oblivion

In the opening pages of *Among the Isles of Shoals*, Celia Thaxter recognizes that there is demand for her work among the tourists who frequent the island: “some account of the place, however, slight, is so incessantly called for by people who throng these islands in summer, I should hardly venture to offer to the public so imperfect a chronicle, of which the most that can be said is, that it is, perhaps, better than nothing” (5). This note brings to the forefront the issue of tourism to the islands, and of the text’s original use as a guidebook. Thaxter’s descriptions give the appearance of emptiness on the Isles. This seems to belie her description here of “throng” visiting the islands. So right away we have the actual versus the literary landscape—the “empty” landscapes, marked by cellar holes and absence, of Thaxter’s childhood versus the crowded ones of her adulthood.

Thaxter’s descriptions of the islands reinforce this sense of disembodiment and disconnection. However, not all of these are of a sinister

nature. She tends to use descriptive language that emphasizes the dreamlike qualities of the islands, as in this passage:

The eternal sound of the sea on every side has a tendency to wear away the edge of human perception; sharp outlines become blurred and softened like a sketch in charcoal; nothing appeals to the mind with the same distinctness as on the mainland; amid the rush and stir of people and things, and the excitements of social life (8).

Here Thaxter is directly appealing to the world-weary tourist who would like an escape from the hectic life on the mainland. And the simile “like a sketch in charcoal” evokes the picturesque landscape that would attract mainlanders to vacation at the Isles.²² However, the “blurring” and “wearing away” of human perception could be applied to the boundary between the mind and the place itself—the boundary between what constitutes self and place.

In this chapter, I have argued that in *Among the Isles of Shoals*, Celia Thaxter presents the islands as a place that is in many ways disconnected from the nation. In part, this reflects the sense of disconnection and fragmentation she experienced personally in her period of “land-locked” exile from the islands. I have discussed how she draws upon a mythogeographic tradition that presents the islands as a place filled with human bones, ruins, and other traces; these remains mark their history from the time of the first settlers to shipwrecks within recent memory. However, in Thaxter’s text, while these artifacts seem at times to be bursting from every acre of the islands, they do not situate the landscape within the national consciousness or the geographical boundaries of the nation

²² Charcoal drawings are very easily smudged, which makes Thaxter’s simile even more suggestive.

as do the places represented in the texts of Hale, Cooper, and Sedgwick.

Thaxter represents the islands in a disconnected and fragmentary way as an act of conservation, working within the tensions of trying to promote the islands as a tourist destination and simultaneously as a place that needed to be preserved. These tensions emerge in the ways that Thaxter both displays and “hides” the islands, smudging her “charcoal sketches” rather than presenting them clearly.

In the next chapter I focus on Constance Fenimore Woolson, a contemporary of Thaxter’s. Like Thaxter, Woolson is often presented as a regionalist who was concerned about the impact of “progress” on the environment, especially the Great Lakes region. Woolson, too, presents the archaeological landscape as something that is legible to “insiders”—especially female ones—while it is often “misinterpreted” or unable to be “read” by tourists and other “outsiders.” Both Thaxter and Woolson use artifacts to explore their sense of self in relation to place, although, as I will argue, Woolson does so both in relation to physical places and to the “imaginary” territory of the literary marketplace. Thaxter’s text is (arguably) purposefully difficult to “locate,” either by genre or due to her fragmentary and elusive descriptions of place. Conversely, Woolson explores the uses and limits of antiquarian discourse in establishing a sense of “location.” As I will discuss, she is particularly concerned with the place of the woman writer/artist in a changing literary marketplace.

CHAPTER V

THE SPINSTER AND THE ANTIQUARIAN IN POSTBELLUM AMERICA: THE
SHORT STORIES OF CONSTANCE FENIMORE WOOLSON

Constance Fenimore Woolson (1840-1894)¹ was wandering through the Gizeh Museum in 1890 when she came upon a giggling, chatting group of "Cairo ladies" who were also exploring its collection of antiquities ("Cairo in 1890", 661). To Woolson, their chatter is a startling sound in the otherwise empty museum, "partly because of the echo, and partly also, I think, on account of the mystic mummy cases which stand on end and look at one so queerly with their oblique eyes" (661). She draws attention to the way that the women's conversation echoes in the atmosphere of solitude and silence; their behavior is relaxed, and they experience relative freedom from their veils and eunuch attendants. As there are no men around—"The most modest of men—a missionary, for instance, or an entymologist [sic]—would, I suppose, have put them to flight"—Woolson is able to observe them more freely than she otherwise would, lamenting the fact that she cannot speak with them "in [their] own tongue" (661). However, while the Cairo ladies are relaxing in the nearby museum garden, their eunuch attendants burst upon the scene and quickly veil them. Woolson remarks,

¹ Woolson was the great-grand-niece of James Fenimore Cooper.

there was no real resistance; there was only a good deal of laughter. I dare say that there was more laughter still (under the veils) when the cause of all this haste appeared, coming slowly up the stairs. It was a small man of sixty-five or seventy, one of my own countrymen, attired in a linen duster and a travel-worn high hat; his silver-haired head was bent over his guide-book, and he wore blue spectacles. I don't think he saw anything but blue antiquities, safely made of stone" (662).

Woolson's description of the man—he is older, small and travel-worn in appearance, and doesn't notice the women because he is too focused on his book and the antiquities—marks him as an antiquarian. (It is perhaps left up to the reader to assume that, since the women have not actually "taken flight," the antiquarian ranks lower down the scale of "modest men" than the missionary or the entomologist.) He interrupts the women's stolen moment of pleasure, and, in spite of his less-than-masculine appearance and implied lack of virility, seems to restore patriarchal order in a space that had been temporarily given over to the women's relative ease and liberty. However, their muffled laughter remains as a sign that they find him a figure of fun rather than a true sign of male authority. This brief and amusing anecdote shows that in 1890, the eighteenth-century version of the effeminate male antiquarian was still alive and well, intruding upon a travel sketch written by one of the most successful women authors of the late nineteenth century.

Throughout my dissertation, I have been interested in the ways that the figure of the antiquarian surfaces in women's writing—whether writers take on the identity of "antiquarian" themselves or create antiquarian characters. Women who chose to modify the antiquarian tradition for their own purposes participated in an alternative model of authorship that, at its heart, relied upon unstable

constructions of gender—particularly in the interplay between the female figure of the spinster and the male figure of the antiquarian. In the antebellum decades, women writers “stabilized” the spinster/antiquarian identity and affirmed their own virtuous femininity through careful self-presentation and specific appeals: Hale’s portrayal of herself as a needy widow, for example, or Sedgwick’s appeal to her “antiquarian readers.” Even Cooper uses antiquarianism in order to situate herself as a preservationist with nationalistic intentions, thereby downplaying what was problematic about playing the antiquarian role. Through these rhetorical strategies women justified and normalized antiquarianism, de-emphasizing its associations with sexual deviance while foregrounding its usefulness for commenting upon important national issues.

By the 1880s and 1890s, however, another identity was emerging that aroused fears of sexual transgression: that of the New Woman (Donaldson 102-03). Susan Donaldson describes the anxieties about the nature of the New Woman’s sexuality that accompanied her emergence:

public debates about New Women resounded with lamentations about the new ‘mannishness’ of women. Fears were expressed about the effect of higher education upon the capacity of women to reproduce and to absorb ‘beyond’ their biological abilities, and anxieties about New Women as an emerging ‘intermediate sex’ contributed to the newly articulated sexual category of Lesbianism created by equally new experts in sexology (105)

If the antiquarian and spinster were abnormal because of their monstrous “asexuality,” the New Woman loomed as a threat in part because of this perception of her hypersexuality—because she might “go beyond her capacity.” Similar fears of monstrous sexuality entered into contemporary debates over a

particular version of the New Woman: the “woman artist,” a woman capable of producing works of genius or “high art.” Concerns over the nature of female artistic genius arose in particular among those critics who sought to limit women’s participation in the literary world to the sphere of popular writing rather than allowing that women could “create” in the ways that men could. It is interesting that their concerns surfaced in conversations about women’s sexuality. Such fears had their roots in the thought of Aristotle, who theorized that women were like “lesser men”: “a kind of monster or abnormality who...fails to develop to her full (= male) potential” (Battersby 28). By the late eighteenth century, these anxieties had crystallized in a kind of Catch-22 for the aspiring woman artist. In her study of gender and genius, Christine Battersby describes the problem in this way:

A woman who created was faced with a double bind: either to surrender her sexuality (becoming not *masculine*, but a surrogate *male*), or to be *feminine* and *female*, and hence to fail to count as a genius. This is the logic behind Goncourt’s epigram, quoted so approvingly by Cesare Lombroso in *The Man of Genius* (1863): ‘there are no women of genius; the women of genius are men’ [p. 138] (3-4).

Battersby explains that the phenomenon of the woman genius in the Romantic period was looked at as “a kind of mental hermaphrodite”: “A woman can have a powerful imagination only by being unsexed: by being a freak of nature” (79).

It makes sense, then, that women authors’ concerns over their place in the world of “high art” and literature would crystallize around ideas of gender; that they might use another form of “mental hermaphrodite”—the spinster/antiquarian—to address the issue. In this chapter, I will demonstrate that one of Woolson’s uses for antiquarianism and the archaeological landscape is to

address the problem of criticism and the gendered division of the literary marketplace. In the texts I have focused on thus far, antiquarianism is closely connected to issues that were important to women writers from the antebellum period through mid-century: the connection between the figure of the spinster and the antiquarian, and the imaginative opportunities that this connection afforded; the relationship between antiquities, memory, and the national landscape; and the link between antiquities, women, and art. Woolson expands these threads to accommodate the concerns of a late-century writer, especially in the ways that she brings the focus onto questions about the production and reception of literary art. She is interested in the role of literary criticism in either nourishing or quashing a budding artist, questions of what makes a particular piece of writing "art," and the importance of place and location to the production of art.

I am focusing this final chapter on Woolson's short stories and sketches because she engages each of the major threads of antiquarianism in the 1870s and 1880s, a time of transition between the "True Woman" and the "New Woman" (Cutter 3). In her writings during these decades of transition, Woolson brings antiquarianism and archaeology to bear on a number of issues: how well the white, Eastern, male gaze reads history in the landscape, particularly during a time of unprecedented industrialization and environmental destruction; the problem of finding critical acceptance and thus establishing a place for oneself in a changing literary marketplace; and the nature of women's genius and the difficulties that women writers faced in claiming the identity of "artist" for

themselves in the late nineteenth century. As she uses the antiquarian model of authorship to address these problems, Woolson also critiques it, especially in the self-conscious way that she blurs the problematic gaze of the tourist with that of the antiquarian.

