# Authority, Genealogy, Infrastructure
## Nineteenth-Century Discourses of Transatlantic Relationality

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When the first telegraph message was transmitted between Europe and North America in August 1858, the British satirical weekly *Punch* ran a poem that presented transatlantic contact in fraternal terms, turning technological rapprochement into corporeal connection. Imagining a transatlantic dialogue, the text has British and American citizens exclaim: "That wire will draw close you and me / As those famed twins of Siam" (Anon. 1858: 72). Entitled "The Anglo-Saxon Twins," the text illustrates a newly perceived Anglo-American proximity that was ushered in by the transatlantic telegraph not merely through an abstract reference to racial connections, but more immediately through linking race to family relationships. Reflecting "popular assessments of international telegraphy" as a technology "destined to promote diplomacy and sympathetic connection" (Hanlon 2010: 502),[1] the poem likens Britain and the United States to Siamese twins rather than just to siblings, a rhetorical choice that highlights the degree of intimacy between the two nations (with the transatlantic "wire" imagined as transforming them into a single social

1 Hanlon has written extensively on how antebellum debates about the transatlantic cable fed into discussions of Anglo-American relations as well as into relations between North and South (see Hanlon 2010 and Hanlon 2016). Paul Gilmore argues that telegraph technology furthered racialist ideology at the same time that it deconstructed its underlying logic: while "celebrated for extending the conquest of a disembodied white mind," the telegraph, through "rendering bodies unnecessary," "emphasized the disappearance of racial barriers defined in terms of bodily difference" (2002: 806). Brian Murray (2018) points to the discrepancy between Anglo-Saxonist celebrations of Anglo-American contact rendered possible by transatlantic telegraphy and the fact that the telegraph cable ran between Ireland and Newfoundland—Celtic (or, via emigration, Irish-dominated) peripheries of the British Empire.

and political body).[2] Yet "The Anglo-Saxon Twins" would not be a *Punch* piece if this image did not also simultaneously undercut its seemingly straightforward optimism about transoceanic contact. When ties become too close, the simile implies, they threaten to encroach upon the autonomy and physical integrity of the individual national organism. Combining a celebration of physical unity with an anxiety of excessive proximity, the text captures a prevalent mid-nineteenth-century dialectics of transatlantic relationality.

If the image of conjoined twins offers an extreme view of the nineteenth-century special relationship between the United States and the United Kingdom, it was certainly common enough at the time to conceptualize transatlantic links through the language of race and ancestry. As an ideology of origins and destiny, racial Anglo-Saxonism flourished on both sides of the Atlantic—in fields as diverse as comparative anatomy, philology, and cultural history (see Horsman 1981 and Hall 1997). The rhetoric of race offered an effective way of mobilizing sentiments, but its referents were by and large highly abstract. Complex fictions of blood or racial belonging were more palatable when they circulated in the form of a more tangible language of kinship relations that broke conceptual complexity down to the scale of the nuclear family. Using technological infrastructure as an occasion to speak about cultural contact, *Punch* specifically imagines two individuals becoming siblings rather than two peoples discovering their common lineage. Where the language of brotherhood implies equality and solidarity, the twin simile points to the potentially conflictual nature of genealogical connections. This aspect comes to the fore in another nineteenth-century metaphor of transatlantic relations, that of the relationship between parent and child—which frames international relations as a family affair at the same time that it raises questions of hierarchy and authority.

What follows explores such tensions through focusing on family and infrastructure, the two key dimensions of transatlantic connection referenced in the *Punch* poem and by countless nineteenth-century British and American writers. The first section of the chapter examines vocabularies of kinship, while the second looks at the technological developments that accompanied

2 Contemporary readers would have decoded the poem's allusion to "those famed twins of Siam" as a reference to Chang and Eng Bunker (1811–1874), Siamese-American conjoined twin brothers who had established a reputation touring the United States as freak show celebrities.

and informed them. Both family rhetoric and the celebration of infrastructural transformations emerged against the background of political conflicts between Britain and the United States in the second third of the century. This period, Elisa Tamarkin reminds us, hardly constituted "good years for Anglo-American relations," despite talk of "collaborative enterprise and commercial alliance" (2008: 58). The disagreements were many: border conflicts between the United States and British Canada in the late 1830s and early 1840s; British meddling with the Texas annexation and the subsequent Mexican-American War in the mid-1840s; and British neutrality during the Civil War years (see ibid., 58–59 and Haynes 1997: 121–122). Genealogical and infrastructural discourses could mend such strained relations, but they could just as easily fuel existing conflicts—depending on whether fraternal solidarity or parental authority was emphasized or whether the bilaterally beneficial or unilaterally imperial effects of infrastructural advances were highlighted. These discursive frames provided the conceptual language through which nineteenth-century British and American commentators could imagine the special relationship between the United Kingdom and the United States as a constellation marked by shifting distributions of political and cultural authority that continuously redefined the character of transatlantic contact.

