# Ecologies of Docility and Control: Environmental Fantasy and Extractive Economy at a Maryland Girls Boarding School, 1834–1868

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Jane Smith thought she saw conquest in the sky. In 1850, the seventeen-year-old girl recalled an experience she had while standing on a cliff near her home in Virginia. First observing the "rippling" creeks and "azure" mountains of the natural landscape, Smith then looked above her at "the western sky." The clouds suddenly began to merge and transform into the shape of an eagle. "As I gazed upon it," mused Smith, "I thought of my country." Bathed in the red light of sunset, the bird reminded her of "blood spilled upon the plains of Mexico." With this violent imagery, Smith conjured memories of the Mexican-American War, which had ended two years earlier, expanding the United States' territory and sparking new enthusiasm among Americans for westward expansion. "When we see the crimson glow in the West," she wrote, "we know that night is approaching; so, wherever a nation exults in tyranny and bloodshed, it is a sure sign of downfall" (*Patapsco Young Ladies Magazine* Vol. 1 no. 4, 5–7). This nation was almost certainly Mexico, which many Americans saw as an enemy country, standing in the way of the United States' ability to possess the continent and realize a so-called Manifest Destiny (Adelman/Aron; Merry). In Smith's piece, "The Star of Empire," the landscape blessed and made natural the United States' occupation of the West, fantasizing an animate environment that condoned and encouraged the nation's imperialist expansion and its exploitation of the land's natural resources. Smith's text debuted not in a newspaper or magazine, but in the pages of a literary journal published by the elite all-girls boarding school she attended.

Smith's writing exemplified the prose produced by students at her school, the Patapsco Female Institute. The school was founded in 1834 by industrialists who had built fortunes extracting from the environment. Capitalizing on the

hydrology of the Patapsco River, their businesses processed locally mined iron-ore in their furnaces and plantation-grown wheat and cotton in their mills, creating and exporting natural resources as lucrative commodities. As a site of production, the Institute was meant to create both material and cultural profits. It charged high tuition fees for an education that groomed young women to be part of the industrial economy as wives and teachers. While enrolled at the school, female students developed sentimental attachments to the natural world. In their writing, they imagined the landscape as nurturing, supportive, and full of emotional and physical beauty. Focusing particularly on the intellectual discourse circulated between teachers and students, this essay argues that the school cultivated an imagined environment, which was passive, gentle, and deeply empathetic to human emotions. Institutional and census records reveal that the women at the Institute benefitted from extractivism through their families' plantations and factories, and through their identities as enslavers, employers of domestic servants, and settler-colonial migrants. In their academic and personal writings, however, students and teachers repeatedly envisioned the environment through sentimental fantasy, as a space dedicated to serving their needs and desires. These writings emphasize the role of ecological fantasy in obscuring the harms of extractivism.

The domestic sphere remains a thorny construct for scholars of 19$^{th}$ century America. Once thought to imply a space to which all women belonged in contrast to masculine public life, the term now more commonly evokes the culture of elite white women, who were able and expected to opt out of the formal economy (Gómez-Reus/Usandizaga; Park/Wald). As Amy Kaplan has argued in her formative 1998 essay, "Manifest Domesticity," affluent white women deployed fantasies of domestic life to perpetuate imperialist and white supremacist projects, rendering domestic space as the center of civility and citizenship. Even as rich white women publicly embraced the cult of domesticity, however, they often did so while working within semi-political spaces, like schools, churches, and clubs that blurred the lines between public and private. In her study of early American women's schools, Mary Kelley (2012) further argued that women were overtly engaged in public and political life and that to fashion the school as a private space is to misread the deliberately and distinctively political activity that women engaged in within them.