One example that I will focus on at length in this chapter is the lengthy, two-part story "The Ancient City"². This text connects different versions of spinsters and antiquarians with the problem of place, artistic identity, and critical reception of women's writing. It follows the adventures of a party of northern tourists as they explore St. Augustine, Florida, following the Civil War. John Hoffman, a worldly Northerner who is knowledgeable about Florida, describes it as a place that Northerners often think of it as "wild and new," although it has been in fact a long-settled part of the nation: "You can scarcely go out in any direction around St. Augustine without coming upon old groves of orange and fig trees [sic], a ruined stone wall, or fallen chimney. Poor Florida! She is full of deserted plantations" (Brehm and Dean 109). Throughout the story, Woolson uses antiquities to give her readers a sense of the Florida landscape, and St. Augustine in particular, as a contested location. The landscape seems to be marked everywhere by ruined forts and plantations, graveyards, and even scattered bones—the traces of multiple conflicts and massacres. Meanwhile, the contemporary residents of St. Augustine—among them freed slaves who live alongside the "dark-eyed, olive-skinned" descendents of Greek colonists—and the Northern tourists who travel to Florida to consume the exotic landscape are

² "The Ancient City" appeared in two parts in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*; Part I in December 1874, and Part II in January of 1875.

reminders of the more recent conflict of the Civil War (97).

However, Florida serves as a significant location in the world of mass publishing and literary criticism. As Woolson scholar Sharon Kennedy-Smith has argued, Florida became contested ground in the literary marketplace for picturesque travel sketches, especially those published in magazines. She writes that after 1870, "the landscape of Florida became a key part of a decisive literary territory over which magazines waged battles within a volatile, postwar market" (145).³ In her study of postbellum novels, Susan Donaldson describes the postwar literary market as a "battle for domain" (1) and as a pitched gender battle" (2). Kennedy-Smith's and Donaldson's use of terms like "territory" and "domain" as metaphors to describe this market make it seem like a geographical—if imaginary—location.

In "The Ancient City" and the other stories I focus on here, Woolson superimposes this "imaginary territory" upon particular archaeological landscapes that are within specific physical places. The antiquarian gaze makes these superimposed places visible and legible. In Woolson's treatment of tourism and antiquarianism, particularly in her depictions of the Florida landscape, she critiques, and at times conflates, the gazes of the tourist, the antiquarian, and the literary critic. They reveal that territory is connected to literacy and to the process of composition. It is contested through one's ability to read, organize, and

³ Woolson was one of the first Southern writers to enter and succeed in this market. Although born in Claremont, New Hampshire and raised in Ohio, Woolson lived in Florida from 1873 to 1879, hoping to retire there one day (Kennedy-Smith 142).

compose the landscape, both the imagined domain of the literary marketplace and landscapes in places like Florida, the Great Lakes region, and Rome. Woolson's inclusion of the tourist and antiquarian gazes in stories about women artists suggests that she saw the nationalistic implications of women's participation in high culture, as well as the difficulties presented by gendered perceptions of the marketplace.

The nineteenth-century literary marketplace was a gendered location. By the end of the Civil War, women writers of popular sentimental fiction had dominated the market for decades (Donaldson 2). The "battle" over this "territory" between popular, established women writers and rising male critics and authors became by extension a contest over the gendering of this imagined place—what Donaldson has described as the contending forces of women's sentimentalism and men's professionalism (2). The gendered identity of the American author was also at stake in this period. As Donaldson has argued, male authors like Henry James faced a paradigm of authorship influenced by decades of the success of women novelists: "so prominent were best-selling women writers...in American letters that by mid-century terms like 'culture' in general and 'literature' in particular had very nearly come to be defined as inherently feminine" (2). Donaldson goes on to describe the "pitched gender battle" waged by authors like Henry James and William Dean Howells to redefine the production of literary art as a male profession (2). At the heart of this debate was the question of who would be allowed access to the world of art and high culture, and who would be relegated to the less exalted world of popular or mass culture (2). In *Doing*

Literary Business, Susan Coultrap-McQuinn expands upon how “masculine”

values became part of the idea of literary professionalism:

as the century drew to a close, the publishing marketplace increasingly emphasized ‘masculine’ values and called for a literary professionalism that was more aggressive, competitive, and self-aggrandizing than before. Such masculinization was occurring in other professions, which also chose to institutionalize values of rationality, objectivity, specialization, and authority. In other professions, the net result was often to place additional limitations on women’s participation. It may be that in literary circles, too, masculine values were being propounded in order to bring control of the literary marketplace to men (198).

With such values being emphasized, women who attempted to become “professionals” were in danger of having their femininity questioned. The same challenge faced women who identified as “artists” or sought to be recognized for their genius.⁴

The problem of women’s genius, as Battersby and others have described it, is that it is impossible for women to be geniuses unless gender boundaries are transgressed. She writes that the exclusionary language of genius became more pronounced in the nineteenth century, when the spheres of mass culture and “high” culture became gendered feminine and masculine, respectively (Battersby 6). The result, she writes, was “a continual blotting out of the contributions of

⁴ Archaeology was also becoming increasingly professionalized toward the turn of the twentieth century (Fowler 22). Like postbellum authorship, it was also increasingly becoming defined as an elite profession, and found itself increasingly located in institutions like museums and universities, particularly between the years 1880 and 1920 (Trigger 63-64; Fowler and Wilcox 36). Although women were outnumbered by men in the field, they did take part in the advancement of archaeological research and of archaeology as a profession. Egyptologist Sara Yorke Stevenson, for example, helped establish the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology by gaining the patronage of the Philadelphia elite (Fowler and Wilcox 36-37).

women artists" (6). The stereotype of the feminized male antiquarian made it easier for women writers to rework antiquarianism for their own purposes, using it in part to authorize the political and social interventions of their texts. For example, in "Spinster stories" like Susan Pindar's "Aunt Mable's Love Story" (1848) that I address in Chapter I, antiquarianism is used to define the social role of the single woman as a preserver and propagator of domestic values. Adapting antiquarianism also gave women the agency to authorize alternate narratives around material remains; for example, in Rebecca Harding Davis's "A Faded Leaf of History" the author uses antiquarian discourse to create a new narrative that challenges established patriarchal histories.⁵

As I will go on to argue in this chapter, Constance Fenimore Woolson uses antiquarianism to challenge the binaries that created ideological barriers between women and the sphere of "high culture": male/female, artist/object of art, public/private, genius/imitator of genius. In the stories I will focus on here—"The Lady of Little Fishing" (1874), "Castle Nowhere" (1875), "St. Clair Flats" (1873), and "The Ancient City" (1874-75)—she ties her women characters, particularly women "creators" and "artists," to artifacts and ruins—which in nineteenth-century culture were associated with the idea of human genius—and purposefully has her male "critic" characters misinterpret them. They fail to understand the nature of genius that these women characters possess. As a result, her women

⁵ Antiquarianism, while seemingly apolitical due to its stereotypical disconnection from reality and history, had been used for political ends before the nineteenth century. As Mike Goode has noted, eighteenth-century nationalist antiquaries in Scotland looked to the past and oral traditions to reconstruct histories that had been lost to English imperialism (61).

characters become thwarted in their efforts to be received and recognized as artists. Frequently they are depicted as wanderers with no firm footing in either the artistic world or the physical one. Ambitious women characters that fall outside of the traditional marriage plot and instead seek an independent existence most often experience this sense of placelessness in Woolson's stories, and it leaves them with grim options. For example, in "The Ancient City," the single woman writer Sarah St. John fails to gain critical acceptance from male critics, represented by the renowned poet Eugenio and the worldly gentleman John Hoffman. She finds herself at a crossroads by the end of the story; unable to move forward with her career, she is faced with the choice of either suicide or marriage. In the midst of this crisis, Sarah becomes fixated upon a ruined tower—an interestingly phallic structure—that symbolizes both her potential suicide and her potential marriage.⁶ In this instance and in other examples, Woolson uses antiquities to mark women's locations in a literal and a figurative sense. They help evoke the sense of placelessness that women artists experienced—that Woolson herself experienced—while trying to break into a sphere that was becoming closed off to them.⁷

⁶ If read in another sense, marriage is a kind of suicide: women writers who married were often forced to sacrifice their writing careers in order to fulfill their domestic duties. This is the implied outcome for Sarah in "The Ancient City" and the confirmed fate of Mrs. Winthrop in "At the Chateau of Corinne."

⁷ In *Cultures of Letters*, Richard Brodhead writes, "In the years between 1860 and 1900, the *Atlantic Monthly*, *The Century Magazine*, and *Harper's Monthly Magazine* achieved an identification as the three American 'quality journals.' This means that these three journals produced the same high or distinguished zone in the literary realm that the classical museum or symphony orchestra produced in art or music, a strongly demarcated high-status arena for high-artistic practice."

I. Antiquarianism and the Problem of Place in Woolson's Fiction

In their introduction to *Constance Fenimore Woolson: Selected Stories and Travel Narratives*, Victoria Brehm and Sharon L. Dean discuss how Woolson's short stories address issues affecting the places she lived in and wrote about. Her writing was more realistic than nostalgic and considers problems such as the impact of tourism and industrialization on the northwestern wilderness, the struggles of the South during Reconstruction, and the lives of American expatriates in Europe (Brehm and Dean xvii). Brehm and Dean point out that in 1876, *Harper's* magazine threatened to stop publishing Woolson unless she avoided writing about the troubles in the South due to the Civil War (xvi). In response to this threat, they write, "Woolson developed a method of subtextually encoding her opinions. She used names, dates, places, quotations of songs and poems to create a secondary reality—a subterranean text

And though actual audiences are notoriously hard to establish, there is reason to think that they produced literary writing toward a similarly constituted social public" (124). As a friend of Henry James, who was arguably one of the primary arbiters of high literary culture in the late nineteenth century, and as a longtime contributor to *Harper's*, Woolson's relationship to the world of "high" literature is a complex one. In spite of her success, she still harbored anxieties about this world and about her place in it; she was not immune to the prevailing opinion that women writers could only imitate great art and not create it themselves. As I will discuss here, she works through these anxieties in her texts, particularly in her earlier writings of the 1870s.

underneath what might appear to be a romance or story of society" (xvii).⁸ This subtle code becomes marked in depictions of ruins and artifacts, and can be read in light of the larger tradition of antiquarianism.

As a writer of "subterranean texts," Woolson saw the landscapes around her—including the built environment—as being comprised of layers over time and space. Various locations in her writing, whether the ruins of a frontier town or a writer's desk, reflect her training as a geologist,⁹ her ability to perceive the layers that make up a place over time (xxv). However, as I discussed in ,", Woolson's places also reveal her connections to antiquarianism and her interest in artifacts. Brehm and Dean label Woolson as a "historian," a "botanist," and a "cultural anthropologist" (xix-xx); they acknowledge that in her travel writing she humorously cultivates the voice of "a caricature of a learned professor" to keep her descriptions of local history and geography from sounding too tiresome (xvii). Her combination of interests in geography, history, culture, and geology align her with antiquarianism, while her caricature of the dry "learned professor," a critique

⁸ Brehm and Dean argue that after 1884, when Woolson wrote solely for *Harper's*, her strategy of encoding unwelcome opinions becomes even more pronounced (xvii).

