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Trade, Time, and the Calculus of Risk in Early Pacific Travel Writing

In the 2005 *Common-place* issue on early America and the Pacific, historians Edward Gray and Alan Taylor observe that the Atlantic studies paradigm, which moves “beyond nations and states as the defining subjects of historical understanding, turning instead to large scale processes” is also particularly “useful for understanding Pacific history” since “disease, migration, trade, and war effected [sic] the Pacific in much the way they effected [sic] the Atlantic.” A similar transfer of the Atlantic world model to the Pacific informs David Iglar’s insistence that, like the Atlantic, the Pacific world was “international before it became national.”¹ Iglar notes that most scholarship on the Pacific has instead relied, however, on a national framework, leaving “too little of this work . . . cast in a comparative, transnational, or transoceanic mold” (par 5). As this critique suggests, it is time to consider not just the exchanges and processes *within* each of these oceanic worlds but *between* them as well. In this essay, I examine late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Pacific travel writing in precisely such a transoceanic context.

Many of the earliest European voyages into the Pacific were motivated by a desire to find the so-called Northwest Passage that was believed to connect the Atlantic with the Pacific through a series of waterways in the upper reaches of the North American continent. Pacific coast entrances to such a passage were reported by Juan de Fuca and Bartholomew de Fonte and were eagerly sought after—with varying degrees of eagerness and skepticism—by explorers from Martin Frobisher and Francis Drake to James Cook and George Vancouver.² The myth of the Northwest Passage endured despite growing evidence against its existence because its discovery would have provided European ships with a quicker and less contested route to Asia and its desirable trade goods. But though such a passage was never found, the many voyages that set out either to prove or disprove its existence did in fact connect the two oceans—not through the geography of a

Northwest Passage but through commerce, politics, and writing. Published accounts of these voyages represent a fascinating and substantial transnational archive that as yet has barely been touched by early American literary scholars.³ My claim here is not that these texts should be considered in some special way American, but rather that the study of early American literature needs to include these transnational texts and to accommodate the pressures they apply to the literary and cultural histories of the Revolutionary and early national periods that currently inform our discipline. In the process, the transoceanic and intercontinental sweep of this early Pacific material might also offer one way to bring the two models of transatlantic and hemispheric early American studies into greater dialogue with each other.⁴

This essay begins with a brief transnational survey of Pacific travel writing between approximately 1760 and 1820, a period of international competition for scientific discovery and commercial profit that provided the context for these voyages and the publication of narratives about them. I pay particular attention to the subgenre of the state-sponsored Pacific travel narrative and examine the dynamics of trade and time embedded within its textual and narratological features. The often enormous returns of profit and knowledge from these voyages were made possible only by their lengthy duration, for it took anywhere from three to six years to travel through the Atlantic, past Cape Horn, and across and around the Pacific on voyages seeking undiscovered lands, resources, and trade goods. As a result, the sense of expectation and anticipation generated by these voyages and texts depended on considerable patience and prolongation. But that same temporal prolongation also worked to mask or minimize the violence that accompanied such returns, including the violent transoceanic movement of goods (such as fur, silk, and silver) and of bodies (especially the indigenous, women, and sailors). As I'll argue, the narrative dynamics of this calculative logic relies on a new understanding of numbers and risk that subsumed violence and loss within the mechanics of long-run calculations.

PACIFIC TRAVEL AND PACIFIC TRAVEL WRITING

European ties to the Pacific were established at least as early as the Portuguese settlement on the Chinese island of Macao in 1557, which linked

Portugal through a lucrative regular trade in silks, silver, and spices with China, Japan, India, and the Moluccas (or Spice Islands). The following decade, Spain established a regular route between the Atlantic and the Pacific when it conquered the Philippines and established the galleon trade in 1565, a trade in which several ships left Acapulco every year with Mexican silver to exchange in Manila for popular Asian trade goods.⁵ Spices, porcelain, and silk were in turn transported back to Acapulco, through the Caribbean, and across the Atlantic into Spain. At the end of that century, the Dutch launched a series of mercantile voyages into the Pacific, establishing a trading post at Batavia in Java (now Jakarta in Indonesia) and inaugurating a vigorous spice trade in the East Indies. The Dutch extended their presence to the South Pacific in the seventeenth century with Abel Tasman's voyages to Van Diemen's Land (or Tasmania) and New Zealand and, early in the eighteenth century, with Jacob Roggeveen's expedition in search of the Australian continent.

The historian J. C. Beaglehole has categorized the sixteenth century in the Pacific as Spanish, the seventeenth century as Dutch, and the eighteenth century as French and English (3–4). But this neat taxonomy overlooks the more complex internationalism of the region, perhaps especially by the second half of the eighteenth century, which saw an explosion in Pacific travel, trade, and exploration by the Russians, the Spanish, the English, the French, and the Americans—each of whom not only made regular contact with each other but with an astonishing array of Pacific peoples and lands, from the Kamchatka Peninsula in eastern Siberia to the trade ports of Macao and Canton in China, from the coasts of Alaska and California to the Philippines, Indonesia, New Guinea, Australia, and numerous Polynesian island systems including Tahiti, Hawaii, Samoa, Fiji, and the Marianas. Much of this late eighteenth-century activity in the Pacific was launched when Russian fur trading expeditions began moving across the Bering Sea to the Aleutian and Kodiak islands in the 1740s. As these voyages extended further east and south along the northwest American coastline in pursuit of sea otter furs, the Spanish began to grow fearful of possible Russian encroachments on their territory. In response, Spain sent the Portolá expedition by land into Alta California in 1769, establishing an extensive mission system and also envisioning Monterey as a possible port for Asian trade. By the end of that century, Spain had also sent the De Anza settlement expedition north by land to Monterey and San Francisco, and

expeditions by sea led by Francisco Mourelle and Juan de la Bodega and by Alessandro Malaspina.⁶