## The Genealogical Rhetoric of Transatlantic Consanguinity

It requires an act of imagination to turn abstract disembodied concepts such as race or nationality into more intuitively accessible units like the family. The imagery of genealogical intimacy translates membership in a complex social organism into an interpersonal relationship. It collapses time and space into a continuum that condenses deep histories and territorial distances into a domestic frame of reference. Research on nationalism has accordingly explained the "special psychological dimension" of the nation as deriving from the "intuitive sense of kindredness or extended family" that it subconsciously inspires in its members (Connor 1994: 74). In ethnically inflected varieties of nationalism, Anthony Smith writes, "[t]he nation is seen as a fictive 'super-family,'" its individual members figuring as "brothers and sisters, or at least cousins, differentiated by family ties from outsiders" (1991: 12).[3] This imaginary also

3 What is important is obviously not so much the actual reality of kinship ties as it is the belief in them. As Max Weber pointed out, "it does not matter whether or not an

operates beyond the boundaries of individual political entities. In the Anglo-American case, it brought together two different nation-states under the umbrella of an extensive notion of ethnic community. Emphasizing bloodlines and common ancestry, genealogical language was thus also a racialized discourse, but as "an elaborate symbology of relatedness" (Tamarkin 2008: 69), it provided a more tangible version of racialist thought that revolved around individuals rather than large-scale collectives.

Two main forms of family imagery feature in nineteenth-century Anglo-American writing—one with a *vertical* emphasis (the parent-child relationship), the other with a *horizontal* one (the fraternal bond). Whereas vertical versions, with their double emphasis on parental authority and filial obedience, were the dominant form of the trope until the mid-eighteenth century, Jay Fliegelman has shown that the second half of the century witnessed a shift towards "a noncoercive rather than authoritarian model of the family," which, based on the pedagogical philosophies of John Locke and the Scottish Enlightenment, redefined the Anglo-American relationship through a new focus on parental responsibility (1982: 26).[4] Paradoxically enough, the call for colonial autonomy from British paternal control often came framed in a rhetoric of transatlantic racial inheritance that highlighted an Anglo-Saxon passion for liberty as among the colonists' chief family traits. Hypothetically conceding the idea of British parental authority but clearly emphasizing freedom over coercion, Thomas Paine, for example, stressed that wielding power also entailed a corresponding obligation to care. In *Common Sense* (1776), he accuses the British of emotional neglect at the same time that he argues that the nascent United States are in fact the offspring of a pan-European patchwork family:

> Britain is the parent country, say some. Then the more shame upon her conduct. Even brutes do not devour their young, nor savages make war upon their families; wherefore the assertion, if true, turns to her reproach; but it happens not to be true [...]. Europe, and not England, is the parent country

objective blood relationship exists" among the members of an ethnic community to make them subscribe to the idea of their relatedness (1978, 1: 389). What matters are "myths of common ancestry, not any fact of ancestry" (Smith 1991: 22).

4 By about 1750, Fliegelman argues, "[a]n older patriarchal family authority was giving way to a new parental ideal characterized by a more affectionate and egalitarian relationship with children"—a paradigm shift that amounts to a fundamental "revolution in the understanding of the nature of authority" (1982: 1, 5).

> of America. This new World hath been the asylum for the persecuted lovers of civil and religious liberty from *every part* of Europe. Hither have they fled, not from the tender embraces of the mother, but from the cruelty of the monster; and it is so far true of England, that the same tyranny which drove the first emigrants from home, pursues their descendants still. (1995: 22–23; emphasis in original)

In Paine's analysis, Britain's call for filial obedience emerges as compromised by the country's poor parenting skills, with British "cruelty" framed as a form of domestic abuse. Rejecting the linguistic convention that describes relationships between established and emergent states in genealogical terms—Britain as the "mother" or "parent country" of the American colonies—allows Paine to call traditional power imbalances into question. Sociologist Richard Sennett in this context speaks of a "split between authority and legitimacy" that exists in situations where hierarchical relations continue to be in place while their self-evident rightfulness has become disputed (1993: 45). Since Paine's alternative to the American colonial configuration under British rule has not yet become an independent political entity, his main rhetorical effort is one of deconstructing the notion of maternal benevolence in order to make a case for what Sennett terms "disobedient dependence" (ibid., 28).