⁹ Woolson's parents encouraged her to explore the outdoors as a child; they sent her to school at the Cleveland Female Seminary, where, as biographer Cheryl Torsney writes, "her interest in the outdoors gained scientific legitimacy from the school's founder Samuel St. John, a specialist in biology, chemistry, geology, and natural history" (3). In her study of nineteenth-century textbook writer Almira Phelps (1793-1884), Tina Gianquitto observes that Phelps authored a series of elementary scientific textbooks for girls beginning in 1829, including one on geology (22). These became bestsellers and remained in print through the 1870s (22). While I have not obtained a list of textbooks that Woolson may have used as a young girl, it is likely that her study of geology involved both the experiential approach encouraged by her parents and the more systematic approach laid out in textbooks like Phelps's.

of the less appealing characteristics of the antiquarian, is a critique of antiquarianism. In these moments of critique, Woolson especially picks up on the commonplace trope of the feminized antiquity and the stereotype of the antiquarian as one who, like Scott's Jonathan Oldbuck, misreads artifacts. This is the case, as I discuss in Chapter I, with the narrator in "Miss Grief," who often associates Aaronna Moncrief with antiquities and never quite understands her true powers. Ultimately, because he cannot place her in the contemporary literary marketplace, the narrator relegates her unpublished drama to the oblivion of his desk drawer. With Miss Grief's drama placed in this new location, Woolson reveals the real "buried god" of the story: a work of woman's genius imprisoned in the desk of a successful male writer whom Susan F. Williams describes as a "feminine amateur" (185). This conclusion is an ironic statement about a world of "high art" that is blinded by its prejudices against women artists; it is ultimately impoverished due to the fact that "gatekeepers" like the narrator, as well as the larger audience of readers, cannot recognize a true work of genius because it has been authored by a woman.

The problem of location looms in Woolson's short stories and travel sketches of the 1870s and 1880s. In her stories, human traces in the landscape reveal how it has been contested within political conflicts and social change, such as a Huguenot massacre, the Civil War, or even the destruction of natural places by the encroachment of industry and tourism. She turns artifacts into metaphors that describe the relationship of women to the literary marketplace and to the world of art and culture, not only in her Florida and Southern tales, but in her

Great Lakes and Italian tales as well. These artifacts, in turn, also transform her landscapes into gendered locations. Woolson was concerned with location in the sense of literally finding a place for herself geographically;¹⁰ however, she also questioned what it meant to establish a place for herself in the world of high culture and literary art. Many of her stories feature women characters that are searching for a place in a world over which they do not have much control—or even the illusion of control. Through her depictions of artifacts and ruins she explores how the properties of location and dislocation operate in the lives of her women characters.

Part of my goal here is to use Woolson's texts as an example that demonstrates how and why women's responses to the antiquarian model of authorship were changing in the late nineteenth century—specifically, in the period of transition between "True Womanhood" and the "New Woman" in the 1870s and 1880s. Woolson biographer Cheryl Torsney remarks that the author's career spanned a period of transition that is often overlooked by today's critics: because she published in the span of years between "the weakening of the bonds of womanhood and the freedom of the New Woman" (8), her career "is interposed between two periods when women wrote from positions of secure

¹⁰ In her adult life, Woolson never successfully established a permanent home for herself, and this at times was troubling for her. Biographer Cheryl Torsney writes, "Woolson's nomadic life was a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it severed her from the comfort of family and a sense of place, so that she spent much of her life searching for a permanent home to which she could feel bound; on the other, it helped her to sever ties that would have bound her to the provincial and the ordinary. Because she developed the habit of travel early, she needed wider boundaries to nourish her imagination than did someone like Emily Dickinson, who could see all the world in the confines of her Amherst home" (26).

identity and power" (7). As I demonstrate with the passage from "Cairo in 1890" at the start of this chapter, by the end of the nineteenth century the popular figure of the antiquarian seems unchanged from its eighteenth-century manifestations. However, I would argue that Woolson is using this stereotypical figure as a place of departure for the spinster rather than emphasizing the connections between spinsters and antiquarians as do Sedgwick, Hale, Cooke, and other earlier writers. Woolson's evolving uses of antiquarianism and the figure of the antiquarian—itsself a far from stable identity, especially in terms of gender—makes sense in this "twilight world" of transition, as Torsney terms it (8).

Key moments in Woolson's short stories reveal the ways that literary uses of archaeology and antiquarianism were evolving by the late nineteenth century according to the changing needs of women authors and the changing marketplace. I argue that Woolson presents her readers with scenarios in which a specifically male antiquarian gaze fails to "read" artifacts in the landscape successfully, and, by extension, fails to understand the women with whom those artifacts are connected. These women offer alternative interpretations of artifacts and archaeological landscapes, upending the attempts of the antiquarian gaze to narrate their stories or to locate them in a particular place. Woolson's women struggle to locate themselves through narratives of their own making. Only they are authorized to tell their stories. Attempts by the male gaze—whether it is presented as antiquarian, tourist, or critic, or a conflation of two or more of these—to "read" and "interpret" these women end up producing romanticized, inaccurate misunderstandings, much as Scott's Oldbuck interprets the remains of

a country wedding as the site of a Roman camp. As I analyze the relationship between antiquarianism and the problems of self-representation in Woolson's work, I will consider how she raises questions about the aesthetic value of women's artistic productions and the literal "place" of women's art in America.

One question that is at stake is how the role of "antiquarian" operates in light of conditions for women writers in the literary marketplace toward the turn of the century. To address this issue, I would like to expand on a thread that I traced in my analysis of Woolson's "Miss Grief" in Chapter I; namely, how artifacts and the landscapes where they reside become sites where Woolson addresses her concerns over the place of the woman artist in the literary world. She explores issues of creative independence through depictions of places and, more importantly, through her interrogation of the importance of "location" for women artists. Artifacts and antiquarianism play an important role in her construction of allegorical landscapes that contain labyrinths, islands, fortresses, ruins, and natural barriers—places that resist conclusive interpretation and that are in various ways "disconnected." This disconnection contributes to both the problems and opportunities that result from "dislocation" for Woolson's women characters.

II. Location and the Aesthetic Place of the New Spinster

Woolson uses a sense of displacement and dislocation in her stories to negotiate between the possibilities and limitations of antiquarianism and the

future of the New Spinster. The afterlife of women writers' use of the antiquarian model of authorship and its legacy for the twentieth century is directly related to the emergence of the "New Woman" in the 1890s but also, more specifically, to the simultaneous emergence of the "New Spinster." This phrase was coined by historians Ruth Freeman and Patricia Klaus to describe an emerging model of the single life that offered enticing alternatives to women who were put off by the idea of marriage. The figure of the "New Spinster" is an outcome of debates over single life for women that had been ongoing since the beginning of the nineteenth century, alongside debates over the nature of marriage—particularly its economic and social disadvantages for women.¹¹ Freeman and Klaus claim that, by the last third of the century, attitudes toward the single life for women were changing "irrevocably" (410). They argue that the single life increasingly became associated with economic independence, opportunities to pursue personal goals, and self-fulfillment: qualities that became embodied in the New Spinster (410).

The New Spinster takes on a specific form in Woolson's fiction: namely, the single woman artist. These characters frequently set out on artistic journeys, seeking to unmoor themselves from the conventional writing that was expected of women. She dramatizes their progress—or lack thereof—as they try to move toward futures where they may fully participate in the aesthetic sphere as artists and geniuses in their own right. In the process, Woolson portrays their struggles to find increased independence, self-fulfillment, and to pursue career opportunities. However, these characters often simultaneously experience the

¹¹ See Nancy Isenberg, *Sex and Citizenship in Antebellum America* (155), for further discussion of the disadvantages of married life for women.

discomforts and disadvantages of physical journeys, resulting in a sense of “placelessness” and exile. Often, by the end of the story, they face a choice that really is no choice at all: marriage, or death in some form.

In some respects, marriage *is* a kind of death for these artist characters. If they marry, they may regain a sense of place that is tied to domestic space and identity as wife. However, this choice knocks the character out of the center of such spaces. She no longer controls the space around her, nor can she move through it in an independent fashion. Her location becomes pinned to her husband and his needs and wants. For example, in the short story “At the Chateau of Corinne” (1887),¹² a male critic, John Ford, crushes the aspirations of a hopeful woman writer, Katharine Winthrop, before making her his wife. Much of the story takes place in and around the chateau of Madame de Stäel, author of *Corinne* (1807)¹³ and one of the most noted women artists of the romantic period. Ironically, it is in de Stäel’s home that Ford convinces Katharine to give up her artistic ambitions and marry him. In a speech on the prospects of the woman artist, he opines that she “should not dare in that way. Thinking to soar, she

¹² Cheryl Torsney observes that, although Woolson wrote “At the Chateau of Corinne” in 1880, she didn’t publish it until seven years later (106). Torsney writes of Mrs. Winthrop’s marriage, “Taken under her husband’s control, put into his library, she, like the works of her heroine, is ranged separately on a shelf, a collectible, a conversation piece, an objet d’art displayed for the purpose of eliciting from her husband the clever sort of commentary that concludes the narrative” (106).

¹³ In her study of the impact of de Stäel and George Sand on Victorian women artists, Linda Lewis writes, “Stäel and Sand are important because they began to define the woman-as-artist at the very point in literary history when Romanticism was defining the hero-as-artist and when the woman writer, rapidly becoming a presence in the English publishing world, was looking for foremothers” (9).

invariably descends. Her mental realm is not the same as that of man; lower, on the same level, or far above, it is at least different" (Weimer 233). At the story's end we see only the masculine space of the Ford's library. There he keeps a portrait of de Stäel, along with a collection of her works: "'You admire her?' said a visitor recently, in some surprise. 'To me she always seemed a—a little antique, you know.' 'She is antiquity itself!'" Ford replies, "'But she once lent me her house, and I am grateful'" (247). Tellingly, Ford's wife is absent from this closing scene that takes place in his library: a masculine space reserved for himself and his visitors. The collective (and collected) genius of the woman displayed there becomes for him a reminder of his victory over his wife's tendencies toward "daring." De Stäel's volumes don't sit upon his shelves as Great Works but as spoils of war. His wife, who gave up her dreams of becoming a poet to marry him, is absent. The husband shows off his library and collection of works by Germain de Stäel to an unnamed male visitor—an oblique reference to his courtship of a woman who now has no place in the story (Weimer 247).

Another example of the dislocating effect of marriage occurs in "St. Clair Flats." Waiting Samuel's wife, Roxana, gives up her place in her hometown in order to accompany her "prophet" husband to the West. She manages single-handedly to set up a home for them in the middle of a marsh; however, by the end of the story both Roxana and her husband have vanished, leaving behind their decaying home. The unsettled narrator can only speculate about their fate, which includes the possibility that Samuel has once more uprooted his wife and compelled her to move further west (Brehm and Dean 77). In "The Lady of Little

Fishing," the female missionary who captivates a shantytown of rough hunters and trappers dies after an illness. After her death, the men, "in a kind of blind fury against Fate," destroy the home they built for her, "so that the very location might be lost" (Weimer 23). Woolson's women characters are most successful at staking a relatively stable place for themselves when they become the interpreters of place. As I will show, Roxana is a good example of a woman character that exerts control over her location by understanding it, reading it correctly, and being able to interpret it for others. The Lady of Little Fishing, too, is able to exert a certain amount of influence over location, although in her case it is through cultivating feelings of sympathy and love among the camp men. She helps them to re-see Little Fishing as a domestic space and an orderly village rather than a vice-filled trapping camp.