As the Spanish were responding to the Russian presence along the North American coastline in the 1760s, both the English and the French were sponsoring ambitious voyages of discovery to the Pacific. France entered the Pacific with Louis de Bougainville's circumnavigation of the globe in 1766, while the English sent no fewer than three expeditions during that same decade—by John Byron in 1764, by Samuel Wallis and Philip Carteret in 1766, and by Cook in 1768. These voyages were followed up by two more expeditions by Cook in the 1770s, by the Frenchman Jean-François de Galaup de Lapérouse's circumnavigation in the 1780s, and by Vancouver's English voyage in the 1790s. By the late 1780s and throughout several subsequent decades, the Pacific was also traversed by numerous British, American, French, and Russian commercial voyages seeking profits from the lucrative China trade as well as from sealing and whaling voyages. During the late eighteenth century, then, a multinational array of goods and bodies moved with some regularity around the Pacific Ocean, its American and Asian coastlines, and Polynesia. But these Pacific trade routes were themselves situated within transoceanic maritime trade networks that linked the Pacific with the Atlantic through the exchange of European finished goods such as cookware, clothing, and firearms for Chinese teas, silks, and porcelains, primarily by way of sea otter pelts trapped and traded on the American northwest coast.

All of these voyages, of course, also generated a considerable amount of writing. But if the Pacific has been neglected by historians of early America, as Gray and Taylor note, it has been even more neglected by scholars working in early American literary studies. This neglect is in spite of the fact that this international explosion in Pacific travel was accompanied by an equally international print explosion in Pacific travel writing. In the following brief review of the kinds of texts that made up this quite popular late eighteenth-century genre, I focus in particular on texts that circulated in English translation or that were originally published in English. The most dominant subgenre within Pacific travel writing of the period were narratives of the large state-sponsored European expeditions and the collections of earlier international voyages that motivated and guided them. The state-sponsored Pacific expeditions were, in fact, preceded and likely inspired by Charles de Brosses's historical collection

of Pacific travel narratives, first published in France in 1756 and a decade later in English by John Callander. *Terra Australis Cognita; or, Voyages to the Terra Australis, or Southern Hemisphere, during the Sixteenth, Seventeenth, and Eighteenth Centuries* collected into multiple volumes accounts of several centuries of Spanish, Dutch, Portuguese, and English voyages. Callander's edition translated de Brosses's material into English, but it also silently excised all mention of the book's original French editor and even "substitut[ed] England for France" (Engstrand 30) throughout the volume. As a result, it efficiently argued that the English nation was in the best position "to advance the Knowledge of Geography and Navigation" and hoped that the book itself would help "to promote the Commercial Interests of Great Britain, and extend her Naval Power" (Callander n.p.). Callander's appropriative edition appears to have launched an English boom in Pacific travel and Pacific travel writing that lasted through the remainder of the eighteenth century and into the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Numerous travel compilations followed Callander's translation, including two volumes of early Spanish and Dutch Pacific voyages edited by Alexander Dalrymple and published in 1770–71; John Hawkesworth's 1773 collection of the English voyages of Byron, Wallis, Carteret, and Cook; William Coxe's *Account of the Russian Discoveries between Asia and America*, published in 1780 and in a revised and updated edition in 1787; George William Anderson's 1784 *A New, Authentic, and Complete Collection of Voyages round the World*, which collected English eighteenth-century Pacific voyages; Christopher Smart, Oliver Goldsmith, and Samuel Johnson's *The World Displayed; or, A Curious Collection of Voyages and Travels, Selected and Compiled from the Writers of all nations*, published in a Philadelphia edition in 1795; and James Burney's *A Chronological History of the Discoveries in the South Sea or Pacific Ocean*, published in five enormous volumes between 1803 and 1817. There were also continued translations of recent Pacific travel narratives into English during these decades; for example, Bougainville's voyage was published in London in 1772, the Spanish voyage of Mourelle and Bodega in 1781, and Lapérouse's voyage around the world in 1798. Pacific travel accounts were also often abridged, combined into collections, and reprinted along with other historical and contemporary Pacific voyages. News of these voyages and reviews of and excerpts from these travel narratives also sometimes appeared in American periodicals during this period.⁷

Numerous lesser-known voyages and experiences in the Pacific—including those by ship captains, castaways and captives, disgruntled or impoverished sailors, missionaries, and merchants—also made it into print during the last decade of the eighteenth century and the first two decades of the nineteenth: the Polish Count Maurice Benyowsky's exploits in Siberia and the Pacific were published in 1790; James Colnett's Pacific whaling narrative in 1798; James Wilson's missionary voyage to the south Pacific in 1799; William Moulton's account of shipboard tyranny and William Broughton's exploration voyage both in 1804; John Jewitt's Nootka captivity narrative in 1807; John Turnbull's commercial voyage in 1810; David Porter's US expedition in 1815; shipwreck narratives by the Scotsman Archibald Campbell and the American Daniel Foss in 1816; the sailor Samuel Patterson's account of Fiji in 1817; and officer Amasa Delano's account of his merchant ship voyages (the source for Melville's *Benito Cereno*) in 1818.