Analyzing English neglect half a century later, American author Washington Irving was following essentially the same reasoning as Paine but came to a more conciliatory conclusion. In his collection of essays and short fictions, *The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* (1819–1820), he asserts that Americans have continued to regard their "parent country" with "tenderness and veneration" despite political tensions during the Revolution and in the wake of the War of 1812:

> There is a general impression in England, that the people of the United States are inimical to the parent country. It is one of the errors which have been diligently propagated by designing writers. There is, doubtless, considerable political hostility, and a general soreness at the illiberality of the English press; but, generally speaking, the prepossessions of the people are strongly in favor of England. Indeed, at one time, they amounted, in many parts of the Union, to an absurd degree of bigotry. The bare name of Englishman was a passport to the confidence and hospitality of every family, and too often gave a transient currency to the worthless and the ungrateful. Throughout the country there was something of enthusiasm connected with the idea of England. We looked to it with a hallowed feeling of tenderness

> and veneration, as the land of our forefathers—the august repository of the monuments and antiquities of our race—the birthplace and mausoleum of the sages and heroes of our paternal history. After our own country, there was none in whose glory we more delighted—none whose good opinion we were more anxious to possess—none toward which our hearts yearned with such throbbings of warm consanguinity. (1998: 54–55)

Irving describes genealogical sentiments as a phenomenon that generates social and individual trust. Even after political independence had been achieved following years of transatlantic family feud, the sense of an intimate connection between American and British citizens remained strong, encouraging "confidence and hospitality" among strangers and guaranteeing the collective welcoming of Englishmen into the sacred space of the American "family." To Irving, this amounts to "bigotry," however, because the kind of trust created by family feeling was being "ungrateful[ly]" exploited by the British. Prepared to pay their transatlantic respects, Irving's filio-pietistic compatriots are systematically snubbed by their "parent country." When he turns to "lament the waywardness of the parent that would repel the affections of the child," Irving—like Paine—reframes the charge of filial disobedience as one of emotional starvation due to neglect by the British (ibid., 55). His Americans proudly embrace their transatlantic parentage with "throbbings of warm consanguinity," but are profoundly troubled by the fact that the feeling seems not to be reciprocated. Irving's gesture of transatlantic sympathy illustrates well what Tamarkin has described as nineteenth-century American Anglophilia, a cultural disposition that "reinvests in patriarchal authority by understanding national ties through anterevolutionary metaphors of familial connections" (2008: 68). For Irving, unlike for Paine, English authority is not in itself problematic; what to him mars the picture of domestic bliss is British indifference.

If Irving was already more diplomatic than Paine, the last traces of transatlantic critique disappeared in a text like Edward Everett's 1824 oration commemorating the Puritan settlement—an address that wholeheartedly celebrates the idea of filial attachment. To Everett, Harvard professor and later U.S. ambassador in London, it was an unequivocal "matter of congratulation and joy, that our fathers were Englishmen" (1825: 42). On a more personal note appropriate to the affective intensity of invoking the bond between parent and child, Everett confessed that "after my native land, I feel a tenderness and a reverence for that of my fathers," speaking with awe of "this great consanguinity of nations" (ibid., 47). Far from being merely

another country, Britain was to Everett "that other native land" which could become the emotional target of a transatlantically-extended patriotic admiration (ibid., 49). Everett's oration demonstrates that Anglo-American family rhetoric was not as neatly divided between an American renunciation of British parental authority and a British emphasis on "the older authoritarian model" as Robert Weisbuch has claimed (1986: 64). With British historian and man of letters Thomas Carlyle, for example, the use of the trope was considerably less straightforward than with either Paine or Everett. Although Carlyle often sounded a paternalistic note, he was also in command of the fraternal register. "What […] is America but a *piece of England*," he asked John Stuart Mill in April 1833, adding that Americans were nothing less than "our Brothers" (1970–, 6: 373; emphasis in original). Writing to his American friend Ralph Waldo Emerson the following year, he expressed "the sentiment of all Englishmen, Cisoceanic and Transoceanic, that we and you are *not* two countries, and cannot for the life of us be; but only two *parishes* of one country" (Emerson/Carlyle 1964: 102; emphases in original). Where England to Everett was "that other native land," America to Carlyle similarly figured as merely "another part of my native country" (ibid., 118). If Carlyle, as Kenneth Marc Harris has noted, "was continually reminding Emerson of their consanguinity," in later years these reminders could also take on a more forceful character (1978: 138). Carlyle at times revelled in the idea of a globally expansive Anglo-Saxon population and attempted to sell this image to his American correspondents through referring to it as their shared "wide motherland" (Emerson/Carlyle 1964: 180). In a later letter, however, he reminded Emerson of the location of the true centre of this configuration. London "is properly *your* Mother City too," he wrote, urging Emerson "to come and look at it" at regular intervals to pay his filial respects (ibid., 423; emphasis in original).

Annoyed by such British exhortations, American writers less transatlantically minded than Everett or Irving went back to revolutionary rhetoric to highlight the emotional and genealogical distance between Britain and the United States. Like Paine, Young American journalist and editor John L. O'Sullivan, for instance, pointed out that Americans had "derived their origin from many other nations" in addition to the English and that their "patriotism" was hence not one "of ancestry" (1839: 426). Pluralist declarations like O'Sullivan's notwithstanding, many Americans at mid-century were interested in tracing their transatlantic heritage—and not just metaphorically, as in Everett's case. The 1840s and 1850s were boom times for the genealogy business on both

sides of the Atlantic. More commonly employed in researching the history of the English peerage, British genealogist John Bernard Burke was overrun by American customers eager to trace their potentially august pedigrees. His recollections of their assignments from a decade's distance, at the peak of the Civil War, illustrate how closely the rhetoric of Anglo-American ancestry and contemporary political conflict were tied up with one another:

> Bitter has been of late the expression of animosity against England, and loud the denunciation of her in the United States; yet I cannot but hope and think that there is a deep-rooted affection in America for the "old country," and that when the angry passions, excited by the present most deplorable of wars, have subsided, better sentiments will resume their influence, and former kindly feelings be restored.
>
> For ten or twelve years before the civil conflict broke out, the most intelligent and zealous of my genealogical clients and correspondents were from the other side of the Atlantic, all yearning to carry back their ancestry to the fatherland, and to connect themselves in some way with its historic associations. Massachusetts was more genealogical than Yorkshire, and Boston sustained, what London never did, a Magazine devoted exclusively to genealogy. (1863: 288)

In 1845, a group of eminent Bostonians had founded the New England Historic Genealogical Society and began to issue the *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*. One of the Society's transatlantic correspondents, Burke's American colleague Horatio Gates Somerby, permanently relocated to England to study parish registers and family documents on behalf of his American clients (some of whose pedigrees he embellished or invented from scratch).[5]

Carlyle was not the only British author to seize upon such genealogical enthusiasm to make a case for English authority. Martin Farquhar Tupper, an English poet and moralist read widely on both sides of the Atlantic, tapped into a preexisting American desire for transatlantic attachment. Writing in *The Anglo-Saxon*, a short-lived magazine published in London in the late 1840s,

5 On Somerby and the history of genealogy in the United States more generally, see Weil 2013. Writing about Burke and the contemporary American mania for genealogy, Tamarkin speaks of "Anglophilia's genealogical romance of a historic homeland and source of self-fashioning to which all Americans—as members of a widely extended 'kinship'—could subscribe" (2008: 70). Hanlon, by contrast, reads the popularity of genealogy as evidencing not simply Anglophilia but also "a marked ambivalence in American attitudes toward England" (2007: 801).

he sought to capitalize on this sentiment to rally Americans under the banner of global Britishness. In a contribution entitled "A Word to the Yankees," Tupper, like Irving, asserted that the British and the Americans were "blood-relations, called by the same name, stirred by the same sympathies, sons or grandsons of the same stock" (1849: 26). But where the United States in Irving's account had figured as the deserted child, Tupper cast it as the prodigal son. Whenever he meets an American in England, Tupper writes, he treats him as

> a long-lost, long-loving, long-loved brother; an exile from home, whose grand object in life is then daily being realized (through the favour of Providence), in re-visiting the hearth of his ancestors, and in discovering how kindly and yearningly his kith and kin receive him; a son, once the wilful but generous-hearted youth who played truant from his father's house, (through the centrifugal force of unwise austerities,) but now travelling back once more, by land and by sea, over thousands of miles, in mature life, eager to be recognised again as a child, and reconciled to us, his brethren. (ibid., 28)

Although paternal and fraternal language is mixed here, the moral encoding of this parable of the American Revolution and its aftermath is itself straightforward. Whereas in Irving, Americans figure as the wrongfully disowned offspring, in Tupper, they have become "wilful" "exile[s] from home." When Tupper was addressing Americans more directly than in the medium of print, the hierarchical implications of his family rhetoric quickly backfired. He embarrassed himself when he extemporized a speech for a New York audience during an American tour in the spring of 1851, an incident the local press reported with glee:

> Mr. Tupper [...] said—My dear friends, I have not prepared a speech. All I have to say is, that I love you. I have come over the Atlantic ocean to say I love you—to tell you that England loves you. You have some faults, which I do not mean to flatter; but you deserve to be called Englishmen. (Cheers, mingled with suppressed murmurs.) I find no difference. I have crossed the ditch, and I find you are Englishmen at the other side. (Cheers and hisses.) Yankee Englishmen, I mean. (Cheers and laughter.) (*New York Herald*, 25 March 1851, qtd. in Coulombe 1996: 202)

Tupper's moment of failed identification demonstrates how volatile the language of transatlantic kinship could be where it was based on a sense of vertical distance and authority.