Significantly, Rome and the American frontier are major sites where women's battle for acceptance as artists is carried out, whether physically or imaginatively. Woolson often includes the perspectives of single women artists in those stories that take place in the South and Rome: places that she considered artistic retreats.¹⁴ However, antiquarianism and archaeological language were not confined to writings of a particular region, but surfaced in landscapes both at home and abroad. In this way, Woolson locates her landscapes in a larger scheme or market for travel and antiquities. Her treatment of antiquities as

¹⁴ Woolson's Great Lakes sketches are less focused on the woman artist, specifically, and more on the impact of tourism and industrialization on the region. However, she brings women's creative power to bear on this conversation, especially in depictions of female characters who are able to "read" and organize the landscape while their male counterparts fail to do so.

commodities seems to suggest that she understood that there was a conflict between artistic integrity and the demands of the literary marketplace.

Woolson's short fiction grew out of her travels and life in different places: the Great Lakes region, in the South, and in Rome. Her treatment of antiquities in a number of short stories reveals the development of her thought on the relationship of artist to place, and of both to the literary marketplace. Physical movement and travel, as well as the circulation of artifacts in the marketplace, are important metaphors for Woolson's idea of the creative process and for her configuration of the New Spinster. She unearths artifacts that then circulate and take on different meanings in a public arena, which comes to be defined by circulation and movement rather than stasis. Woolson associates stasis with the "outsider" status and the domestic sphere in which women often find themselves confined. Many of her stories contain conflict between the desire for establishing the self-in-place and the need to circulate—both to physically travel and to circulate one's artistic productions—in order to have value in the public sphere.¹⁵

Woolson's interest in the connections between location, antiquities, and women artists develops from the 1870s through the 1880s. Travel, circulation,

¹⁵ To quote Arjun Appadurai in *The Social Life of Things*, from a Marxist perspective, "Economic exchange creates value. Value is embodied in commodities that are exchanged" (3). Bill Brown, in a Marxist and cultural materialist study of modernist literature, observes that "value is created in specific social formations and lodged in specific material forms" (4). Woolson understood that the marketplace for "high culture," like the mass market of popular culture, was ultimately a place of economic exchange. She reflects as much in "Miss Grief," where Aaronna's drama, though a work of genius, is in one sense "worthless" because the narrator does not help her achieve its circulation. However, it also fails because it does not progress within another form of social exchange: that between literary critic and author.

and other forms of movement between places sustain her image of the woman artist. Travel writing was a mainstay of Woolson's career; she began earning money by writing local color fiction in the Great Lakes region where she grew up, before moving to and writing about the South, particularly Florida (Brehm and Dean xv). She eventually joined the ranks of American expatriate artists in Rome (xv).¹⁶ In her work—particularly her works of literary realism—we can read the beginnings of the shift toward the New Spinster as she asked what it meant to be a single woman who was not simply trying to survive the economic hardships and other difficulties that attended the single life, but to thrive as an independent person and produce work with artistic merit.

In her depictions of the spinster and the antiquarian, Woolson works through different questions related to the location of the woman artist: the problems of originality, and of dealing with gender markers that might “devalue” a work before it has a chance to be great. Like other women before her, she addressed the differences between being acknowledged as “a woman artist” and as “an artist.”¹⁷ As I mentioned in my earlier discussion of Woolson, her treatment of antiquities as “anonymous” works of art provides readers with a way into this question. Her depictions of ruins and artifacts force the reader to grapple with questions of authorship and the nature of original artistic creation. This issue of “originality” is perhaps the most important one when speaking of antiquities in

¹⁶ Woolson was prolific. Brehm and Dean observe that, over the course of her career, she wrote “more than fifty short stories, four novels, a novella, and numerous poems and travel essays” (xv).]

¹⁷ See Sherwood's account of sculptor Harriet Hosmer's public life: She “ask[ed] only to be treated as an artist, rather than a female artist” (193).

Woolson's work. In my discussion of "Miss Grief" in Chapter I, I point out that Woolson links the circulation of the spinster's art to the problem of counterfeiting in the antiques marketplace (56). In the nineteenth century, women were often acknowledged as "copyists" who could imitate art rather than produce great works of original art—this was the province of male writers, sculptors, and artists (Sherwood 63). The male narrator/literary critic in "Miss Grief," for example, has a difficult time believing at first that what Aaronna Moncrief is "selling" could be anything more than worthless reproductions of old treasures. In this case, Woolson's interest in the problems of location can be expanded to include the idea that authenticity of authorship, and the authenticity of an author's genius, help to locate a text either in the mass market or the sphere of high culture.

III. The Great Lakes

Castle Nowhere: Lake Country Sketches (1875), a series of Woolson's Great Lakes local-color stories, marks a moment in her career that is concerned with the power of material objects to evoke memories and connections to place. In the stories I will examine here, she is concerned with how "hidden" narratives of place could be brought to light through the ability to "read" the histories of material objects, often surprising her readers with unexpected turns in the plot. She explores what it meant for there to be "ruins" on the edge of the frontier—a place supposedly new and relatively untouched by civilization. Woolson creates scenes in which ruined structures signify the increasing industrialization and

destruction of natural places in the region. As a historian of the wilderness culture of the Northwest Territory, she uses ruins to document the destruction of the wilderness and the simultaneous destruction of the frontier way of life.

In each of the Great Lakes stories I focus on here, ruins are closely connected to women who function as creators of "locations" on the frontier. As markers of location, they transform the wilderness from a sprawling and chaotic space to an organized place with themselves at the center.¹⁸ This is not so much strictly a process of "civilization" as it is the construction of a network of relationships that make the place meaningful. In each of these stories, men build homes for women in the wilderness; although the women become the center of these homes, it is the men who retain almost complete power over them. The male characters that construct these homes later either abandon or destroy them. As a result, with the women who once occupied them vanish in various ways, and the sense of location becomes fragmented and distorted. Ruin and a return to a sense of placelessness is the result in each case.

While the women seem to be the locating, creative force contained in these spaces, they lack control over their destinies and especially over the places they inhabit. In this way they are simultaneously powerful and powerless, a theme that Woolson picks up again in later explorations of the position of the woman artist in a male-dominated literary marketplace. By the time the author reached Rome, the problem of "location" translates to the problem of finding

¹⁸ In *The Land Before Her*, Annette Kolodny argues that women were excluded from the male fantasy of the frontier as an eroticized, female, virgin land; instead, she claims, women formulated an alternative fantasy of the frontier as a garden that they could tame and shape according to their desires (5).

oneself at the mercy of the critics and the marketplace—an imaginary place where she can never be at the center and cannot establish it as a location that she can inhabit.

“The Lady of Little Fishing” is a local color story that unravels the history of a frontiersman who scorned the love of an angelic missionary woman and was exiled from his community. He gradually unfolds this story to the narrator, a genteel and light-hearted young adventurer who is touring the area. When we first meet this narrator, he is gazing upon the deserted island community of Little Fishing. He remarks facetiously, “Ruins are rare in the New World. I took off my hat. ‘Hail, homes of the past!’ I said...’A human voice resounds through your arches’ (there were no arches,—logs won’t arch; but never mind) ‘once more, a human hand touches your venerable walls, a human foot presses your deserted hearth-stones” (3-4). The narrator’s grandiloquent language and humorous interjection about logs and arches mark him as an unreliable narrator. Woolson depicts him as a careless, happy-go-lucky wanderer who enters the village only to destroy all remaining traces of the community. He immediately sets to work burning the ruins that he celebrates in his opening lines (3-4).

Soon he meets a strange old man, who explains how the village came to be through the love of the rough fur traders for a mysterious missionary, called “Our Lady,” who arrives one day in their rough-and-tumble camp. Surprised at this revelation, the narrator comments, “I scarcely expected to find the woman and her story up here; but since the irrepressible creature would come, out with her by all means. She shall grace our last pipe together, the last timber of our

meeting-house, our last night on Little Fishing" (5). The old man goes on to describe the woman as a beautiful young missionary who explains that she is being driven west by the idea that she must travel to as many frontier towns as possible, ministering to every one she can reach. The traders put her on a pedestal,¹⁹ and she becomes a civilizing and centralizing force among the wild, reckless men. They build her a house and construct an orderly town—which even has a decorative fountain—around it. However, after her death the men raze the town they have so carefully built. It is as though, without the woman and her "story" as centralizing forces, the town cannot stand and the sense of location is destroyed:

Then, in a kind of blind fury against Fate, they tore down her empty lodge and destroyed its every fragment; in their grim determination they even smoothed over the ground and planted shrubs and bushes, so that the very location might be lost. But they did not stay to see the change. In a month the camp broke up of itself, the town was abandoned, and the island deserted for good and all; I doubt whether any of the men ever came back or even stopped when passing by" (23)

There are several key terms in this passage that reveal Woolson's interest in the problem of location. The men's actions are motivated by "blind fury," a destructive and irrational response to Our Lady's death. They destroy "every fragment" of her home, eliminating all traces of its "very location," and reinstating the beginnings of a new wilderness over its foundations before abandoning the place. Of the mysterious woman—one of the many "wandering women" who inhabit Woolson's fiction—there is also no physical trace. The loss of "location"

¹⁹ Woolson is clearly making a connection between "Our Lady" and the Virgin Mary. This association suggests that the Lady's ability to tame the men of Little Fishing is miraculous.

here is more than just the loss of a building; it can be read as the eradication of the woman's works and accomplishments in the community. There are, however, ruins left over from the men's destructive rampage; the privileged young Easterner who is idly touring this region finds these and burns them in an attitude of idleness and arrogance. The burning of the ruins eliminates all final traces of Our Lady's influence; the missionary's work comes not only to ruin but to oblivion. She lives on only in a narrative that has now been passed on to a genteel young man, the unreliable narrator who now has control over her story. This ending recalls the ending of "Miss Grief," where Aaronna's story also ends up in the hands of a man who will ultimately consign it to oblivion.

Like "The Lady of Little Fishing," "Castle Nowhere" takes place on an island, although this one has an even more vague location. Taking place on Lake Michigan, the story follows the strange relationship between Jarvis—another young, genteel male adventurer—and a criminal he meets on the shore of the lake. This man, known only as Fog, has spent his life running from a crime he committed in New York City during his youth. As a kind of penance, he takes in an abandoned baby and raises her as his own daughter, whom he names Silver, in a fairy-tale like setting: a "castle" where the Rapunzel-like innocent can be raised apart from the world, without knowledge of religion, sin, or death. Like Our Lady in "The Lady of Little Fishing," Silver acts as the force at the center of the place, the meaning behind its purpose and location. Her castle is a wooden tower standing in the water; it exists in obscurity in a region that the narrator describes as "showing even now on the school-maps nothing save an empty waste of

colored paper, generally a pale, cold yellow suitable to the climate...a hundred miles of nothing, according to the map-makers, who, knowing nothing of the region, set it down accordingly..." (25). The only way to reach this tower is through a labyrinthine series of channels in the surrounding marsh, where a natural barrier defends the opening from any who might try to find it. When Silver ultimately leaves the tower, it falls into ruin and oblivion, becoming a lost location like the town in "The Lady of Little Fishing".