With the glaring exception of the three expeditions led by Captain James Cook, few of these accounts have received much in the way of scholarly attention, and even fewer are available in modern editions. Rather than make a case for any single one or a few of these texts, however, I read examples here of the particular subgenre of the state-sponsored voyage narrative in order to identify and contextualize some of its textual and narratological features. We might take John Callander's national appropriation of de Brosses's French collection as a model for the way in which these texts often replicated in print the intense international competition that characterized the voyages themselves, which sought to make claims to new scientific discoveries on the one hand and lay claims to considerable commercial profits on the other. In fact, the goals of disinterested scientific knowledge and self-interested commercial gain were often intricately entangled with each other; in most cases, the state-sponsored circumnavigations publicly announced goals of scientific discovery (such as tracking the transit of Venus, or locating the great southern continent, or charting new coastlines) while also secretly pursuing commercial goals (such as identifying new trade goods, or locating sites for the establishment of trading posts, or competing in already established trade networks).⁸

Whatever the ostensible reasons for sailing into it from the Atlantic, the Pacific became synonymous with exceptionally long periods of time, with the experience of waiting many years to learn of or reap the results

of these endeavors. These trips demanded enormous patience even while they excited considerable expectation, since profit and discovery alike depended on the prolonged duration of these very risky, and very promising, voyages. While most thinking about temporality in literary studies comes from narratology and studies of the novel, I turn to the textualization of late eighteenth-century Pacific trade and travel to investigate a particular mode of narrative temporality that—by combining patient duration with impatient expectation—might be thought of as prolonged promise. Accounts of Pacific travel are characterized, I argue, by modes of narrativizing risk that reflect a new eighteenth-century conception of numbers and time, and that work to conceal the violence and loss that often characterized these voyages.

PROFIT AND PROLONGATION

The experience of Pacific travel repeatedly showed that there was no profit without prolongation. When Vitus Bering's 1741 expedition returned to Russia, the results appeared disastrous: one ship had been lost entirely, along with half of its men, and Bering himself died of illness on an uninhabited island in the sea that now bears his name. The returns from the voyage included only some survivors, a reconstructed ship, and some pelts from the sea otters they had consumed as food while stranded on islands in the north Pacific. When those pelts, however, later proved to be highly profitable in the China market, Russian merchants began to outfit subsequent expeditions in exclusive pursuit of sea otter fur along the islands and coastlines of the American far northwest. The past losses of Bering's voyage became dwarfed by the prospect of future profits.

Although the Russians extended and exploited this Pacific fur trade over the subsequent decades, it was the travel narrative of James Cook's third voyage that circulated news of its profitability to Western Europe and the United States. The publication of this travel narrative in 1784 has long been associated with its description of Cook's death at the hands of Sandwich (or Hawaiian) Islanders. But it may well have been another passage altogether that marked the narrative's central moment of narrative engagement for late eighteenth-century readers—namely, the description of the sailors' extraordinary profits by selling in China the sea otter skins acquired from northwest coast natives. In fact, while the account of Cook's

death—and the rather grisly descriptions of attempts to recover portions of his cannibalized body for purposes of identification and burial—has taken on a mythic status in cultural memory, the account of income from the Asian fur trade took on an equally gripping and mythic dimension for eighteenth-century readers and speculators.⁹ Indeed, the spectacle of the violent murder and reported cannibalization of James Cook's body on a beach in the Pacific really should be seen as circulating *together with* the spectacle of immense profits made by some sailors and merchants on that voyage. These paired images—of violence and profit, of cannibalization and accumulation—together illustrate the rotating cycle of exploitation and resistance that characterized the trade circuits that webbed across the Pacific and that also connected that ocean by commercial and political cords to the Atlantic. But these paired images illustrate as well the strangely allied temporal attitudes of restless impatience with static endurance, of horrified engagement with abstract calculation.

It was just after Cook's death in Hawaii that the *Resolution* (led after Cook by Captain James King) arrived on the northwest coast of North America. Like the Russians several decades earlier, the sailors discover that the furs possessed by the northwest coast natives “produce a high price; and the natives, from their mode of life, require few articles in return. Our sailors brought a quantity of furs from the coast of America, and were both pleased and astonished on receiving such a quantity of silver for them from the [Russian] merchants” who were in the region (Cook 2: 319). The full significance of these furs, however, isn't realized until much later, when the men arrive in Asia. In Canton, one sailor “disposed of his stock” of sea otter furs “for eight hundred dollars; and a few of the best skins, which were clear, and had been carefully preserved, produced a hundred and twenty dollars each.” The sale of these “best skins” amounted to a return of ninety pounds on an investment of one shilling, or a profit of an astonishing 1,800 percent (Gibson 22–23). Two sailors jumped ship altogether in the hopes of returning to the fur islands, “seduced by the hopes of acquiring a fortune” (Cook 2: 343), while those who remained on the ship had added to their ragged English clothing “the gayest silk and cottons that China could produce” (2: 343).