Elite girls' schools like the Patapsco Female Institute embodied what Lauren Berlant have termed an "intimate public sphere," an affective social space in which shared discourse around emotion and feeling constituted a shared identity. Berlant argued that, beginning around 1830 with the publication of *Godey's*

*Lady's Book* and other publications marketed to women, one can see "the first subcultural, mass-mediated, market population of relatively disenfranchised people in the United States" (xii). Berlant's readings of *Godey's Lady's Book* and similar national periodicals, as well as novels like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe, demonstrate how intimate public spheres cultivated supposedly universal concepts of "womanhood" (20–69). In reality, these publics largely represented the emotional and cultural lives of white, affluent women. I apply Berlant's intimate public to the social space of the boarding school, considering the literature created for and assigned to students, as well as the writings produced by students, in affective conversation. By reading, learning, and writing about their emotional and sensory experiences, female teachers and students modelled for one another feelings that rearticulated themselves in the women's lived experiences. I argue that the feelings and labor produced within the Institute manifested in the production of reproducible cultural ideas about women's relationship to the environment, ideas which lived beyond the school's formal existence as a cultural institution and which were porous to and consequential for people who lived outside of this intimate public space.

Merging Kaplan's contention that feminine domestic fantasy fueled extractive and imperialist projects with Berlant's theory of feminine social production, I demonstrate that within this boarding school, women produced an intimate public sphere of environmental thought and affect. Students and teachers generated, circulated, and internalized fantasies of pristine landscapes free from the consequences of industrialist and extractivist activities. Through an examination of the writings of teachers and students, this essay will demonstrate how women at the Institute used ecological fantasy to soothe their own extractive anxiety. In poetry and prose, the same environments which their families actively exploited could be recast as spaces of spiritual and emotional refuge. Through this sentimental attachment, these women thus upheld, reinforced, and reproduced the extractive culture and industrial production from which they profited.

## Extractive Capitalism, Whiteness, and the Patapsco Female Institute

Most of the families of students enrolled at the Patapsco Female Institute gained capital through the extraction of environmental resources, whether in

the monocrop farming of southern plantations, in the mining of stone and heavy metal, or in the processing of natural resources in industrial factories. The exploitation of human labor also fueled these profits, whether through the overt use of enslaved labor in plantation agriculture or by using coercive and undercompensated wage labor systems. The students at the Institute held stake in the upholding of environmental capitalism, as it funded their ways of life and senses of self. The Institute thus kept intact the capitalistic order by gatekeeping race and class boundaries, developing a community where affluence and whiteness were naturalized, and those who might deviate from this norm sought assimilation into its ranks.

Beginning in the mid-1700s, Maryland's Patapsco River Valley became a popular site for privately funded extractive projects. The valley's proximity to the river made it a convenient point of access to the Baltimore harbor and Chesapeake Bay. At the time, the river was deep and wide enough to accommodate sea-faring vessels. The area's forests and ore deposits made it an attractive site for iron furnaces, while its fertile soils provided land for both tobacco and wheat farming. The river itself also provided power for grist mills. By the 1830s, some families in the area had amassed several generations of extractive wealth. Using enslaved and convict labor as well as the exploitation of wage laborers, the area's industrial economy grew rapidly (Varle; Rockman; *Ellicott Family Deeds and Land Records*; *Caleb Dorsey & Co. Elk Ridge Furnace Journal*).

While this economic landscape provided managerial roles for men within these elite families, feminine roles within this ecosystem were less certain. The proliferation of elite all-girls' schools throughout the country in the Early Republic era, scholars have argued, came largely from a desire to formalize the training for women's future reproductive roles as wives and mothers who would encourage proper Republican values in their husbands and sons (Kelley 2012; Kerber 1988; Norton). The stockholders of the Patapsco Female Institute conceived the school in this image in 1834. A small trust of the area's most wealthy industrialists and planters founded the school as both a monetary and cultural investment. Through expensive tuition, the school would produce financial profit. Through education, it would produce female alumni capable of reinforcing the industrial market economy by way of reproductive and family labor.