The overwhelming sensation throughout this strange story is that of being adrift. In one instance, when Jarvis is in fact adrift in his boat after leaving the castle, he wonders aloud, "What does it all mean anyway? Where am I? Who am I? Am I anybody? Or has the body gone and left me only an any?" But no one answered" (43). Each time Jarvis attempts to leave the castle, he finds himself returning—drawn back to Silver and orienting his thoughts on her—perhaps in an effort to find answers to these questions that cannot be answered in the Nowhere that surrounds the Castle. In the above passage, the question of meaning leads immediately to the question of location. The transition between questions—the question of meaning, which leads into the question of location and then the question of identity and purpose—mirrors what Woolson saw as the importance of location in establishing the latter. The where takes precedence over the who because it is a critical piece of the process of self-definition and artistic self-realization; it is a necessary first condition that helps determine the condition of being.

"Castle Nowhere" ends with Jarvis marrying Fog's daughter and taking her away from the Castle. The implications are that she will lose her innocence and childhood, and that in shattering the illusion that Fog has created Jarvis will ultimately regret his decision as an illusion. After Fog's death, the couple leaves the castle along with the "mummy-like" black servant who attends Silver (39); but with the loss of Silver, whose name implies "treasure" and who was its *genius loci*, the castle disintegrates into ruin and then nothingness: "gradually the walls fell in, and the water entered. The fogs still steal across the lake, and wave their gray draperies up into the northern curve; but the sedge-gate is gone, and the castle is indeed Nowhere" (78). Silver is represented as almost without desires, and like the metal she is named after, seems to reflect back what others wish to see in her. She is not even aware of what romantic love is at first, so perfect is her state of innocence, and is a blank slate upon which the men in the story—her adoptive father, and Jarvis—may write whatever they choose. Conversely, they may also deny her information, even basic information about the human condition.

This seems to be one of Silver's attractions for Jarvis, who begins to indoctrinate her with knowledge of death and of good and evil, much like the Serpent in the Garden. Like Silver, the wilderness will eventually be cultivated by outsiders like Jarvis; the questions of "What does it all mean?", "Where am I?", and "Who am I?"—questions that were important to a nation struggling to gain a sense of itself after the devastating Civil War—could be answered by overwriting the "cold, yellow spaces" with new information. Woolson's shrewd reading of the

uses of the frontier by the industrialized East are encoded in these images. Like Celia Thaxter, who wrote "Among the Isles of Shoals" around the same time that Woolson was writing these sketches, Woolson critiqued the problem of overdevelopment and other changes brought on by encroaching industrialization and tourism. In one sense, her narrator is a tourist who also ends up "plundering" the region of one of its hidden "treasures," Silver. The implication is that this traveler has taken something meaningful from the place.²⁰ After he removes this treasure and brings her back east, "the castle is indeed Nowhere" (78).

Woolson also critiques the idea of the frontier as a "new Paradise" for Eastern tourists and industrialists in "St. Clair Flats," again setting the scene on an island in the midst of marshland that is cut by winding, maze-like channels. While "Castle Nowhere" features a woman who seemed to exist purely as a canvas on which men could write their desires—in the case of Fog, his redemption from sin, and in the case of Jarvis, the creation of a woman in his image—"St. Clair Flats" offers a female character, Roxana, who is a bit more complex. Like Silver, Roxana's movements and location depend on the desires of her husband; he has even forced her to change her name from Maria Ann to

²⁰ Scholars of regionalism have debated the extent that regionalist writers "export" or even "plunder" value from the regions they write about. Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse depart from Richard Brodhead in the discussion of region and value. Fetterley and Pryse argue that regionalist writers communicate the value of a place to readers from all walks of life. Brodhead, on the other hand, "characterizes Jewett and other regionalist writers as 'carrying the good of the place *out* of the place'" (117). They go on to remark, "To share the good of a place does not necessarily destroy the good of the place" (117-18). This is certainly true, but the "touristic" aspects of regional writing certainly hint at outside destruction, and writers like Thaxter and Woolson seem to write defensively of the places they are selling to elite audiences.

Roxana (102). However, Woolson makes it clear that Roxana made a conscious choice to marry the strange outsider, who calls himself "Waiting Samuel," of her own accord, and to leave her beloved home and follow him Westward.

Additionally, it is Roxana who sustains their married life on a marshy island in the middle of the flats through physical strength, creative management, and hard work. If "Castle Nowhere" makes a statement on the destructive illusions that outsiders may hold concerning an unknown region, "St. Clair Flats" does so more pointedly, mourning the "vanishing charm" of the flats (106).

As in the other two stories, the main characters in "St. Clair Flats" are idle, genteel, male Easterners who have come to tour and hunt in the region.²¹ In their journeys, they meet Roxana and Waiting Samuel, a strange prophet who claims to have been ordered west by visions he received in dreams.²² The two travelers stay with the couple and observe how Roxana, in spite of the harsh life style she has chosen, remains faithful to her husband and his visions and serves as his anchor to life and reality. Through her efforts, she and her husband are able to survive in the marsh country. Although the visitors find the flats beautiful, they are also treacherous to navigate—a problem that their steamer's captain would solve with the construction of a channel (82). The maze-like landscape is not a problem

²¹ Richard Brodhead discusses how high-culture magazines (*Atlantic Monthly*, *The Century Magazine*, *Harper's*) included regional writing as a staple; he argues that regionalism exhibited little-known corners of the nation to an "elite audience" that "needed" the "primitive" as a "leisure outlet" (131). Woolson's male tourists seem to fit this role of privileged, elite Easterners who used (in this case) the Great Lakes region as such a "leisure outlet"—an interesting, partially-veiled critique of the very audiences that would read her sketches in *Harper's*.

²² Waiting Samuel seems to be Woolson's version of a radical Protestant "exile" from the East.

for Roxana; in her words, “I can read the flats like a book, but they’re very blinding to most people; and you might keep going round in a circle” (94). Roxana has the power to impose location on what otherwise seems a confusing wasteland. An outsider, she has nevertheless learned the ways of the place and can orient herself properly when rowing through the channels. When her two guests set out on their hunting and fishing expeditions, Roxana gives them a line to unwind behind them so they are sure of finding their way back to her. Thus she becomes an Ariadne figure, but also the hub of the place for these men: the only way they can be sure of their location, the only way they can orient themselves while traveling the marshes.²³

More so than the other two stories I have discussed here, “St. Clair Flats” is about reading and misreading, whether the reader’s subject is the place itself or objects that are found in the landscape. If one misreads the maze of channels in the marsh, one may become lost and the mistake may prove fatal. Woolson’s tourists have a “sophisticated,” “transcendent” perspective that gives them a romanticized view of the landscape and tends to cause them to misread situations rather than to interpret them correctly. Through her classically

²³ Roxana’s role as a fixed point in this labyrinth recalls Fetterley and Pryse’s argument concerning the power of regional characters’ point of view to shape the “geography” of a place: “If a text looks ‘with’ regional characters, location becomes marked rather than transcended and the text retains its ‘geography.’ When a text looks ‘at’ the region, however, geography and location characterize only one aspect of the text while the perspective of the one who looks is framed as universal and transcendent” (36). Woolson seems interested in the differences between insiders’ and outsiders’ perspectives on place. In the case of the two young Eastern tourists, sophisticated education and worldly views will still ultimately not help them find their way in the bog. Roxana, however, is the “insider” who is able to “mark location” and impose a legible geography on the place.

educated Eastern narrator, she makes the point that American prehistory is the province of fantasy and romance for those who lack the ability to read the historical landscape:

“Why were the Flats called St. Clair?” I said; for there is something fascinating to me in the unknown history of the West. “There isn’t any,” do you say? you, I mean, who are strong in the Punic wars! you, too, who are so well up in Grecian mythology. But there is history, only we don’t know it. The story of Lake Huron in the times of the Pharoahs, the story of the Mississippi during the reign of Belshazzar, would be worth hearing. But it is lost! All we can do is gather together the details of our era,—the era when Columbus came to this New World, which was, nevertheless, as old as the world he left behind (97-98).

In spite of his comment on “gathering together the details of our era,” the narrator has shown himself incapable of interpreting the histories of the details that he finds. He cannot fill in the gap of history in the ways that he suggests are possible if one starts at the beginning of “our era,” or the advent of the European foothold upon the North American continent. The narrator’s comparison of the prehistory of North America to the great civilizations of Egypt and Babylon, and his lament at the “loss” of this history, echoes the commonly-held beliefs that I discussed in Chapter II: namely, the idea that America had a prehistory to rival those of other ancient civilizations. The concept that “there is history, only we don’t know it,” is striking. The idea that history can exist without documentation suggests historical narratives are inherent in places and objects, waiting to be found or “assembled” through a collection of pertinent “details.” In “St. Clair Flats,” the “details” that the narrative and his companion find and imagine are almost exclusively objects owned or treasured by women, and which suggest women’s personal losses and even their death through “drowning.” The “details”

that history is built on, at least in the imaginations of these two tourists, are women's sacrifices.

Later, Waiting Samuel fills in certain historical gaps for his guests, describing the history of the flats from the time they were first explored by French missionaries in 1679 (98). In addition to his history, he describes his visions of the future:

America is the great escaping-place; here will the change begin. As it is written, "Those who escape to my utmost borders." As the time draws near, the spirits who watch above are permitted to speak to those souls who listen. Of these listening, waiting souls am I; therefore have I withdrawn myself. The sun himself speaks to me, the greatest spirit of all; each morning I watch for his coming; each morning I ask, "Is it to-day?" Thus do I wait (99).

Waiting Samuel's vision of the west as the "great escaping-place"²⁴ carries a double meaning in light of the story's end, which laments the destruction of the flats by industrial change, a shipping channel, and an influx of people. There is no escape from these changes, although the mysterious disappearance of Samuel and Roxana from their home upon the narrator's return to the flats years later suggests that perhaps they did "escape"—although this remains ambiguous. Samuel's worship of the sun suggests some type of animistic, shamanistic religion that would have aligned him with other non-Christian frontier-dwellers: namely, Native Americans. The possibility that he has "vanished" to the west along with the Indians hangs in the air at the end of the story; as the "prophet of the waste," there is no room for him in an expanding nation.

²⁴ It might be worth exploring further Waiting Samuel's possible connections to American millennial sects and other radical Protestant groups who were trying to escape the modern world.