Once this narrative appeared in print, the quick calculation of these numbers sent numerous men and ships on lengthy expeditions into the Pacific from Europe and the United States.¹⁰ Those ships sailing the long

route between Boston, the Northwest Coast, and Canton became known for delayed desire, both economic and sexual. These voyages were identified on the one hand with “lucrative profits” (Gibson 57), since the return on investment for these voyages could be anywhere from 200 to over 2,000 percent, and on the other hand with “exotic stopovers” (Gibson 57), primarily in Hawaii, where one visitor explained “[w]omen can be considered one of the commodities that these islands abundantly furnish to visiting ships.”¹¹ George Vancouver, who arrived on the northwest coast in the 1790s, encountered an assortment of English, American, and French ships all “collecting the skins of sea-otter and other furs” (1: 408). He also reported that the cost of sea otter skins was “at least an hundred per cent. dearer” (1: 348) than they had been on his last visit (when Vancouver was a member of Cook’s third expedition), and finds an English ship searching for inland sources for fur since “the price of skins [was] so exorbitant on the sea-coast” (1: 375).¹² The speediness of the escalations and pleasures described in these texts are in strange contrast to the utter sluggishness of the journeys themselves, although it was precisely the combination of these antithetical tempos that characterized both the content and the form of these narratives. These texts shared this temporal duality with the calculative logic of economic investment that motivated and underwrote the voyages themselves and whose terms were especially magnified by the enormous distances, durations, risks, and profits entailed by expeditions to the Pacific.

DURATION AND EXPECTATION

Temporal prolongation is materially evident in the most obvious feature shared by the vast majority of these Pacific travel books: their size. By eighteenth-century standards, Pacific travel collections tended to be large tomes in every respect: they were bulky and heavy; they were wide, tall, and thick; and they typically consisted of multiple volumes. The collection edited by Alexander Dalrymple, for instance, was made up of two such heavy volumes. The Hawkesworth collection took up three substantial volumes, as did the Vancouver voyage alone, while Burney’s history of Pacific travel ran to five unwieldy volumes of about six hundred pages each. The size of these books is, of course, in some part a measure of the length and breadth of the voyages themselves. Their temporal duration was empha-

sized in titles that almost invariably ended with a serial listing of the years during which the journey was underway. The title of Anderson's collection of English Pacific voyages, for example, begins *A New, Authentic, and Complete Collection of Voyages round the World*, and concludes with *And Successively Performed in the Years 1768, 1769, 1770, 1771-1772, 1773, 1774, 1775-1776, 1777, 1778, 1779, 1780*. The American edition of Cook's narrative appeared as *Captain Cook's Three Voyages to the Pacific Ocean: The First Performed in the Years 1768, 1769, 1770 and 1771: The Second in 1772, 1773, 1774 and 1775: The third and Last in 1776, 1777, 1778, 1779 and 1780*. Vancouver's travel narrative is called *A Voyage of Discovery to the North Pacific Ocean, and round the World . . . Performed in the Years 1790, 1791, 1792, 1793, 1794, and 1795*. The English edition of Bougainville's travels was titled *A Voyage round the World: Performed by Order of His Most Christian Majesty, in the Years 1766, 1767, 1768, and 1769*, while Lapérouse's read *A Voyage round the World Performed in the Years 1785, 1786, 1787, 1788*. This insistence on sequentially listing each year of the voyage not only advertises but seems to perform the drawn-out temporality of the voyages themselves.¹³

The sense conveyed by these titles of an extensive, almost tedious, duration is often replicated within the texts themselves, which are typically organized as chronological records that take regular note of the ship's location, navigational direction, weather conditions, and nautical details. Sometimes, these mundane details are in fact significant scientific findings that challenge, confirm, or complicate the results of earlier expeditions—such as revising information about the exact location of particular islands or filling in the gaps of incomplete charts from earlier voyages. On the one hand, then, these texts are characterized by a temporal duration marked most often by a rather tedious repetition and prolonged regularity, an extended plodding onward in which, from a navigational standpoint, slow progress is being made but, from a narrative standpoint, nothing really happens. On the other hand, these texts were both framed and punctuated by a sense of anticipation, by an expectant sense of promise and urgency.¹⁴ They were *framed* by expectation because they were motivated by the pursuit of new knowledge and wealth, by the conviction that the extraordinary costs of these voyages would result in even greater returns over the long term, and because international competition for such discoveries gave these voyages a sense of urgency. And they were *punctuated* by expectation because each successive encounter with a new landscape and new peoples

might yield profitable products and pliable partners for trade as well as new information and discoveries.

The pace of these narratives reflects this tension between dilation and acceleration. The narratologist Gérard Genette calculates narrative speed according to the proportion of temporal duration to textual length, so that the “speed of a narrative” is determined by “the relationship between a duration (that of the story, measured in seconds, minutes, hours, days, months, and years) and a length (that of the text, measured in lines and in pages)” (87–88). Because the navigational portions of Pacific travel narratives typically cover a long expanse of time in a proportionally short number of pages, by Genette’s structuralist metric they would be described as fast or accelerated. But although significant expanses of time may be covered in these pages, the pace of the narrative from most readers’ point of view is experienced instead as profoundly slow. Indeed, reader-oriented narratology—which understands plot not as “fixed structures, but rather a structuring operation peculiar to those messages that are developed through temporal succession” (Brooks 10)—would describe these sections of the text as slow or dilatory because they generate little or no sense of expectation or desire. If for Peter Brooks “plot is, most aptly, a steam engine” (44), the plot of the Pacific voyage narrative too often seems to drift at sea like a preindustrial sail waiting for the wind to pick up.