Despite the lofty ideals of the school's founders, by 1840, the Institute was hemorrhaging capital. The trustees strategized that to keep the Institute (and their investments) afloat, they needed to enroll more students. To do this, they courted Almira Hart Lincoln Phelps to serve as the school's headmistress. At

forty-seven, Phelps was a well-known figure in elite women's education, a textbook writer, headmistress, and the sister of Emma Willard, who had established one of the country's most influential boarding schools, the Troy Female Seminary. In 1841, Phelps signed a contract to lead the Institute. Her academic pedigree and public status proved to be brilliant marketing for the school, significantly boosting its enrollment (Baym; Bolzau; Mitchell; Rudolph).

Phelps was calculating, ambitious, and contradictory. A born-and-raised Northerner, she enslaved at least two people during her tenure at the Institute (U.S. Census 1850) but also maintained close relationships with abolitionists. She was devoted both to Christianity and to Linnaean natural sciences. She valued hierarchy in all things and believed fervently in the biological weakness of women, but also advocated for them to gain financial independence in becoming teachers and part of the work force. Over the course of Phelps' tenure, the school became significantly more Southern in terms of demographics. When she arrived, the population was equally split between Southern students and Northern students but by 1855, the school was made up of ninety percent Southerners and only ten percent Northerners (Mitchell). Phelps' identity as an enslaver doubtlessly influenced her sense of social and racial hierarchy and almost certainly led to the school's high rate of Southern students. A great many of the students' families enslaved people as well. The social order of the school was inextricably linked to the social order of slavery.

The student body was almost entirely white, apart from four Cherokee students. These young women, Mary Jane Ross, Amanda Ross, Cora Ross, and Henrietta Coodey all had blood connections to Cherokee Chief John Ross, and Coodey was the daughter of William Shorey, a writer and Cherokee leader (Preston 327–56). Theda Perdue has suggested that by sending their daughters to white boarding schools, Cherokee men sought both to assimilate them into white society and to subdue their power in traditionally matrilineal Cherokee culture. "Trained and treated like elite women in the non-Native South," writes Perdue, "these women had connections to the new locus of power in the Cherokee Nation, but they were the Cherokee women least likely to attempt an exercise of that power themselves" (146). As historian Tiya Miles has highlighted, many Cherokees themselves owned slaves, which could be interpreted as a further attempt to claim and perform whiteness. William Shorey, father of Henrietta, owned at least two slaves, and Chief John Ross owned at least twenty (Perdue 141; Ross 5). In this way, one might read the Cherokee families as seeking acceptance into the norms of whiteness, which included slave ownership.

The school also enforced rigid class gatekeeping through both its high tuition costs and attempts at subsidized scholarship. At $290 a year, the school was significantly more expensive than any other female academy in operation, which usually cost around $200 annually ("Female High Schools," *The Christian Advocate and Journal* 1847, 15). Beginning in 1835, the Maryland state government mandated that the Institute sponsor one student per year as a Free Scholar, allowing the student to attend the school free of charge. These students were to be "selected from the poor children" of the county, and the designation was appointed by the state Orphan's Court (*Patapsco Female Institute Records*). The Free Scholars, however, were the daughters of the area's emerging middle class, coming from the families of tailors, shoemakers, boardinghouse owners, and other middle-class service and artisan professions of the period (U.S. Census Records 1850–1870). That these students were designated as poor further points to the astronomical wealth likely held by students paying full tuition at the school.

The Patapsco Female Institute's trustees forged a feminine space from extractive capital and designed it to adhere to the race and class structures, which upheld that capital's steady growth. With Phelps at the helm, the school developed a culture, which also enforced a hierarchy of the natural world. Through curriculum, academic culture, and writing, students at the Institute would learn to envision an environment, which endorsed their desires and served their needs.