Emerson had argued against the condescending British paternalism of the type represented by Tupper in an essay entitled "The Young American" (1844), a text in which he described the danger of parental authority morphing into authoritarianism. Emerson here employs the image of the family to illustrate an argument about political organization. "The patriarchal form of government," he explains, "readily becomes despotic, as each person may see in his own family. Fathers wish to be the fathers of the minds of their children, as well as of their bodies, and behold with great impatience a new character and way of thinking presuming to show itself in their own son or daughter" (1971–2013, 1: 232). As a political strategy, paternalism is a form of exerting authority that, in Sennett's words, aims at "a legitimation of power outside the family by appeal to the roles within the family" (1993: 57). It thus constitutes "a bond of metaphor" that links authority and trust, but one in which both positive and negative connotations of the domestic roots of the image are evoked (ibid., 77). Emerson clearly emphasizes the authoritarian elements of paternalism (control, domination, despotism) more than its affective dimensions (care, protection, security). In *English Traits* (1856), some ten years later, he employs transatlantic family rhetoric in a more emphatic way. In the chapter on British "Manners," for example, he writes admiringly about an English penchant for domesticity: "An English family," he observes, "consists of a few persons, who, from youth to age, are found revolving within a few feet of each other" (1971–2013, 5: 60). The simile he chooses to describe this kind of intimate community is one with which we are already familiar: the "English family" seems to Emerson "as if tied by some invisible ligature, tense as that cartilage which we have seen attaching the two Siamese" (ibid.). Whereas in the *Punch* poem discussed above, the metaphor of the conjoined twins is essentially a negative image of excessive closeness, Emerson's image of the "ligature" binding together the members of the English household is an affirmative one. To him it was this kind of "[d]omesticity" that formed the secret of Britain's global success, "the taproot which enables the nation to branch wide and high" (ibid.).

Elsewhere in *English Traits*, family imagery is employed in a more specifically Anglo-American sense. Recounting a conversation with Carlyle during an excursion to Stonehenge, Emerson presents his response to Carlyle's charge that, for the time being, the Americans would have to receive their instruc-

tion from the English. England, Emerson replies, was "an old and exhausted island" and "must one day be contented, like other parents, to be strong only in her children" (ibid., 155). Like Paine, he transforms family rhetoric into a means of filial self-empowerment. His bid for an American pedigree is coupled to a topsy-turvy version of transatlantic authority that upends a vertical relationship of westward paternal dominance and replaces it with the idea of a generational succession that will see the youthful United States grow into becoming the guardian of a senescent British parent. An even more explicit sense of entitlement runs through the journals Emerson used for recording material destined for *English Traits* during his tour of the British Isles in 1847–1848. Reflecting on an English tendency for anti-American self-aggrandizement, in an 1852 entry he remodels American identity by erasing transatlantic difference:

> What is said of England,—every particular,—we Americans read with a secret interest, even when Americans are expressly &, it may seem, on good grounds, affronted & disparaged; for we know that we are the heir, that we & not he who is meant to be praised is the Englishman; but we, we are the Englishman, by gravitation, by destiny, & laws of the Universe. The good he praises is devolving to us, and our keen sympathy in every trait he draws, is the best certificate that we are the lawful son. (1977: 84)

Unlike Paine, Emerson openly endorses a transatlantic line of inheritance that casts the United States as unequivocally English. But instead of binding Americans to the onerous duties of filial piety, Emerson's family imagery formulates a claim to succession that entails a radical recalibration of the parent-child relationship and its underlying dynamics of authority.

## Transatlantic Infrastructure: Distance and Rapprochement

As the *Punch* poem on the telegraph as a transatlantic lifeline indicates, the Anglo-American family metaphorics that surface in *English Traits* and countless other mid-century texts were proliferating in tandem with a widespread contemporary impression that Britain and the United States were technologically and infrastructurally growing ever more closely together. When Carlyle, for instance, noted that "America is not a country of strangers; it is a country of our Brothers," that statement was accompanied by the observation that "they are […] building a Bridge over: there is little doubt but there will be

Steamboats ere long, and a passage of not many days" (1970–, 9: 97). Transatlantic brotherhood, Carlyle suggests, would be strengthened by revolutions in transportation infrastructure. It was the increased speed of transatlantic travel that led to a fundamental recalibration in the perception of genealogical and geographical distances. In 1843, Carlyle observed with surprise that, from a Scotsman's point of view, "America is in very fact *nearer* to us at present than London was fifty years ago" (1970–, 16: 187; emphasis in original). Within half a century, he suggests, the geographical reality of the transatlantic relationship had profoundly shifted. So, too, had the scale of the Anglo-American literary sphere in which writers of Carlyle's generation were moving—a space increasingly contracted through advances in communication, transport, and print technology.[6]

As in the case of racial rhetoric or genealogical imagery, reflections on transatlantic technological rapprochement could take various forms, ranging from cisatlantic isolation to transatlantic inclusion. Infrastructural progress, for example, often served not to highlight Anglo-American proximity but to underwrite cisatlantic difference. It was, after all, one of the argumentative stereotypes of mid-century American cultural nationalism that domestic literature had failed to manifest its cultural autonomy and potential excellence in the past simply because Americans had been preoccupied with building a nation rather than establishing a literary tradition. "We have had the primitive forests to clear away," Boston critic and editor Orestes Brownson declared,

> cities and villages to erect; roads, canals, and railways to construct; in a word, our whole material interests to provide for, and the field of our future glory to prepare. […] While engaged in this work, we could not turn our attention to the cultivation of a national literature. Moreover, […] while clearing away the forest, planting the rose in the wilderness, and erecting cities and villages

6 Transatlantic literary and cultural relations unfolded against the background of such a material history of Anglo-American exchange. Some recent research, especially in the field of Victorian studies, has begun to pay closer attention to infrastructure both as it shaped and as it was reflected in nineteenth-century writing. See, for example, Menke 2008 for an account of how information systems such as the penny post and the telegraph relate to Victorian realism, or Grossman 2012 on how "advances in public transport"—the stage-coach and railway systems, in particular—"were interconnecting" readers "by networking them together" (3). Both Menke and Grossman are writing about fiction, however, and they largely confine themselves to nation-sized infrastructures. My aim here is to think through the cultural repercussions of communication and transportation technologies on a larger transatlantic scale.