But signs of expectation and scenes of excitement in fact do interrupt the steady regularity of curt entries and dry navigational records, most often at moments when the crew makes landfall, giving way to an intensification of detailed descriptions of the land, its produce, its inhabitants, and the crew’s interactions with them. Such moments of encounter typically represent an inversion of the proportion of textual length to temporal duration that characterizes the navigational sections of the narrative. While only a few days or even hours may pass, the narration of that time often takes up a large number of pages. The narrative pace for readers accordingly speeds up, often quite dramatically, and plotting itself shifts from a largely geographical activity (i.e., determining the shape of this coastline, filling in the gaps of geographical knowledge on this map) to a narrative dynamic (i.e., wondering what will happen next, now that the ship has anchored offshore, hoping to trade for food and profitable goods with the natives, who are approaching in canoes, and may or may not be carrying weapons). The routine navigational calculations that make the safe com-

pletion of these voyages possible are therefore framed by the expectant economic and political calculations that underwrote these voyages, and also interrupted by the often frantic social calculations that characterized commercial and cross-cultural encounters during the voyage itself.

Editors of these narratives often found themselves caught between the inclusion of those navigational details that provided crucial data for subsequent explorers and travelers (and that sometimes allowed a nation to boast of its discoveries) and general readers' relative lack of interest in such information. Editors tended to solve this problem by either defending narrative tedium in the name of science or eliminating it in the name of entertainment, or by using some combination of the two. Callander's 1766 volume explained that the editor has removed "intermediate things" and "other things which often tire the reader," although the style has been preserved since it is "utility, and not elegance of style, that is to be looked for here" (vii). Vancouver, writing in the 1790s, apologizes for the repetitiveness of his narrative but argues that its aim is not entertainment but scientific accuracy (1: xxix). James Burney admitted that "[i]f half the account of a voyage is found to consist of figures and mathematical dissertation, what reader will not wish that this part had been published separate?" (4: 506), and John Turnbull promises readers not to include "technical extracts of our log book" (6) in his *Voyage round the World*. Indeed, Turnbull's 1810 volume departs substantially in feel and tone from the vast majority of Pacific travel accounts published in the preceding half century by abandoning all features of the logbook other than temporal progression through a sequential narrative, resulting in a volume with a far less scientific and far more subjective voice and perspective than its forebears.

Interestingly, Turnbull's 1810 narrative actually returns in this respect to some of the features of one of the earliest collections of Pacific narratives, John Hawkesworth's edition of Cook's first voyage, first published together with the earlier English voyages of Byron, Wallis, and Carteret. Hawkesworth's 1773 volume was both quite popular and quite controversial, and it was both of these things because of his editorial decision to write the account of Cook's narrative in the first person and to transform what one scholar calls the "plain if sometimes awkward prose of [Cook's] journal" into "a continuous and homogeneous narrative" (Rennie, "Point" 137).¹⁵ While Hawkesworth's technique certainly increased narrative pace and heightened reader interest, it also gained many critics in the eighteenth

century and since who objected to its elevation of narrative entertainment over scientific detail, its sacrifice of truth to desire. Reaction to Hawkesworth's editorial decision was strong enough that his experiment was not soon repeated, and even Turnbull avoids the singular in favor of the plural first person.

Ultimately, most of these volumes employ a kind of editorial calculus designed to balance the redundant tedium of navigational or geographic details with the accelerated drama of discovery and exchange, to punctuate prolongation with promise. Hawkesworth suggests as much when he announces that "those who read merely for entertainment will be compensated [for the dry geographical or navigational content] by the description of countries which no European had before visited, and manners which in many instances exhibit a new picture of human life" (vii). Despite his critics, Hawkesworth's textual decisions actually reveal a great deal about the narrative mechanics of expectation in travel writing. Indeed, accounts of Pacific travel and trade had in common with the genre of the novel developing in the Atlantic world at the same time this dynamics of prolonged promise, a narrative temporality that helps to explain the popularity of these nonfiction texts with readers unfamiliar with and uninterested in the routine details of navigation.¹⁶ It was, moreover, precisely this protracted suspense of time, this temporal duration, that worked to mask the violence of profit seeking, a violence that was played out most often on the bodies of indigenous peoples, women, and sailors in the distant and exotic regions of the Pacific.

THE CALCULUS OF RISK

As Alan Taylor's brief history of the Russian presence in the north Pacific makes clear, the profitability of these trading voyages depended not just on long periods of time but on multiple acts of violence against the natives and their environment. These included initial attacks with firearms on Aleut villages, taking women and children hostage in order to compel the men to hunt furs, sexually enslaving the women during the months that the men were at sea hunting pelts, and eventually decimating the region's sea otter population through indiscriminate overhunting (Taylor 451). The French and English travelers and traders who worked the northern Pacific fur trade later in the century often condemned the behavior of

their Russian (as well as their Spanish) predecessors in the Americas and offered a patient and pacifist commerce as an antidote to rapid and violent conquest. The de Brosse/Callander collection, for example, imagined the discovery of an immense southern continent that would serve as “an advantageous market for all our wares, such as cloths, glasses, paper, spirits, and all the species of toys that were so greedily sought after by the *Indians* of the West, in the days of Columbus” (Callander 11). And yet the French (or English, if one reads Callander’s edition) need precisely to “avoid avarice and cruelty” such as was practiced by the Spanish, since “[e]xperience has taught us, that a solid and well-regulated commerce should form our principal object in those distant climes, and not the conquest of large kingdoms.” The best method of ensuring the natives’ “useful dependence, is, to take care, that they shall always find it for their advantage, to exchange the product of their country for that of ours” (12). The volume argues that such a design was best driven by kings or republics, not by merchants or trading companies who “have nothing in view but a quick return of profit” and who therefore would be unwilling to take the risks “where the success is uncertain and the profits at a distance” (7).¹⁷