## The Illusion of a Docile Environment

The school's education centered on hierarchical and highly regulated relationships to the environment, community, and self. Phelps closely monitored time and social hierarchy, teaching her students to be submissive to the structures of etiquette, family, and society. She considered her students as temporary daughters and saw it as her duty to parent them. Restraint, control, and moderation were central to Phelps' philosophy, undergirded by the idea that women were inherently more emotionally sensitive and fragile than men. For this reason, botany became a core part of the curriculum. Phelps believed that internalizing botanical order through the Linnaean system, which categorized all plant, animal, and mineral life based on visually observable traits, helped to encourage women towards order and regulation in their lives. She believed that Linnaean taxonomy mimicked the intelligent design of God. Students prac-

ticed rigorous observation of themselves and their surroundings through field observation and personal reflection. She took students on field trips to collect plant specimens that they dried in scrapbooks and touted the benefits of open air during observational excursions, which she viewed as "conducive to health and cheerfulness" (Phelps 1876, 159). Likewise, direct observation provided women with the opportunity to "strengthen" the muscle of their minds. "All our thoughts, by means of the senses, are originally derived from external objects," wrote Phelps, and thus engaging directly with natural objects rather than seeing them mediated through images in a textbook would better sustain and nourish the mind (Phelps 1838, 36).

The students seemed to enjoy field visits, at least as an aesthetic experience. Mary Stone, a student at the Institute, wrote to her mother of one such excursion, remarking that "we enjoyed ourselves very much, ascending the lofty hills, and gathering the beautiful flowers, which grew in great abundance" (*Mary Stone Letters*). Many students discussed flower collecting as a more pleasant part of the regular exercise the headmistress mandated. "Calisthenics, or female gymnastics," wrote Phelps in *The New York Mirror*, "is very properly becoming a branch of female education." The physical sciences, which could be viewed in the "wild and sequestered scenes," of the natural world, thus offered unique opportunities for girls to engage their bodies through walking, hiking, and breathing fresh air (1833). Phelps promoted the idea that engagement with the environment would physically improve the human body, an idea which, at some level, suggested a utilitarian relationship to the natural world. Within the school, exercise and environmental appreciation often went hand in hand.

If exercise was an ideal engagement with the natural world, it remained secondary to the performance of domestic labor Stone fixated on in her correspondence (*Mary Stone Letters*). "In reference to exercising in the open air," she wrote, "I must inform you, I scarcely ever have time, except a short time in the morning, when I am not Roomkeeper." Stone's reference to her work highlights the importance of household labor in the Institute's curriculum. "The rising bell has not yet rung," Stone reported to her mother, "but I have been up some time, and have made my toilet, and spread my bed, and am now seated in the school room, writing you a few hurried lines." Stone emphasized the time and energy that it took for her to be domestically virtuous, echoing instructions given by Phelps. "How much might be done by an energetic daughter in the family," Phelps wrote in *The Educator or Hours with My Pupils* (1876), her collection of lectures given to students at the Institute, "where servants sleep away the best hours of the day, and rise to lounge about." While servants could be expected

to "indulge in idleness," ideal young women "should be seen to rise early, to walk about and notice what is going on" (Phelps 1876, 179). Scholars have observed that rhetoric like this served to create a moral boundary between the mistress, cast as refined and virtuous, and the servant, cast as lazy and untrustworthy. Thavolia Glymph and other scholars have shown that "mistresses" constantly found ways to assert moral differences over those they controlled to naturalize their positions of power (Branch/Wooten 169–89; Dudden; Glymph; Green). Mary Stone's family owned at least seventeen slaves (U.S. Census 1840). After emancipation, census records show that Mary Stone would go on to employ black servants for her entire life. Her letter demonstrates that at the Institute, Stone was instructed to naturalize the hierarchy of power upon which her family built wealth. Through her writing, she made invisible the domestic labor that fueled the extractive economy, which she lived in and benefitted from.