> where lately prowled the beast of prey, or curled the smoke of the Wigwam, literature adequate to our wants was furnished by the mother country, of a better quality, and at a cheaper rate than we could furnish it for ourselves. Here is, after all, the chief cause of the deficiency of our literature, and the main reason why we have so long remained the literary vassals of England. (1840: 66)

Brownson frankly acknowledges the transatlantically-pervasive cultural authority of "the mother country," but turns it into an index of political dependence. Cultural identity to American writers like Brownson was intimately connected to questions of infrastructure. In contrast to celebrations of technology as bringing the two nations into closer contact, infrastructural efforts could also be used to shut down transatlantic dialogue through distancing national cultures that, thanks to "roads, canals, and railways," were growing internally more coherent but also transatlantically differentiated from one another. In "The Young American," Emerson, like Brownson, reflects on the kind of infrastructural revolutions that historian Daniel Walker Howe has described as the single most important factor in American history between 1815 and 1848 (see 2007: 203–242).[7] Emerson similarly celebrates infrastructural progress as a catalyst for national—rather than transatlantic—unification. "This rage for road building is beneficent for America," he explains: "Not only is distance annihilated, but when, as now, the locomotive and the steamboat, like enormous shuttles, shoot every day across the thousand various threads of national descent and employment, and bind them fast in one web, an hourly assimilation goes forward, and there is no danger that local peculiarities and hostilities should be preserved" (1971–2013, 1: 223–224). Emerson is not oblivious to the fact that the same logic of assimilation would need to apply to transatlantic distance as well. Yet rather than positing that national "peculiarities" will disappear just as "local" ones, he paradoxically argues that "now that steam has narrowed the Atlantic to a strait, the nervous, rocky West is intruding a new and continental element into the national mind, and we shall yet have an American genius" (ibid., 229). Instead of weaving the United States

7 Howe speaks of "twin revolutions" in communication and transportation (2007: 1). Among the first, he counts "[t]he invention of electric telegraphy," "improvements in printing and paper manufacturing; the multiplication of newspapers, magazines, and books; and the expansion of the postal system"; among the second range "the introduction of steamboats, canals, turnpikes, and railroads" (ibid., 1–2). Similar revolutions were of course transforming Britain during the same period.

and Europe more tightly together, transatlantic transportation in Emerson's view will create a distinctive American national identity genuinely independent of European influences.

Emerson's own bonds with Europe, however, were knit closer by the fact that "the Atlantic" had become a mere "strait." When transatlantic steamship travel took off from the late 1830s onwards, it significantly reduced distances between New York and Bristol or Boston and Liverpool. Emerson was among many of his contemporaries who benefitted from these improvements. On his first transatlantic voyage in 1832–1833, it took him thirty-nine days to get to Europe aboard a sailing vessel and another thirty-five to get back to Boston. Upon his return to England for his lecture tour in 1847, that time span had been reduced by more than half.[8] When in the 1830s and 1840s he tried to convince Carlyle to make a transatlantic visit, he noted that the two were in fact "getting to be neighbours," calculating that it would merely take "a day from London to Liverpool; twelve or eleven to Boston; and an hour to Concord," the Massachusetts village in which he resided (Emerson/Carlyle 1964: 355). Carlyle, too, celebrated the fact that steamships would eventually "bring us a thousand miles nearer, at one step" (ibid., 249). His vision of a "universal Saxondom" (ibid., 305) congregating in London at regular intervals—and the model of a centralized, globally expansive British empire that the image represented—relied on the existence of a transnational infrastructure that enabled such large-scale relocations. In developing this idea, Carlyle may have been thinking of Edmund Burke's famous March 1775 speech on "Conciliation with the Colonies," which framed the impending loss of the American territories as a result of transatlantic distance. "Three thousand miles of ocean" were "weakening" the power of British government abroad, Burke argued, regretting that distance was "the immutable condition; the eternal law, of extensive and detached Empire[s]" (1784: 32–33). Nineteenth-century steamships provided a way of rendering this problem "mutable," and Carlyle was quick to recognize the potential of infrastructure to tighten metropolitan control.