The narrator and his friend Raymond are never on "solid ground," and Woolson's choice of fragmented marshlands and islands as the settings of her stories reiterates this point and the illusions that her Easterners fashion in their interpretations of the frontier. As one of the tourists in "St. Clair Flats" remarks, "The whole race of philosophers from Plato down are all the time going round in a circle. As long as we are in the world, I for one propose to keep my feet on solid ground; especially as we have no wings!" (100) The irony of this statement is apparent; the speaker is essentially adrift in a marshy labyrinth. His only link to solid ground is a string that connects him to the humble woman whose household occupies the only firm ground in the area. As in the first two stories I have discussed here, Woolson presents her readers with an illusory and elusive landscape, seen through the eyes of genteel male tourists who judge the world around them according to their own desires and fancies. In spite of her lack of sophistication, Roxana can "read the flats like a book": what is closed off to the others is open to her.

The young tourists often choose to misread what they see in order to feed their active imaginations. Like Jarvis, who brought "Silver" out from the wilderness, they too are "treasure hunters"; however, their focus is romantically set on imagined objects that may have been dropped by a mysterious woman who has gone before them:

There is a fancy, too, that one may find something,--a ring dropped from fair fingers idly trailing in the water; a book which the fishes have read thoroughly; a scarf caught among the lilies; a spoon with unknown initials; a drenched ribbon, or an embroidered handkerchief. None of these things did we find, but we did discover an old brass breastpin, whose probable glass stone was gone. It was a paltry trinket at best, but I fished it out with

superstitious care,—a treasure-trove of the Flats. “Drowned,” I said, pathetically, “drowned in her white robes—” (95).

The narrator’s melancholic reflection on articles left behind by a (supposedly) drowned woman is part of his overall interest in reconstructing the lost narratives behind places and things. The Ophelia-like figure that he conjures here is one of many possibilities he imagines as the tragic source of the lost articles. Later the narrator shows it to Roxana, and lists the numerous possible identities for its former owner:

It might have been a diamond dropped by some French duchess, exiled, and fleeing for life across these far Western waters; or perhaps that German Princess of Brunswick-Wolfen-something-or-other, who, about one hundred years ago, was dead and buried in Russia, and traveling in America at the same time, a sort of a female wandering Jew, who has been done up in stories ever since (101).

It is at this point that Roxana reveals that the pin is actually hers; it is precious to her, a reminder of her lost home and the baby that she has buried there, remarking, “somehow it seemed to tie me to home and baby’s grave” (101).

Roxana is “common place” (104), just like her brass brooch; however, it means a lot to her and represents all she has sacrificed. The passage reveals much about Woolson’s concerns with “location” in her Great Lakes stories. Both of the women that the narrator conjures up are in motion—one is “fleeing for life,” the other is compared to the figure of the “wandering Jew.” Like Roxana, who is also continually uprooting to follow her wandering husband, these women lack location and are forced into movement. The pin becomes a focal point of location for the imaginary women and the real woman. When it is sunken in the marsh, it acts literally and figuratively as a placeholder upon which the men project their

imaginative desires and unfounded romantic narratives. When it is brought back into its originating narrative, the pin represents Roxana's still-important connections to her home place where her child is buried. It is entirely appropriate that the object should be a pin, and not a spoon, diamond, ring, or other object conjured in the men's imagination: it "pins" Roxana to the narrative of her past, as well as to her place of origin.

The true tale behind the brass pin is more tragic than the narrator's fancies. However, the guessing game played by the narrator and his companion, Raymond, brings Woolson's story into an interesting current: a discussion of literary criticism, which leads into talk of the history of the place in ancient times. Through this conversation, Woolson demonstrates that the problem of "misreading" landscapes and objects extends to the misreading of literature and the question of what makes "true poetry." Her characters' dialogue serves as a critique of the power that critics have over the careers of would-be artists. They describe how critics and the readers who listen to them are able to squelch the career of a budding artist even before it starts. In this portion of the text Woolson raises questions about the rightful role and inherent subjectivity of criticism, and its hold over both readers and authors. This conversation, which begins with the discussion of found objects in the marsh, ties together the concerns of the antiquarian with those of literary criticism. As the narrator muses on the brooch, Raymond recites a poem about Cleopatra and the narrator begins to offer an opinion on his poetic style, when Raymond interrupts, remarking, "not one of you dares admire anything unless the critics say so. If I had told you the verses were

by somebody instead of a nobody, you would have found wonderful beauties in them" (96).²⁵ The narrator responds with the idea that true talent will be recognized by its own merit, arguing that every "somebody" in the literary world was once a "nobody" who grew to achieve fame (96). The question remains whether critics can "make or crush a true poet," after which Raymond asks "What is poetry?" (96) The only response to this question is the croaking of a bittern: "Probably he was not of an aesthetic turn of mind, and dreaded lest I should give a ramified answer" (96). It is significant that this conversation takes place in a marshy wasteland, where there is little dry land stable enough to stand on; the problematic role of criticism is disorienting to the two travelers, and their questions remain unanswered. Woolson's Great Lakes stories connect the themes of natural destruction, women's placelessness, and the "marshy ground" of an unstable literary world.²⁶ Together, these themes speak to her growing concerns in the 1870s over her place in the artistic world. They evoke a sense of

²⁵ This conversation, especially considering that the men are discussing poetry, suggests one of Emily Dickinson's most famous poems:

I'm nobody! Who are you?
 Are you nobody, too?
 Then there's a pair of us - don't tell!
 They'd banish us, you know!

How dreary to be somebody!
 How public like a frog
 To tell one's name the livelong day
 To an admiring bog!

²⁶ From an ecofeminist standpoint, Woolson could be said to be reinterpreting wilderness fantasies in such a way that she aligns the plight of the woman artist with that of the natural environment: both face destruction at the hands of paternalistic ideals and romantic illusions fostered by patriarchal myths of expansion and women's place in the present and future of the nation.

powerlessness of the artist over critical reception of her work, and the loss of control of meaning and interpretation of one's "beloved object" once it falls into the hands of the male literary establishment.

IV. Antiquaries in the Ancient City

Like her Great Lakes stories, Woolson's Southern tales link the problems of tourism with antiquarianism. However, she seems particularly interested in how white, unmarried, Northern women like herself fit into the tourist role in these sketches. In "Miss Elizabetha," for example, a Northern spinster with a love for music has moved south to care for a Southern orphan; there she fights ruin as she constructs a kind of temple around herself (107). In "Felipa," the main character and narrator is a single woman artist, who, like Woolson herself, has moved temporarily to Florida to find a healthy place to live and work.

"The Ancient City," which was published in *Harper's* in 1874 and which will be my primary focus among Woolson's Southern stories, provides an example of the paradigm shift I am arguing occurred in the latter half of the nineteenth century: the transformation of the spinster/antiquarian figure into the New Spinster. "The Ancient City" is a romance in which the drama overtly seems centered on the question of which suitor the charming and attractive young Iris Carew will marry; however, Woolson treats the typical marriage plot with a great deal of irony. Her greatest act of irony is perhaps to situate this marriage plot in the setting of St. Augustine, Florida—a city covered by "the rare charming haze

of antiquity" (106). Every romantic interlude between Miss Carew and her various suitors takes place in between antiquarian descriptions in the dusty remains of an old fort, specifically in the "demi-lune"—an old stairway in Fort San Marco that becomes a running joke for Woolson's more worldly spinster characters, Sara St. John and Niece Martha. Joining in the discussion of the proper name for the "odd little stairway," which the Captain describes as "a curiosity," Martha responds:

"I have heard it described as a demi-lune," I remarked, bringing forward my one item, the item I had been preserving for days. (I try to have ready a few little pellets of information; I find it is expected, now that I am forty years old.) The Professor took off his tall silk hat and wiped his forehead despairingly. "Demi-lune!" he repeated—"demi-lune! The man who said that must be a—" "Demi-lunatic," suggested John (101).

Woolson aims this humor at Iris and her suitors, who become the true "demi-lunatics" as they pursue love in the ruin. Her primary concern is not the action surrounding the marriage prospects of the story's ostensible heroine, Iris, but the movements of her spinster characters, particularly Sara, who is a professional writer. This passage also reveals the gentle, self-mocking humor of the narrator Martha, another spinster.

In "The Ancient City," Woolson presents her readers with three different versions of "the spinster." One of these, Martha, is the narrator, and treats the others with a great deal of sympathy. She serves primarily as an observer and as an appreciative audience for the work of the struggling young writer, Sara St. John. Martha admits on more than one occasion that she is a romantic who does not always see the reality of things clearly. For example, in one passage in Part II of the story, Aunt Diana scoffs at Martha's assertion that Sara will one day

succeed in her literary ambitions. Aunt Diana argues that the renowned poet Eugenio will not be interested in Sara:

“He belongs to another literary world entirely.”

“I know that; but may not Sara attain to that other world in time? I hope much from her.”

“Then you will be disappointed, Niece Martha. I am not literary myself, but I have always noticed that those writers whose friends are always ‘hoping much’ never mount to much; it is the writer who takes his friends and the world by surprise who has the genius.’ There was a substratum of hard commonsense in Aunt Diana, where my romantic boat often got aground. It was aground now (176).

Unlike Aunt Diana, who is pragmatic and realistic, Martha is naïve about the different “literary worlds” that Sara must negotiate. Martha’s romantic tendencies make her an ideal audience for Sara’s poetry, however; in one passage that I will discuss further on, she lapses into a trance-like state upon hearing one of her friend’s poems. The language Woolson uses to describe Martha’s mental state after hearing Sara’s poem is gothic, romantic, and suggestive of Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Raven” (1845). It is only interrupted when Aunt Diana—a far cry from the “Lost Lenore”—rushes into the room, “pale and disheveled in the moonlight,” to interrupt Martha’s romantic reverie (Brehm and Dean 119).

The second spinster, Miss Sharp, is a muddled governess who represents the worst of antiquarianism’s dryness and its potential for confusion and inaccuracy. She is paired off with the story’s antiquary, Professor Macquoid, who embodies every stereotype of the eighteenth-century antiquarian. He is a dusty bachelor who never seems to notice the affections of Miss Sharp; she, in turn, hangs on his every word and stays by his side even though he appears to be ignoring her, self-important and absorbed in his own world. Constantly spouting

information about the ruins, artifacts, and traces that the party finds in their tour of St. Augustine, the Professor quibbles over every detail and is, as the other characters note, in the process of writing his "Great Work" (91). Miss Sharp, on the other hand, is often corrected by her own student and takes on a querulous tone whenever she speaks of antiquarian matters: "She always declared that her voice took a scratching tone when she asked a manuscript question" (96).