Stone's letter also highlights the corrective thinking and selective remembering that Phelps encouraged in students. A striking speech by Phelps epitomized these skills. She instructed students to write frequently to their parents, but also not to dwell upon the challenges of their experiences. She offered two sample letters by fictional students of her own creation. The first was written by a bad child who she named "Growlinda Snarl." In Snarl's letter, she wrote to her parents that "When we arrived in this dirty village of Ellicott's Mills, we were directed to get upon some narrow rocks, and climb up a narrow passage; in this way we proceeded for some miles […] it was the worst climbing I have ever done" (Phelps 1876, 258–64). Phelps admonished Snarl's writing as an example of ungratefulness and complaint. In contrast, she offered the letter of "Agatha Goodchild," who wrote to her parents, "On reaching the romantic village of Ellicott's Mills, we were directed to the institute by a winding path which leads up a steep ascent, but were amply rewarded for our labor." In this fascinating fictional reimagination, Goodchild corrected the improper, but perhaps more honest, depiction of the natural state of the land surrounding the Institute. The negative details such as "dirty," "narrow" and "worst climbing" are replaced with "romantic," "winding," and "rewarded for our labor." Interestingly, Phelps herself wrote at length about her own arrival at the Institute and discussed the off-putting appearance of the school and the hike up to it, including brambles, jagged rocks, and "ill-favored swine rooting up the ground" at the entrance. "All around the mansion were heaps of unremoved stones which had been left there on the erection of the building." Her own words suggest that Growlinda Snarl's account of the ascent might still have held some truth.

The fable of Snarl and Goodchild exemplifies how women at the Institute encouraged one another to embellish and adjust their renderings of the natural world. Indeed, student writings focused on ecological beauty and sentimental experience, and hardly ever noted unpleasant or negative sensations or situations. In this way, they created an image of the environment which served their fantasies, rather than one which might be challenging to physically navigate, or which showed signs of extractive damage. The Patapsco River Valley was, in fact, a highly industrial environment. During this period, the valley was peppered with iron furnaces, grist mills, and cotton mills, which required environmental manipulation like river damming, deforestation, and roadbuilding. The environment would have showed significant sensory signs of extraction, including olfactory, auditory, and visual markers of industrial production. In students' writing, however, any markers of industrial activity were notably absent, suggesting that students were oblivious to them, minimized or misunderstood them, or that they had been expressly instructed not to focus on them. By ignoring signs of extraction within the landscape, students furthered an imagined environment where extractive consequences did not exist, and where the environment appeared as a bucolic and peaceful backdrop for their lives.

Students wrote constantly about environmental experiences in the *Young Ladies Magazine*, a quarterly journal produced and edited at the school. Flowers, climate and air, forests, mountains, and bodies of water all occurred as constant motifs in the students' writings and were often the direct subject of their pieces. 17-year-old student Kate D. Earle's "The Teachings of Wildflowers," (*PYLM* Vol. 1 No. 3, 14–15) for instance, envisioned flowers as a messenger of God. In the piece, a "sad and weary" young girl found a woodland glen to sit in and meditate on her troubles. As she sat, the flowers surrounding her came to life as a "fairy-like band" and spoke to her directly. "Their voices murmured softly: 'Maiden we are sisters from the spirit-land.'" The blossoms beseeched her to stop isolating and pitying herself and rejoin her community. "'Though hast wandered to muse in solitude and cherish thine own dark thoughts,'" they scolded. The flowers suggested to the narrator that her painful feelings were self-inflating, and that she should, instead, cultivate happiness and a sense of care toward others. This aspect of the fable, perhaps, reflected the values of Transcendentalism, which had become fashionable during this period. In particular, transcendentalists believed in nature's ability to foster virtue within the self and inspire greater care for the community. The flowers also exalted faithfulness and told Earle to serve God. "Live for Him," they sang, "bow humbly and

meekly to His will and sadness shall no longer dwell with thee." In Earle's reading of nature, as in many of her peers', nature spoke the teachings of a Christian god, and embodied Christian principles. The flowers thus served human interests and existed primarily to enrich human life.