Many American writers tended to ascribe the same kind of power to transportation and communication, but some were troubled by what this transformation entailed for American national identity and literary culture. Remarking on the swiftness of the transatlantic passage and on the wide American availability of British periodicals which it had brought about, New York-based

8 Seventeen days from Boston to Liverpool and a mere twelve days for the return journey (for the exact itineraries of the trips, see von Frank 1994).

author and editor Nathaniel Parker Willis in 1839 worried about the denationalizing—and recolonizing—effects of an increasingly Anglocentric literary sphere:

> *In literature we are no longer a distinct nation*. The triumph of Atlantic steam navigation has driven the smaller drop into the larger, and London has become the centre. Farewell nationality! The English language now marks the limits of a new literary empire, and America is a suburb. Our themes, our resources, [...] the feeling of expanse, of unsubserviency, of distance from time-hallowed authority and prejudice—all the elements which were working gradually but gloriously together to make us a nation by ourselves, have, in this approximation of shores, either perished for our using, or slipped within the clutch of England. (1839: 150; emphasis in original)

The "approximation of shores" brought about by transportation technology here features not as a catalyst for cultural contact, but as a phenomenon that clandestinely re-introduces Britain's "time-hallowed authority" over its former colonies. When Emerson reflected on the effect of innovations in transatlantic travel on a more abstract level than he did in "The Young American," he often lapsed into an anxiety of denationalization that matched Willis's concerns. Like Willis, he tended to emphasize the drawbacks behind the extension of transatlantic network ties. As Laura Otis points out, "networks both empower and disempower": they can be imagined as "a liberating device through which scattered individuals can form associations" (the United States coming into its own regional and cultural identity, the "American genius" Emerson sees as emerging from such national unification), but they can just as easily "represent the terrible efficiency of a power structure that commands its domain from a central point" (the infrastructurally reinvigorated "clutch of England" that Willis dreads) (2001: 226, 49, 49).

Carlyle's rhetorical appropriation of transportation infrastructure to effectively recolonize Americans apparently hit a nerve. His private record of transatlantic travel notwithstanding, Emerson's numerous critiques of "the superstition of Travelling" take their point of departure from a desire for national autonomy similar to Willis's (1971–2013, 2: 46). If "the rage of travelling" was merely "a symptom of a deeper unsoundness," as Emerson writes in the 1841 essay "Self-Reliance," the underlying illness was of a more deeply ingrained cultural kind—imitation, the pathological tendency to "follow the Past and the Distant" (ibid., 46–47). In as late a text as *The Conduct of Life* (1860), Emerson still wonders when it would finally be possible to "extract

this tapeworm of Europe from the brain of our countrymen" (1971–2013, 6: 77). But rather than simply arresting the development of national identity, foreign travel is here also considered as a tool to strengthen it—providing "a point of comparison," it ultimately "recommend[s] the books and works of home" (ibid., 78). Emerson's fear of a loss of distinctive national qualities mainly surfaced when he was picturing Americans travelling to Britain. With the transatlantic passage in the opposite direction he argued more confidently—and implicitly against Carlyle—that steam travel would lead to a weakening rather than a consolidation of the British Empire and its political and cultural authority. In an 1853 journal entry, he writes: "The emigration to America of British […] people is the eulogy of America by the most competent arbiters. In this age, steam has enabled men to choose their country & these men choose ours" (1977: 176). When he reworked the passage for publication in the later *English Traits*, Emerson transformed its American triumphalism first into a more general claim ("Great is the power of steam. Nations are given up" [ibid., 321]) and then into a fully fledged transnational vision from which any concrete reference to American nationality had been redacted: "Nations are getting obsolete, we go and live where we will. Steam has enabled men to choose what law they will live under" (1971–2013, 5: 91).

A similarly cosmopolitan vision of the global dissolution of national boundaries also surfaces in the poetry of Walt Whitman. In "Passage to India" (1870), for example, he celebrates the "technotopic cosmology" (Yandell 2019: 130) of transnational infrastructure and discovers a divine impulse behind the geographical and cultural approximation of the modern world:

> Lo, soul, seest thou not God's purpose from the first?
> The earth to be spann'd, connected by network,
> The races, neighbors, to marry and be given in marriage,
> The oceans to be cross'd, the distant brought near,
> The lands to be welded together. (1998: 316)

With Whitman, too, infrastructural rapprochement is linked to an image of racial amity, but it emerges more radically as an agent of genealogical amalgamation ("races […] welded together") beyond the boundaries of individual groups—rather than simply imagining intra-racial proximity, as in the idea of British and American Anglo-Saxons connecting with one another but differentiating themselves from other identities. Whitman understands "network" technology as a development that engenders new kinds of family relationship—no longer only brotherhood or the parent-child relationship, but new

connections created through the "marriage," the reciprocal espousal of opposing forces. Whitman's world—unlike Emerson's, Willis's, and Carlyle's—is an egalitarian one in which the conflictual nature of family relationships has disappeared through the collapse of authority, through the dissolution of geographical as much as of hierarchical distance.