Arguments about the virtues of commerce saturate late eighteenth-century Pacific travel narratives, which frequently repeat the assumption that commerce offered an antidote to the violence of conquest and just as frequently issued instructions that indigenous peoples be treated with respect and fairness precisely in order to enable profitable and long-lasting trade relations. Turnbull’s 1800 voyage was inspired by his observation, on a 1799 voyage to China, “that the Americans carried on the most lucrative trade to the north-west of that vast continent” (5) and found merchants willing to invest in the opportunity to replicate the Americans’ financial success. He argues that

[t]here are few dangers, and still fewer difficulties, which can deter men of enterprise from any pursuit which they consider as the means of independence. If the colder moralist, in his abstract reasoning, brand this desire with the name of a pernicious avidity, the practical philosopher, tempering the conclusions of his reason by the modes of life, considers it in a more favourable point of view, hailing it as the grand moving impulse of commerce, and effectually the means of improving the whole condition of life. (5)

Vancouver likewise announces that the “spirit of discovery” has resulted in a “reciprocity of benefits” between Europe and “the less-enlightened of our species,” those “people of the newly-discovered countries” who have been supplied with “iron, copper, useful implements, and articles of ornament” in exchange for their supply of animal skins and other useful “articles of a commercial nature” that have been sought after by “traders who now resort to their shores from Europe, Asia, and the eastern side of North America” (1: i) for the “purpose of establishing new and lucrative branches of commerce between North West America and China” (1: v). John Hawkesworth explains in the dedication to his travel compilation that rather than pursue the motive of conquest the English king has rather acted “from more liberal motives” and has proceeded “not with a view to the acquisition of treasure, or the extent of dominion, but the improvement of commerce and the increase and diffusion of knowledge” (n.p.).

But these narratives themselves repeatedly reveal that commerce didn’t so much eliminate violence as conceal it within a narrative temporality of prolonged promise. For instance, Hawkesworth warns readers that the pages of his collection do record “the destruction of poor naked savages, by our firearms, in the course of these expeditions, when they endeavoured to repress the invaders of their country.” While Hawkesworth is certain that his readers will share his “regret” about such destruction, he also claims that it is an unavoidable evil, since “resistance will always be made, and if those who resist are not overpowered, the attempt must be relinquished” (xvii). The other alternative, he suggests, is simply not to attempt such “discoveries” if they result in abuse and violence. But, he argues, “[i]f it is not lawful to put the life of an Indian in hazard, by an attempt to examine the country in which he lives, with a view to increase commerce or knowledge; it is not lawful to risk the life of our own people in carrying on commerce with countries already known.” Hawkesworth’s justification here uses a calculus of risk that legitimizes the use of force or violence in controlling resistance by Pacific peoples to England’s commercial goals. “It seems reasonable to conclude,” Hawkesworth determines, “that the increase of knowledge and commerce are ultimately common benefits; and that the loss of life which happens in the attempt, is among the partial evils which terminate in general good” (xvii). Violence gets buried inside a calculation, counted as one risk within a prolonged but profitable equation. Short-term losses are effectively canceled out by long-term gain.

By emphasizing the long-term general benefits of short-term individual risks, Hawkesworth's commercial calculus expresses a fundamentally mathematical mentality that, as Lorraine Daston notes, gradually came to dominate late eighteenth-century thinking about risk and certainty. Associated with a group of thinkers Daston calls the probabilists, this logic entailed "an altered conception of time and numbers" that differed considerably from the "founders of the early life insurance societies [who] believed that more members enrolled over more time meant more risk." In contrast to the alternative logic of the insurers, the probabilists "thought in terms of symmetric deviations from an average that would cancel one another out over the long run. The insurers equated time with uncertainty, for time brought unforeseen changes in crucial conditions; the probabilists equated time with certainty, for time brought the large numbers that revealed the regularities underlying apparent flux" (Daston 115). These two competing conceptions of time actually work together in late eighteenth-century narratives of Pacific travel.

If Hawkesworth's commercial calculus most often resembled that of the probabilists, his editorial calculus—to which I now return—remained that of the insurers, since it is the accumulation of each particular, individual detail that will engage readers, not the general results or averages over time. Such detailed description is, according to Hawkesworth, akin to reading a novel, for he notes that "it is from little circumstances that the relation of great events derives its power over the mind," for those who read "[a]n account that ten thousand men perished in a battle, that twice the number were swallowed up by an earthquake, or that a whole nation was swept away by a pestilence . . . without the least emotion" are those very same readers "who feel themselves strongly interested even for Pamela, the imaginary heroine of a novel that is remarkable for the enumeration of particulars in themselves so trifling, that we almost wonder how they could occur to the author's mind" (vii). Particularist description generates the kind of engagement and expectation associated with novel reading, and it was largely to be found in these travel accounts in the descriptive and often dramatic encounters and exchanges with native peoples.¹⁸

But such scenes also highlight the immediacy and scale of risk in a way analogous to the perspective of the early insurers described by Daston, who saw particular risks and their costs accumulating dangerously over time. Such descriptions may have made for exciting reading material, but

they were not conducive to the confidence necessary to promote and resource trade, especially over such extensive distances and periods of time. And indeed, a Pacific travel narrative that excised all the tedious navigational and geographical details associated with the logbook, leaving behind only a series of expectant engagements with particular peoples, may well have resembled those very conquest narratives that the defenders of commerce's virtuous pacifism so aggressively positioned themselves against. Duration and its sense of repetitious tedium therefore created a protracted space and time that allowed uncertain risks and their often violent results to be averaged and canceled out.