Earle's devout flower vision depicted nature as a messenger of Christianity. Phelps, a zealous Christian, also frequently referred to plants as connected with God. Part of her campaign to send students into the field for observation suggested that by doing so they might experience direct connection with God and suggested that by observing them directly rather than through the mediation of a textbook, students might sharpen all parts of their minds. She posited that by guiding students down "paths strewn with flowers," they would learn that "these beautiful creations of Almighty Power" exemplified "the goodness of God" (Phelps 1876, 11). References to God were frequent throughout the book, and often suggested that students see the aesthetic benefits of the botanical world, such as beauty and order, as evidence of intelligent design. The nature that Phelps and her students wrote about frequently embodied European and Neoclassical aesthetic traditions as well. Earle's piece was one of many to envision nature as "mild and beautiful spirits," with feminine qualities. "Nymphs and Naiads sprang lightly from the sparkling waters of the stream," wrote a student named Laura Bevan, and "mermaids glided with inimitable grace beneath the leaping fountains" (*PYLM* Vol. 1 No. 1, 8–9). Through both Christian and Greco-Roman imagery, the students envisioned natural environments which bared signs and symbols of Western cosmology. Like Phelps, their affective experiences of nature celebrated their own spiritual values.

In both its Christian and Neoclassical manifestations, the environment served as a spiritual allegory for feminine existential struggles. Writings often dealt with death, for instance, connecting seasonal change and botanical death cycles to the loss of people in their lives. The young women consistently noticed death within their natural environments. As Institute student Harriet Ryan wrote, "we see a tiny rosebud just opening its beautiful petals to catch the first faint rays of the morning sun, but ere we turn to look again, the withering blast has come, and swept the lovely bud to death" (*PYLM* Vol. 1 No. 3, 5). The flower illustrated the brevity and temporality of life, and the natural cycle of death. During this time, Phelps was also grieving the loss of her own daughter, Jane, killed in an 1855 train accident. In her eulogy for Jane, Phelps wrote that "in the beautiful seasons of youth, before the storms of worldly sorrow had swept over her—like a young and tender plant she is transplanted to a more genial

clime, and in the garden of Paradise you will find her blooming with expanded and perfected nature" (1855). Through her writing, Phelps often found solace in the rhythm of seasons passing, discussing the autumn and winter as seasons of death, and spring and summer as seasons of birth.

Cycles of time seemed also to preoccupy students who neared adulthood, particularly relating to the pressures of marriage and reproductive obligation. Eliza Dall Thomas, a student at the Institute from 1844–49, wrote about these concerns in her journal, in a piece titled "Sixteen." In it, she lamented her youth's passing, using natural imagery including landscape, animals, and flowers to recall innocence. "Light heart of my youthful years," wrote Thomas, "when rambling over the picturesque hills of my native land, or stalling by some romantic river in quest of sweet flowers to deck my sister's hair, I imagine myself as happy, as though the future would add no grief to my unsophisticated soul." Thomas used flowers to suggest a childlike femininity but also seems to be concerned with the temporality that flowers represent. In another piece titled "Flowers," Thomas began by waxing on beauty. However, as the piece progressed, her writing became darker and more anxious. She discussed how blossoms died with the passing seasons and likened human life to this process, writing, "we, like these frail flowers, remain but for a brief space […] we pass away, and others occupy the space we once filled" (*Eliza Dall Thomas Commonplace Book* 44).

In some ways, student writings mirrored the interests of wider literary culture at the time, which placed tremendous cultural and aesthetic importance in images of plant life, the environment, and its symbolism. The language of flowers served discreet and symbolic purposes in 19th century literary culture. Flower dictionaries were some of the era's most popular books, expressing the classical and symbolic meanings embedded within floral imagery. As Dorri Beam has convincingly argued, "the language of flowers" was a significant way in which notable 19th century female writers such as Margaret Fuller and Sarah Hale expressed desire and fantasy. The students would have been familiar with these writings through their consumption of novels, newspapers, and nationally circulated magazines. In this way, the students were following patterns of literary expression outlined by Beam and other scholars.