Early on in the story, Woolson juxtaposes two forms of writing: the Professor's Great Work of antiquarianism is contrasted with poor Miss Sharp's muddled, scribbled notes, taken on behalf of her student, the "gay schoolgirl" Iris Carew (91). The differences between the two forms of writing surface throughout the story. Between her notes and her guidebook, Miss Sharp manages to misunderstand every monument, ruin, and artifact that she comes across. Her laboriously written yet hopelessly addled notes, such as "the Okeechobee stories current on the St. Johns, about buried cities, ruins of temples on islands, rusty convent bells, and the like," are "demolished by the stern researches of the Professor" (93). Woolson's romantic narrator, Niece Martha, remarks of the antiquary, "The Professor was not romantic" (93). In spite of this proclamation and the Professor's indifference to her, Miss Sharp becomes infatuated with him and the two become like the two sides of the spinster/antiquarian coin, providing much of the comic relief in the story. In a particularly funny scene at the opening of Part II, John Hoffman, Sara, Aunt Diana, and Martha see the romantic pair out by the Rose Garden at night:

We looked, and beheld two figures bending down and apparently scratching in the earth with sticks.

"What in the world are they doing?" said Aunt Diana. "They can not be sowing seed in the middle of the night, can they?"

"They look like two ghouls," said Sara, "and one of them has—yes, I am sure one of them has a bone."

"It is Miss Sharp and the Professor," said John (166).

Woolson sets up dry-as-dust antiquarianism as the antithesis of romance and marriage, which would seem to make it an appropriate site for critiques of marriage and romantic love. And while she does use antiquarianism as a site from which to stage these critiques, she also uses the relationship between Miss Sharp and the Professor to demonstrate how antiquarian obsession can be translated to romantic obsession. Miss Sharp, who is clutching her prized bone, is blind to the fact that the object of her desire is a kind of relic himself. While she waits for the professor in the demi-lune, "loaded with specimens, shells, and the vicious-looking roots of Fish Island," the Professor has apparently forgotten her very existence: "Knee-deep in coquina, radiating information at every pore...a happy man!" (115-16).

The third spinster character that Woolson brings into "The Ancient City" is Sara St. John, a single woman in her late twenties who experiences occasional bouts of sadness and even despair. Sara, whom the narrator has met in a "city boarding house," agrees to the trip to St. Augustine only after Martha persuades her (92). She is a "proud," "independent," "defiant," and "indifferent" 28-year-old, and the matron Aunt Diana "regarded her with disfavor as 'a young person who wrote for the magazines'" (92). An aloof character that makes a living writing travel and local color pieces for magazines, Sara provides much of the humorous commentary on Miss Sharp and the Professor; she even writes a poem about the

pair: "One summer day—with pensive thought—she wandered on—the seagirt shore," chanted Sara. "The madam-aunt had the Professor, and kept him!" (106).

Sara's dry humor, which is often aimed at Miss Sharp, serves to distance her from her fellow spinster. She uses writing not only as a creative outlet, but also as another vehicle to provide space between herself and the domestic drama unfolding around her. Sara's humor and aloof attitude mask a tragic past, however; she was abandoned by her fiancé, John Hoffman, after they had differences over their relationship: "I was educated, therefore I was his peer. But he was stern, and I was proud; he was unyielding, and I rebellious; he wished to rule, and I would obey no one, although I would have given him freely the absolute devotion of every breath had he not demanded it" (183). Woolson suggests that Sara's tendency to move against the grain of society rather than fulfilling its expectations is part of the reason the relationship ended. While in conversation with the famed poet Eugenio, who has attained the status in the literary world that she desires, she describes herself as "heterodox":

"What is it that attracts you toward Africa, Miss St. John?" asked Eugenio. "Antony," replied Sara, promptly. "Don't you remember those wonderful lines written by an Ohio soldier, 'I am dying, Egypt, dying; / Ebbs the crimson life-tide fast?'"

"Dear me, Miss St. John, I hope you are not taking up *Antony and Cleopatra* to the detriment of the time-honored *Romeo and Juliet*! Romeo is the orthodox lover, pray remember."

"But I am heterodox," replied Sara, smiling (177).

Woolson sets Sara up as one who is always moving "against the current." Even her last name, St. John, suggests this in an almost literal fashion. In a note to the story, editors Brehm and Dean point out that her name connects her to the St.

John River in Florida, which is one of the few rivers on the continent that flows from south to north (120). In Woolson's words, its "slow coffee-colored tropical tide, almost alone among rivers, flows due north for nearly its entire course of four hundred miles, a peculiarity expressed in its original name given by the Indians, Il-la-ka—"It hath its own way, is alone, and contrary to every other" (91). In spite of her love of independence, it becomes clear as the story progresses that Sara is still bitter about her broken engagement. The information about her failed relationship comes out toward the end of the story in Part II, and while Woolson does not give a definite reason for the couple's breakup, she does suggest that the power relations between man and woman were at issue. Although Sara makes fun of Iris's marriage plot and Miss Sharp's failures with the Professor, it becomes clear that she regrets losing Hoffman and is not happy with the single life.

In part, Woolson communicates this regret through Sara's hatred of history. As Miss Sharp's foil, she avoids or pokes fun at all of the antiquarian discussion. In one scene the characters discuss the ruins of a plantation. Iris persists in asking the question, "But does anyone know the story of the place?" (109). Sara responds, "Why insist on digging it up?...Let it rest in the purple haze of the past. The place has not been occupied for a hundred years. We see this beautiful orange walk; yonder is a solitary tomb. Can we not fill out these shadowy borders without the aid of prosaic detail?" (109) When Professor Macquoid goes on to explain these details, Sara only wants to get away. Later, when Martha tells Sara she will be glad to hear about her friend's writing as long

as it is not "historical," Sara responds, "Historical! As though I could amuse myself historically!" (117)

Sara's reference to her writing as a form of "self-amusement" hints at the pastime of antiquarianism as masturbation. However, unlike the traditional antiquarian she rejects "historical" amusements and instead reads aloud a haunting poem that she has written about the day's events, which sends Martha into a state of repose filled with Poe-like images: "I dreamed that there was a hand tapping at my chamber door, and, half-roused, I said to myself that it was only dreams, and nothing more. But it kept on, and finally, wide awake, I recognized the touch of mortal fingers, and withdrew the bolt. Aunt Diana rushed in, pale and disheveled in the moonlight" (119). Although Sara's "haunting" verse is powerful enough to give Martha these literary visions, she is later pronounced a sub-par poet by Eugenio, a visiting poet and literary celebrity who tells Hoffman that she has "not an iota" of genius (179). It is unclear whether Woolson herself considers Sara a "good poet," or even a "genius." What seems to be of greater importance to the author is the fact that any talent that Sara might have is not being given a chance for nourishment or growth. Eugenio's rejection of her poetry recalls the discussion between the young tourists in "St. Clair Flats" concerning the power of critics to arbitrarily squelch writers without giving them a chance to develop their skills. However, Martha, who shares a similar independent state, can comprehend what she sees as Sara's greatness; this is implied in the "Raven" language that Woolson uses to describe the effect that Sara's poem has on Martha. In this scene, Woolson conjures a sense of

sympathy and understanding between her unmarried women that does not exist between her male and female characters, or even between single women and women who are on the marriage market.

Eugenio's pronouncement links Sara to Aaronna Moncrief in "Miss Grief." Like Aaronna, Sara's talents are exposed to a male literary establishment that does not appreciate or understand them. While Martha's reaction to her verse suggests that she finds it powerful, the opinions that seem to matter in the story belong to the male characters. In a footnote to "The Ancient City, Part I," Brehm and Dean remark upon how Woolson ends the story with John and Sara's "reconciliation," "satisfying the public expectation for a fulfilled romance, but at the expense of a woman's art, a theme she often embeds in her fiction" (124). The story does end abruptly, although Brehm and Dean extrapolate a reconciliation between the couple, and it is likely that Woolson intended her readers to assume that John and Sara reunite. However, the image of the ruin at the end is ambiguous. Throughout the story, Sara looks upon the watchtower of the fort as a means to commit suicide, an intention made implicit in her behavior rather than in direct language. The last sentence of the story features this tower, although with a rather more hopeful message: "And Fate, in the person of the old watchtower, let shine a star out through her ruined windows as a token that all was well" (185). When confronted with the possible prospect of marriage, for Sara the meaning of the ruin changes from a symbol of death to one of life. But why is this the case? Why would Woolson choose a ruin to mark the spinster/artist's self-destructive tendencies, changing its meaning only after

marriage enters the picture?

While Woolson suggests that Sara's spinster status will change at the end of the story, "The Ancient City" captures a moment of her career—and reflects a larger moment in the late nineteenth century—where the image of the spinster/antiquarian was undergoing critique and change. I locate this shift alongside Naomi Sofer's theory of the larger shift in writers' identities, which were changing from the idea of the "bread and butter" writer to that of the artist working on a "great book" (1). I mentioned in "The Antiquarian" that women from the antebellum period to the late nineteenth century found antiquities useful because the traditional associations between women and antiquities could be manipulated to become symbols of women's creative process. However, Woolson's treatment of antiquities and antiquarianism suggests that this model was a contested one, and perhaps was being rethought by Woolson in the 1870s. In "The Ancient City," we see a "Great Work" of antiquarianism that our single woman writer, Sara, despises and tries to flee. Surrounded by antiquities, she is trapped in a world of history constructed around the authoritative voice of the Professor, and excluded from a world of art whose boundaries are delineated by established male critics and poets like Eugenio. Her only outlet for artistic expression is to read aloud her poetry to a sympathetic and appreciative friend, Martha, who is also a fellow single woman and the story's narrator.

When Woolson revisits issues of spinsterhood and antiquarianism during her stay in Rome, she seems to be arguing for a separation of the spinster and the antiquarian rather than seeing them as a useful pairing that could be used to

subvert the popular stereotype of the single woman. In part, this might also be because there is still slippage in her work between images of antiquities and women artists, which is apparent in stories like "Miss Grief" and "At the Chateau of Corinne." While Brehm and Dean argue that Woolson creates the figure of the Professor to make the historical and geographical facts entertaining rather than boring (xvii), I would argue that she has a more specific purpose for him as an antiquarian figure that her woman artist can distance herself from. He labels and structures a world of antiquities that the single woman artist cannot escape, unless in the privacy of her own bedroom.

However, Woolson's Professor *is* comic relief, and it is in the gap created by her humor that the critique of the antiquarian model takes place. She situates antiquarianism not in the imaginative sphere but firmly outside of it. In this story, the antiquarian interprets facts but the artist reinterprets events into poetry. While most of the characters balk at the Professor's extremely dry take on the world, their interpretations of events, places, and things are also often inaccurate, clumsy, or banal. Meanwhile, Sara is literally able to sing Martha into a trance-like state with her poem. She does not wish to dig up stories, but to reinterpret and build upon the information she already has. In this process of creation, Woolson uses antiquarianism to grapple with other questions: at what point does art come into being, and what role do found objects, fragments, and ruins play in discussions about women's art? If, as I have argued in this dissertation, ancient artifacts had become symbols for human genius in the nineteenth century, Woolson saw a need to emancipate artifacts—and art—from location: especially

location as it was narrowly defined by the figure of the Professor or romantic tourists. Their definitions of place restrict the artistic potential of women's narratives. Woolson's short stories reveal that she recognized that fulfilling the potential of one's artistic genius required a certain amount of disconnection from place and the narratives that limit a place and one's movements within it.