Pacific travel narratives thus play out in their dynamics of trade and time Daston's "altered conception of time and numbers" in the eighteenth century: as noted, what seemed to be the multiplication of risk (as more and more risks accumulated over a longer period of time) came instead to be seen as its minimization (as they tended to average out over time).¹⁹ Goods and bodies, in other words, moved within a transoceanic and transnational geography in which the short-term uncertainties of risk and loss were absorbed by the prolonged certainty of long-run calculations. The narrative qualities of prolongation and duration in these Pacific travel narratives provided, in this sense, the risk pool needed by probabilist thinking to neutralize hazard and loss. Scenes of detailed desire and danger may have loaned the narrative's prolonged tedium some measure of uncertain anticipation, but the text's otherwise tedious sections just as importantly minimized through temporal prolongation the violence and exploitation associated with the particularities of commercial exchange and colonial contact in and around the early Pacific.

These late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Pacific travel narratives represent a body of texts that press at the limits of scholarly models for literary and historical study in a number of ways. Their accounts of international contact in the early Pacific—along with their international publication and translation histories—would seem to make them excellent candidates for inclusion in the transnational and multilingual refiguration of early American literature and history, except that their transoceanic and global scope has left them outside of both the Atlantic and hemispheric studies models that have replaced earlier nationalist narratives of this period. Moreover, these texts enjoyed their greatest circulation and popularity during the Revolutionary and early republican periods in American

history, decades that are still represented in current literary anthologies predominantly by texts from the Atlantic seaboard about revolution and nation building. While a transnational framework has informed the inclusion of translated multilingual travel writings in several early American literary anthologies, those selections have remained largely limited to material from the Atlantic and from the pre-Revolutionary period—despite the fact that many of these early voyages aimed for Asia and that the greatest surge of interest in this genre was during the last decades of the eighteenth century.²⁰ In other words, dominant narratives of early American literary history have made it difficult to recognize, much less accommodate, Pacific travel texts and the region of the Pacific, even when these texts and this region are clearly connected with the contemporaneous Atlantic through commerce, politics, and writing. What Pacific travel texts have to teach us about narrative temporality may therefore ultimately be of value not only in rereading literary texts from the period but in rethinking the roles of expectation and prolongation in dominant narratives of American literary and cultural history.²¹

NOTES

I thank Naomi Andrews, Eileen Razzari Elrod, Juan Velasco, and the anonymous reviewers for *Early American Literature* for their helpful readings of earlier versions of this article.

1. Iglar is here extending to the Pacific Kupperman's argument that the Atlantic world "was international before it was national" (Kupperman 105).
2. Juan de Fuca was a Greek mariner who sailed for Spain in 1592, and whose narrative was published in 1625; Bartholomew de Fonte's Spanish expedition sailed in 1640, and his account appeared in 1708. For more on these figures and a history of efforts to locate the Northwest Passage, see Williams.
3. Many of these narratives have, however, been studied in the context of various European national traditions (on the English, French, Spanish, or Russian Pacific, for example). Despite the fact that the texts themselves were in transnational dialogue with each other when they were initially published and translated, there has as yet been little work done to integrate these texts into a transnational literary history of the period. Recent scholarship on eighteenth-century British travel narratives to the Pacific (see, for example, Lamb, *Preserving*, and Neill) places that writing thoughtfully in the context of global commerce without, however, considering its production and circulation in a global literary context. Giles does consider some of these narratives in his globalized approach to American literature; Rennie places British literature on the Pacific in dialogue with some French

texts (see *Far-Fetched*); Blum discusses several in her work on sea narratives; Kleker assembles interdisciplinary approaches to eighteenth-century Pacific material; and Kommers reads these narratives in relation to the history of travel writing as a genre.

4. Among recent hemispheric approaches to early American literature, Cañizares-Esguerra alone points toward the possibility of a transoceanic extension when he notes that “even a wide Atlantic perspective could be distorting, for most of the early modern European empires were in fact global ones. There is indeed no reason not to fold the Spanish American Pacific into the geographies of the Spanish American Atlantic, since the colonization of the Philippines was directed from and through Mexico, not Madrid” (*Puritan* 219).
5. Of course, it was not only goods that were transported to and exchanged at such sites, but people as well. These ships carried both sailors and slaves from various parts of Asia across the Pacific. See Seijas, for example, for an account of Caterina de San Juan, a young slave woman from India who was purchased by Portuguese slave traders in the Philippines and taken to Mexico where, in time, she became a renowned beata.
6. Other expeditions that followed land routes to the Pacific in this period included those of the Scot Alexander Mackenzie, who achieved the first transcontinental crossing to the Pacific in 1793, and Lewis and Clark, who would arrive overland at the Pacific in 1805.
7. For example, a narrative of Wallis’s voyage around the world appeared serialized in *The Royal American Magazine* in 1774 (“Epitome”), a review of Jacob von Staehlin’s collection of Russian discoveries, *Account of the New Northern Archipelago*, appeared in *Pennsylvania Magazine* in 1776 (“An Account”), a report on the futility of searching for a Northwest Passage appeared in *The New-Haven Gazette*, and the *Connecticut Magazine* in 1786 (“On the Impracticability”), and excerpts from Lapérouse’s dispatches to France were printed in *The Massachusetts Magazine* in 1789 (“Circumnavigator”). Many of these articles appeared as well in British periodicals at the time.
8. France’s plan for the journey of Lapérouse, for example, may have deliberately emphasized the scientific elements in order to hide from Britain France’s interest in fur trade possibilities along North America’s northwest coast and in China (see Dunmore xxv).
9. *Early American Imprints* catalogs ten editions of Cook’s final voyage published between 1793 and 1818 in the cities of Philadelphia, Worcester, New York, Boston, and Hudson. These publication sites suggest that a significant audience for Cook’s narrative may have consisted of prospective sailors on Pacific seal-hunting voyages, as these crews were drawn largely from the New York and New England regions. The town of Hudson, New York, for example—which might otherwise appear an unlikely location for travel book publishing—was founded by Nantucket seafarers and in fact “provided the majority of sealers from the state of New York” (Kirker 25).