In writings from the Institute, flowers were treated as living, if not completely autonomous, creatures. Flowers "trembled," "wept," "murmured," "welcomed," and "sheltered." While the personification of flowers never rose to the level of full emotional sentience, the language surrounding flowers suggested them to be subjects with more agency than plants were traditionally endowed

with. Rather, the souls of plants seemed to rest somewhere between child and spirit, acting with care but also on instinct rather than intention. The conceptualization of plants as living and acting creatures could also be informed by botanical instruction, which emphasized plants as having anatomies and behaviors, and being responsive to changes in the environment. This suggests that in the act of observing botanical life, women at the Institute felt and noticed emotions that lay at the intersection of actual plant behavior and their affective perceptions, evoking what the theorist Jane Bennett has called "vibrant materialism" (2010). While the students projected their own fantasies of plant behavior in their writings, they also inadvertently pointed to actual ways that plants can act in their own interests, such as through adaptive growth patterns and retreat from threatened soil. The tension between the agency which humans might project onto things and the agency which things themselves have reflects Bennett's idea that abstract concepts like nature or "the Wild" are attempts to "acknowledge a force that, though quite real and powerful, is intrinsically resistant to representation" (xv–xvi).

The nature that students and teachers imagined was, however, always sympathetic and deferent to feminine experiences. It could communicate for them, empathize with them, support them, speak to, and assist them. It was, in other words, the ally of the human world, and especially of affluent and 'civilized' white women. In the same way that Almira Phelps suggested to her students that they were suited to botany as women, the students seemed to suggest that nature itself was classically feminine: docile, mothering, empathetic, beautiful, gentle, and kind. What student experiences implied, however, was a situated and manipulated experience of nature, one that was designed to show them care, and one which belied their own settler role within the landscape. As Mark Rifkin has argued, white writers in the first half of the 19$^{th}$ century often utilized nature to conceptualize their own sense of "sovereign selfhood" against a passive landscape, a "purifying space" in which the Anglo-Americans could articulate their sense of self outside of the market economy (91–93).

For the students, nature was both passive and, at points, an active conspirator in the growth of capital. Jane Smith's "Star of Empire" literally guided Anglo-Americans towards control over the landscape, suggesting that not only did nature endorse the imperialism and extraction of resources that westward expansion wrought, but it would also actively assist in the project of expansion (*PYLM* Vol 1. No. 4). Smith described the star's flickering at the rise of non-western, non-white empires like "Persia," and the "rush of barbaric hordes" which caused the star to be obscured from sight. When she finally claimed

to glimpse the star, it was at the end of the Mexican-American war, when the United States annexed Texas and continued its expansion. For Smith, glimpsing the star meant that the country was just in its decisions to continue to expand territory, thus acquiring the natural resources that would lead to continued wealth for elite families such as hers. In some of her writings, Phelps too refers to the school as a nation-building space, imagining the ways in which students from spaces at the peripheries of the Anglo-American empire, "Canada and the southern States, from the Atlantic and the Mississippi, and even the Cherokee nation," came to live "together as a band of sisters under the care of common parents" (1876, 34). This rhetoric harkens to Amy Kaplan's suggestion that women's writing in the 19th century used the domestic as a site in which to enact the imperial, and, to fantasize a space of white control over the landscape. The school, in this case, acted as a stand-in for the family itself. Phelps' writing and that of her students not only support Kaplan's thesis, but also affirm that for elite white women the school was a collective domestic space in which to manifest imperialist and extractivist fantasies of the land. Ideas of 'manifest domesticity' could circulate in lessons, writing, reading, and relationship-building between students and teachers.