The archaeological landscape is restrictive in this sense, because it dictates narrative possibilities within a limited scope. Thus the ruined tower can only represent two possible narrative outcomes for Sara: her death through suicide or the happy fate of married life. The ruin forces Sara into a particular physical position and choice between life and death. It marks a location in which the choices Sara has available are not choices at all, leaving her no alternative path to pursue her writing career. The ruin becomes a symbol of how the landscapes of the past can be a trap rather than a treasure. Sara is stuck in a location that, like much of the ground of St. Augustine, is stained with the blood of past sacrifices: the martyred Huguenots, Indians, or Catholics that are frequently mentioned throughout the story. Unable to face life obsessively prodding such a landscape with an old bone, as does Miss Sharp, Sara appears to choose marriage as a seeming escape from death at the story's end. However, this choice will likely end her career as a travel writer, along with the relative freedom of movement that this career requires.

In her own life, Woolson sought out artistic retreats, places where she could find space to write; she enjoyed the peaceful solitude of Florida but ultimately sought out the artistic expatriate community of Rome. Traveling was in

one sense an act of rebellion for Woolson: in her travels she resisted prescriptive tours, the limitations of guidebooks, and the banality of middle-class tourism abroad. Her journeys abroad offered her the opportunity not only to join the expatriate artistic community—the possibility of connecting with enclaves of female artists who were, in Michele Martinez's words, "escap[ing] constraints on women's education and sexuality" (215)—but also the opportunity to reexamine the connections between location, antiquity, and art.

As I have discussed in this chapter, if early-century writings on antiquarianism had been battles over the geographical, historical, and public territory that could be textually claimed by a woman writer, the late-century writings of Constance Fenimore Woolson engaged different territory: issues of aesthetics, independent thought, and women's contributions to American art. These debates became rooted in particular landscapes through antiquarian and archaeological imagery. In Woolson's work, images of spinsters, artists, and antiquities can be read as sub-textual statements on the place of the woman artist in a male-dominated literary world. Her preoccupation with restrictive locations, places where women can become "stuck"—Roxana's labyrinth, Silver's Rapunzel-like castle, or Sara's ruined tower—becomes linked with her concerns with the location of women writers and artists in a restrictive market. She revives the figure of the eighteenth-century bumbling antiquary in Professor MacQuoid; he becomes so fixated upon particular details in the landscape that he is unable to relate to those around him, except by lecturing them with antiquarian knowledge. The Professor's foil is a young, single, professional writer who

refuses to let historical fact shape her responses to place or the subject matter of her writing. Although we may surmise that Sara St. John becomes Sara Hoffman after the story's close, it is significant that Woolson presents her as a woman who prefers to live in the present and see the world in an original way, with "fresh eyes." For Woolson, the ability to read material evidence in the landscape could be empowering for women; however, in "The Ancient City" she seems to suggest that antiquarian knowledge—and the figure of the antiquarian in particular—could limit aspiring women artists. Like the antiquary who stumbles upon the Cairo ladies in "Cairo in 1890," he is a symbol of the foolishness of the patriarchal system that such artists battled against to succeed. Woolson does not suggest an alternative to the antiquarian model of authorship; instead, she questions its value to development of artistic genius and aligns it with the critical discourse that, in the words of the narrator of "St. Clair Flats," could squash aspiring authors before they could become "somebodies."

CONCLUSION

Throughout this dissertation, I have tried to examine women writers' uses of discourses of archaeology and antiquarianism between 1820 and 1890. Initially, I was interested in exploring depictions of material culture, such as ruins and antiquities, in women's literary landscapes. I was seeking a common thread in these writings—perhaps evidence of a significant pattern in the ways that women represented antiquarian and archaeological material in their writing. However, in the course of the project I found that the meaningful connection between the writers I had chosen was not their method of representation of antiquities, but their representation of themselves as antiquarian authors. I found that the women I studied took on the persona of the antiquarian as they participated in ongoing conversations in three separate but related areas: debates over women's authorship, the single life for women, and the nature of women's genius. This project ultimately pieces together the ways that constructions of self, gender, place, and authorship emerge through the authorial persona of the antiquarian.

While no comprehensive study of archaeology and antiquarianism in American literature has been conducted, I speculate that women writers' point of departure from male writers on these topics centers on the figure of the antiquarian/spinster. The negative yet playful connection between the spinster and the antiquarian arose in the late eighteenth century; by the early nineteenth

century, American women writers were appropriating the identity of the “antiquarian” as a form of authorship. While men, too, had access to the figure of the antiquarian, women had access to the spinster version of this figure in a way that men did not. In *Memory’s Daughters*, Susan Stabile argues that women in the Republican period had a tradition of historical preservation that was separate from the “male” traditions of preservation “through communal fantasy, myth, and ritual” (4). Women in the late eighteenth century, she claims, “focused on the local, the particular, the domestic. They aimed at accurately re-creating the historical record rather than invoking the past to fashion the future” (4). I would claim that throughout the nineteenth century, women continued to seek alternative traditions of memory keeping and preservation. From the 1820s into the middle part of the century, women used the antiquarian identity as an avenue into public debates on topics of importance to the nation, such as Indian Removal and the preservation of American antiquities. The existing connection between antiquarianism and unmarried women made it easier for them to take on this “masculine” identity. However, the writers I have examined in this project also tried to downplay the negative aspects of this stereotype that connected it to “monstrous” sexuality. For example, in the “spinster stories” I focus on in Chapter I, the authors sought to attribute the most positive aspects of spinsterhood and antiquarianism to single women. I observed that in the works of late-century writers like Constance Fenimore Woolson and Rebecca Harding Davis, this problem of gender and its links to women’s creativity became more explicit.

One challenge I faced throughout the project was a slippage of terms central to the topic such as “antiquarianism,” “history,” and “archaeology.” Related terms, such as “anthropology,” “natural history,” and “geology,” too, experienced a degree of slippage when they were used to explore or explain human artifacts and origins. In her study of the professionalization of history and archaeology, Philippa Levine remarks that in the beginning of the 19th century, while they had never been synonymous, these terms were often used indiscriminately (70). These fields did not emerge as well-defined separate disciplines until late in the century (70). Thus in the 1850s we have a writer like Melville describing “an antiquarian of a geologist” in the “Encantadas.”

In the course of this study I have found that this “slippage” in antiquarianism—particularly in terms of the gender slippage between the Old Maid and the antiquarian—became a quality that women were conscious of, and that they sought to use to their advantage. The figure of the antiquarian was traditionally depicted as an effeminate male and later came to be characterized as an “old maid.” I would conclude that women found this persona especially useful in the debates I mentioned above—those concerning the nature and place of women’s authorship and genius and the single life for women—because these particular conversations revolved around some type of “monstrous” construction of the female gender: for example, the long-standing connection between women’s genius, sexual deviance, and gender confusion. One possible reason they found antiquarianism useful is because the antiquarian was a figure of male creativity that was also sexually disordered. Antiquarianism gave these writers a

tradition in which male creativity was connected with sexual deviance. I don't argue that these writers were claiming this deviance for any subversive purposes. Rather, by the 1870s and 1880s, they were trying to differentiate women's creativity from disordered sexuality by interrogating the figure of the antiquarian.

A number of issues and questions arose throughout the course of the project that could be addressed in future work. Two major issues that came up by the end of the study were those of race and of faith. At this point, I have focused solely on how white middle- and upper-class women writers treat the topics of archaeology and antiquarianism. When I started the project, my especial concern was the ways that archaeology and antiquarianism affected landscape description. I selected writers who are particularly concerned with landscape in their writings. I also tried to pick writers who explicitly treat archaeological or antiquarian themes in their writing, and tried to select those who span the period from 1820 to 1890. Thus, I have included Hale, whose poem "The Genius of Oblivion" (1823) focuses on the mound builders; Sedgwick's historical romance *Hope Leslie* (1827), which explicitly addresses antiquarian readers in the preface; Cooper's nature journal and landscape sketch, which include antiquarian subjects and make archaeological references; Thaxter, whose island landscapes contain relics, artifacts, and monuments; and Woolson, who repeatedly comes back to the figure of the antiquary and the spinster, archaeological images, and the antiquarian mode of authorship throughout her writing career. The question remains, "Can an African American women be an

antiquarian?" I think this question also applies to Native American writers, especially considering the fact that they were the subject of much antiquarian and archaeological writing during the century. Through further reading of African-American writers, particularly those who were writing later in the century, such as Pauline Hopkins, and Native American writers, I believe this question can be addressed in future research.

The second larger issue, that of faith, also seems to have the most promise in a study of later-century writings. Through much of the century, archaeological discoveries were frequently applied to matters of faith, as when they were used as evidence for events in Biblical history. The writers I have looked at here, especially Susan Fenimore Cooper, Celia Thaxter, and Constance Fenimore Woolson, take up matters of faith in writings that contain archaeological imagery and antiquarian themes. The question remains of the extent to which debates over Biblical truth were a concern for these writers, and, if they were a concern, how they might have related to some of the larger issues I have explored here—particularly of women's independence and their sense of themselves as authors and artistic creators. A few areas for further research in this area include spiritualism and other forms of liberal Protestantism, both of which were of interest to Thaxter and Woolson. Mormonism—especially the gender issues that arise from the Mormon patriarchal hierarchy—might provide another avenue of inquiry, particularly as it relates to writings on the mound builders.

I have not documented a tidy “arc” or progression of the use of the antiquarian model by women writers. However, I have shown that they did engage with this model for various reasons and in various ways. This engagement was not always comfortable for these writers; in fact, in many ways their texts register ambivalence toward antiquarianism as a mode of authorship. I find it interesting that in the 1870s and 1880s, which were an important transitional period between the idea of True Womanhood and the New Woman, antiquarianism apparently came under greater scrutiny by women like Davis and Woolson. Instead of justifying it as a mode of authorship, they interrogated it. By the 1880s and 1890s, women were also becoming more active participants in the process of building museum collections, providing financial support for archaeological digs, and participating in excavations at ancient sites. As Don Fowler and David Wilcox have observed, “The decades from 1880 to 1920 have been called ‘anthropology’s museum age’” (36). During this time, women like Sara Yorke Stevenson supported research and the creation of museum collections (36-37). In the 1870s, English-born Alice Dixon Le Plongeon traveled with her husband Augustus to South America to investigate Mayan ruins (Desmond and Messenger xix). Women’s participation in archaeology, anthropology, and museum culture in the latter part of the century, along with the critique of antiquarianism by writers like Woolson, raises questions about how writers’ engagement with antiquarian discourse might have been changing during these decades. Were other writers also critiquing antiquarianism as a useful mode of authorship during this time? I intend on investigating a wider range of

material from these decades, hoping to answer this question and gain more information about the legacy of antiquarianism in the latter part of the century. Perhaps what this dissertation ultimately reveals is the way that women engaged with and attempted to change a popular stereotype that many held in contempt. They clearly saw possibilities in a persona that was noted for its imaginative and creative abilities as well as for its sense of authority over a wide range of topics.

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