## Conclusion

Nineteenth-century transportation revolutions not only affected travel, but also resulted in the increased speed and improved reliability of international communication. As James McKusick notes, periodical publications, books, and letters "moved ever more rapidly across the Atlantic as the century progressed" (2017: 196). Steamships carried passengers as well as mail, and the correspondences of nineteenth-century British and American writers are full of reflections on the material preconditions that made transatlantic exchanges of letters possible in the first place. Marvelling at the increasing swiftness with which their missives arrived on each other's doorstep, Carlyle and Emerson, for example, immersed themselves in the minutiae of postage costs and the schedules of mail steamers. When Carlyle at one point complained about delayed letters, he was at the same instant prepared to grant that, "as the Atlantic is so broad and deep," one "ought […] rather to esteem it a beneficent miracle that messages can arrive at all" (Emerson/Carlyle 1964: 112).[9] Anticipating twentieth-century media theories of globalization, he drew attention to the contracting power of an increasingly comprehensive movement of information in which "[s]team and iron are making all the Planet into one Village" (ibid., 209).[10] The kind of global convergence Carlyle here envisions depends on infrastructural networks that circulate people as well as objects across national boundaries. Plummeting costs for shipping manuscripts and books across the Atlantic created a unified transatlantic print sphere that allowed British and American writers of his generation to speak—and sell—to a readership larger than that of any single national

9 At other points, miscarried correspondence made the two painfully aware both of "their friendship's dependence on a material exchange" (Decker 1998: 45) and of the difficulties involved in "establishing intimate connections across oceanic separation" (Manning 2013: 164).

10 The most obvious parallel, of course, is that to Marshall McLuhan's classic notion of the influence of electronic media on the emergence of a "global village" (1964: 93).

book market. In addition, what made their professional careers transatlantic was the extensive distribution of the more peripheral print products—newspapers as well as periodicals—that spread their reputations abroad. If, as Joel Wiener has suggested, "the Anglo-American press was a product of a common culture and, as well, of a unified transatlantic sensibility," that very sensibility was also in turn the result of the emergence of such a shared culture of print (2017: 264).[11] Even though infrastructure and the networks that it created could alternatively be imagined as unifying or divisive, the nineteenth-century logistics of transatlantic communication and exchange created an Anglo-American literary and cultural sphere in which discourses of racial and genealogical identity were circulating ever more rapidly.

During his extended tour of the British Isles in the mid-1840s, Frederick Douglass relied on a similar sense of transatlantic contact and exchange to summon the powers of technology and convince his European audiences to stand up against American slavery. In a speech entitled "England Should Lead the Cause of Emancipation," delivered in Leeds on December 23, 1846, Douglass highlighted the connection between steam travel and transatlantic abolitionism:

> No geographical position can debar you from sympathising with the oppressed, denouncing the tyrant and oppressor, and pouring your execration on his head, no matter where he is placed, or to what nation he may belong [...]. [...] It is true you are a good way from America; but by the magic power of steam you are brought as it were within mooring distance of each other, and what is uttered this day in the Music Hall of Leeds, will, within fourteen days resound in Massachusetts [...]. (1979: 477)

Encouraging transatlantic sentiment, Douglass notes with a sense of empowerment the speed with which news of his address would travel across the

11 See Straub 2017 for a discussion of how the transatlantic circulation of print products shaped "transatlantic discourse" from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century. Caroline Levine, on the other hand, has drawn attention to the de-unifying dynamics of overlapping infrastructural networks: "One could certainly *imagine* the nation as a unity," she concedes, "but its multiple print, postal, economic, and regional networks, with their different organizing principles, broken links, and temporal delays, did more to hinder the nation from assuming a whole, unifying shape than to foster that reality" (2015: 121; emphasis in original).

ocean and circulate widely through getting reprinted in the United States.[12] Douglass does more than merely rely on print dissemination and "the magic power of steam," however. His appeal to British audiences to campaign against slavery would truly prove effective, he suggests, not simply through the force of quantity, but also—and more importantly—because of the kind of authority Britain began to exert over the United States upon abolishing slavery the previous decade. It was this reform image that gave the country the necessary moral leverage for Douglass to imagine a quasi-parental form of British intervention that would expose the wayward and inhumane American child to severe ethical reprimand. Yet if Douglass subscribes to the transatlantic family imagery Paine, Irving, Emerson, and others had employed before him, the rhetoric of genealogy here appears on another level as well. Whereas Douglass was advancing a case for transatlantic familiality on stage, the Leeds newspaper that reported his speech framed him as a "son of Africa" (ibid., 474) rather than as Anglo-American kin. Technological progress could be portrayed as facilitating cultural rapprochement and transatlantic social reform, but to the majority of nineteenth-century British and American commentators, differences of race and nationality were not "welded together" quite as easily as Whitman imagined. Like racial Anglo-Saxonism, family discourse dialectically relied on forms of exclusion to create the impression of inclusivist relationality. Like infrastructural rhetoric, it made neither difference nor authority disappear.

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12 On Douglass's transatlantic career (and on the ways in which his antislavery campaigning depended on transatlantic circuits of communication and print dissemination), see Bennett 2011, Eckel 2013: 71–98, and Wright 2017: 49–80.

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