After leaving the Institute, many students carried on this discourse as teachers themselves. Phelps had always contended that a major purpose of female education was to train future teachers. Teaching had given her financial stability after her first husband's death. Particularly in the students who came from less generational wealth, such as the free scholars, teaching offered a legitimate source of income throughout their lives. Teaching was also a source of public influence for some women, such as Mary Jane Ross, of Cherokee Nation, who established a prominent school for children orphaned in the Civil War. The school even produced a student publication, which mirrored *The Young Ladies Magazine* in its design.

The majority of students at the Institute, meanwhile, went on to become wives and mothers, enacting those domestic and reproductive labors so essential to the growth of the market economy. Fantasies of a passive and loyal environment were, in this way, passed on in the instructions that they gave their children and in the financial choices, which they helped to make about familial control of natural resources. Student Susan E. Bryant, for example, came from a wealthy slaveholding family of Louisiana and Kentucky origins (Johnson). After attending the Institute, Bryant moved to San Francisco, California, with her husband Isaac Thorne, also from Kentucky. The decision was likely the result of her family's need to restructure their financial assets in the aftermath

of emancipation. It was perhaps also influenced by her time at the Institute and its fetishistic adoration of the environment. For many white Americans, migration to California evoked a fantasy of settling virgin land in the Eden-like imaginary of the far West. By 1900, Bryant, now Thorne, had birthed nine children in her adopted home of San Francisco, and employed at least one servant, a Japanese man named Oti Otero (U.S. Census 1900). Like many of her peers at the Institute, Susan Bryant Thorne's romantic visualizations of the environment thus played out in real life settler colonial actions, relocating to claim new American land to preserve and gain wealth, and continuing to exploit the labor of non-white people to sustain her and her family's lifestyle.

Bryant did make one observation about the valley's ecology while studying at the Institute, which hinted at the unsettling realities of the landscape. One day, wandering through the forest, she paused to notice "the troubled bosom of the Patapsco River," and listened to the "confused noise of the falls" (*PYLM* Vol. 1 No. 2, 5–6). These characterizations of the environment alluded, albeit gently, to the tremendous force of the river, and its uncertain relationship to the landscape. "Troubled," in particular, could have alluded to the river's history of flooding. Since its settlement, the Patapsco had several times flooded, resulting in destruction to residential and industrial property, and demonstrating the landscape's power over human life. As students like Bryant perched on the banks of the Patapsco, musing about the meaning of the landscape, the natural world was beginning to react negatively to years of industrial extraction.

In 1868, what began as an ordinary thunderstorm spiraled into a massive flood along the river. While moderate flooding was an inevitable event, decades of excessive damming and sediment runoff from iron and grain production greatly exacerbated the flood's intensity. The flood was catastrophic, destroying most buildings in the town, killing between thirty and sixty people, and permanently stunting industrial growth ("The Maryland Flood," *Harpers Weekly* 1868; Sharp). In this flood, the behavior of the river aggressively challenged the images of docility students had adorned it with, reflecting not a submissive or pristine ecology, but instead, one deeply affected by extractive capitalism.

The intimate public of the Patapsco Female Institute demonstrates how a collective fantasy of a non-threatening environment could rationalize and perpetuate extraction. Through visions of talking flowers, mothering forests, and magical guiding stars, women benefiting from ecological exploitation could ignore the dangers it posed. The sentimentality that women at the Patapsco Female Institute expressed towards the environment thus reflected a settler-colonial power relationship between humans and environment, a relationship

which we should see as complicit with the causes of the river's flooding. While women at the school did not dam the river or fill its waters with sediment, they held intimate attachment to the executives who ordered these actions, and doubtlessly influenced the direct harms that extractive capital wrought. The sentimental writings of these women thus provide great insight as to how an extractive disaster could approach in plain sight, and yet remain unseen until the day that floodwaters began to rise.

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