10. This passage is accompanied by a fairly detailed calculation of the mathematical progress of profits from Pacific furs over time and distance:

notwithstanding the merchants have so extravagant a profit upon these imported goods [primarily clothing and cookware], they receive still a greater advantage from the sale of the furs at Kiachta, a considerable market for them on the frontiers of China. In Kamtschatka, the best sea-otter skins usually produce about thirty roubles a-piece; at Kiachta, the Chinese merchant gives more than double that price, and disposes of them again at Pekin for a much greater sum; after which, an additional profit is made of many of them at Japan. If then, the original value of a skin at Kamtschatka is thirty roubles, and it is afterwards transported to Okotsk, thence by land thirteen hundred and sixty-four miles to Kiachta, thence seven hundred and sixty miles to Pekin, and after that, to be transported to Japan, what a lucrative trade might be established between Kamtschatka and Japan, which is not above three weeks sail from it at the utmost! (Cook 2: 319–20).

11. This description was made by Louis Choris, the artist who accompanied the Russian-sponsored voyage led by the German navigator Otto von Kotzebue into the Pacific from 1815 to 1818 (Gibson 49).
12. As Gibson's history makes clear, a trade glut and a decrease in furs led to a rapid dwindling of profits beginning in the 1820s (66) and by the 1840s the fur trade was depleted and abandoned (82).
13. This temporal duration is of course matched with a spatial expansiveness, and the middle portions that are elided in the already long titles mentioned here typically offered a brief list of the most important or interesting regions discovered or visited during the course of the voyage.
14. Kommers discusses the tension between narration and description in Pacific travel texts (488–90), but leaves out of consideration the element of time that I am associating with each of these modes.
15. For more on Hawkesworth's version of Cook's narrative, see Rennie, *Far-Fetched* (94–108), and Percy.
16. Travel narratives have long been seen as an important early source for novelistic narrative, though Pacific travel narratives from this later period might be said to be in more reciprocal dialogue with the genre of the novel. My interest here is in these two genres' participation in a protracted and expectant narrative temporality that is shared by contemporaneous developments in mathematical and numerical thinking. For other considerations of the novel in relation to political economy and credit relations, see Thompson, Poovey, and Ingrassia. Dillon's association of probabilistic novelistic narrative with "the development of the world market and new forms of capitalist investment" (245) is particularly suggestive.
17. *Terra Australis Cognita* represents what Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra calls "philosophical travel writing," which, unlike earlier travel writing, established its authenticity through its internal coherence rather than through the social status of

eyewitnesses. De Brosses's collection also made a philosophical argument on behalf of a commercial colonialism that would be "based on trade and commercial exchange and committed to the scientific study of exotic places, rather than their destruction" (Cañizares-Esguerra, *How* 26).

18. Lamb argues that Hawkesworth's narrative particularity serves "to neutralize and exploit the aggression that will masquerade as the reader's pious outrage at this excess," that the magnification of particulars "insist[s] on the hazard, in order to neutralize the reader's aggression" ("Minute" 291). For Lamb, the details of risk alone worked to justify the violence of Cook's men and his expedition, whereas I am arguing that such scenes need to be read within the long temporality of the narrative itself, that the narrative expanses between such episodes neutralized risk by stretching it out over time.
19. It is crucial to recognize that this view of risk makes sense only from the perspective of the insurer or investor, not from that of the individuals (such as the sailors or those peoples encountered by them) undergoing such risk.
20. Despite the by now quite regular inclusion of international and multilingual travel and exploration writings in the selections from earlier colonial periods in most anthologies of early American literature, this representation tends to disappear from the sections devoted to the Revolutionary and early national periods. Attention to early Pacific travel writing would remedy this uneven representation of transnational materials across the temporal landscape of early American studies, while it might also contribute to the recognition that, as Edward Larkin has recently argued, "the politics and culture of the early US were shaped not by a national story, but by an ongoing effort to combine nation and empire" (Larkin 503).
21. The two temporal formulations that intersect in Pacific travel writing, for example, correspond not only to two narrative speeds and two mathematical orientations but also to two definitions of revolution: understood astronomically, revolution is the drone of repetition (analogous to the prolonged duration of narrative, and to the minimized risk of the probabilists); understood politically, revolution is the promise of upheaval (analogous to the speedy anticipation of description, and to the accumulated risks of the early insurers).

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